



To: National Referees, National Instructors, National Assessors
State Directors of Instruction, State Directors of Assessment
State Referee Administrators, State Youth Referee Administrators,
State Directors of Coaching

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Subject: Fouls, Misconduct, and the Restart of Play

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A basic principle in the Laws of the Game is that an offense cannot be considered a foul (within the meaning of Law 12) unless the action is committed

- by a player,
- on the field of play, and
- while the ball is in play.

Accordingly, any offense which does not meet at least these three criteria cannot be considered a foul (a substitute or substituted player, for example, cannot commit a foul under any circumstances). The action can, of course, be misconduct.

If play is stopped for an offense which is only misconduct (no foul occurred), play must restart with either

- an indirect free kick if the misconduct was by a player on the field or
- a dropped ball if the misconduct was committed off the field by anyone (player, substitute, or substituted player).

In connection with restarts for misconduct, it is important to remember several things.

- The restart is unchanged if the misconduct is committed by anyone during a stoppage of play.
- When play is stopped for an offense which is both a foul and misconduct, the restart is determined by the foul, not the misconduct.
- Whether the misconduct results in a caution (yellow card) or a send-off (red card), the restart is not affected.

In the attached clip from a match between the Columbus Crew and Real Salt Lake on August 16, RSL #16 (Forko) actively challenged Crew #7 (Thomas) for the ball just above the RSL goal line in the 21st minute. Their momentum carried them both off the field where Thomas went down (the ball left the field shortly thereafter).

- If the referee's decision was that Forko in fact caused Thomas to fall (trip, charge, push, etc.) while off the field, this would be misconduct only and play should restart with a dropped ball where the ball was at the time (just above the goal line) after showing Forko the appropriate card.
- If the referee's decision was that Forko's actions off the field were not misconduct, then no offense at all was committed and play should restart with a goal kick based on how the ball subsequently left the field.
- If the referee decided that Forko began committing a direct free kick foul while still on the field and merely continued this offense after leaving the field, play should restart with a penalty kick since the foul was committed by a defender inside his penalty area.

It is important to remember that the actual stoppage of play by the referee is marked from when the referee decided to stop play, not when the whistle sounds.