

RECOMMENDED SYSTEM OF POSITIONS AND SIGNALS FOR ASSISTANT REFEREES

The following system attempts to create a standard set of movements and signals to be used by Assistant Referees (ARs) that are applicable to all games. Also see the US Soccer Guide to Procedures for Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials for diagrams and drawings that illustrate these concepts.

It is not intended to rigidly regiment the actions of neutral Assistant Referees. However, cooperation and understanding between game officials can only be maintained if there is a common vocabulary of sign language. Each Referee has the right to modify or change the signals and positioning required from his ARs in any given game. If he does so, however, he will of course bear the main responsibility for any misunderstanding that may arise as a result.

No one system is perfect. All have their pros and cons. But this system is basically the one recommended by FIFA. It is advisable that Assistant Referee's start out with this system. As they gain experience as ARs, they may choose to modify this system to better fit their needs. It is hoped, however, that this will not be necessary.

The secret to being a competent AR lies in the ability to be at the right place at the right time, in the clarity of signals, and in the AR's attitude of cooperation with the "man in the middle". The AR must always remember that he is there to "assist".... not "insist". This means that, in any event, the AR's responsibility is to follow the instructions of the Referee as given during the pre-game instructions.

It is virtually impossible for officials to have a "good" game unless the Referee has conducted a pre-game conference. The Referee should review the many specific points with his ARs to ensure there is a mutual understanding of what is expected during the game.

The areas that the Referee should cover with the ARs in the pre-game include:

- AR's responsibilities
- Out of bounds/Restarts/Position/Duties
- Offside infractions
- Fouls/Free kick awards--indicated by ARs
- Fouls near the goal--Referee's call or AR's opinion
- Fouls behind the Referee's back
- Dissent with ARs

This document is intended, however, to focus on the basic responsibilities of the ARs and will not go into the details of the pre-game conference. However, reference to it will be made from time to time and its importance cannot be overstated.

For ease of understanding, the system will be presented in two parts:

- The AR's positioning
- The AR's signals.

THE AR's POSITIONING

- *Prior to, during, and immediately following the kick off:*

The activities of the ARs prior to the game will vary from game to game and will have been covered during the pre-game conference conducted by the Referee.

After the players' equipment has been checked and the coin toss completed (a task carried out at the intersection of the half-line and touch line on the players sided of the field), the officials may leave the field to permit the two teams to "ready" themselves or complete any pre-game activities (field inspection, etc.). However, and in any event, the ARs should accompany the Referee in carrying out all such tasks and do so in a "line-abreast" fashion.

In like fashion, the officials should enter the field for the start of each half (one on each side of the referee) from the halfway line with their flags furled and proceed smartly to the center circle.

Once the nets have received a final cursory check by each AR (at both the start of the first AND second half of play), the AR should advise the goalkeeper that the game will start once he has reached his position on the touch line and signaled to the referee by unfurling his flag that everything is ready in his half of the field. The ARs are to position themselves on the touchline in line with the second-to-last defender PRIOR to unfurling their flags

- *While the ball is in play:*

The AR should position himself level with the second to last defender or the ball, whichever is closer to the goal line. This position allows the AR to always be on the on-side/off-side line, or level with the ball when it is close to the goal line, so that any decision he renders regarding off-side and/or goals are not contestable from the standpoint of his positioning.

Note should be taken that ARs must follow ALL rolling balls to the goal line when players are attempting to play the ball. The ball cannot be properly judged to be completely over the goal line unless the AR is ON THE GOAL LINE at the time the ball crosses the line.

- *At the taking of a goal kick:*

As soon as the goal kick has been awarded, the AR is to move along the touchline to a point level with the six-yard line defining the goal area. Once he observes that the ball has been properly placed for the kick, he should move further along the touch line until he is level with the eighteen-yard line defining the penalty area to ensure that the ball has cleared the penalty area before it is played again, and that encroachment has not taken place. Once the ball has been put into play, the AR should move quickly to the on side/offside line as previously mentioned. Note: In instances where the goalkeeper is not being contested by close proximity of defenders, the AR should check for proper placement of the ball within the goal area and IMMEDIATELY take up a position opposite to the second-to-last defender as previously mentioned.

The referee will assume responsibility for judgments involving the goal area lines that are parallel to the touchlines.

- ***At the taking of a corner kick:***

As soon as the corner kick has been awarded and regardless from which corner the kick is to be taken, the AR positions himself level with the goal line and behind the corner flag. If the corner kick is to be taken from his side of the field, he should ensure he is not in the way of the kicker by stepping back while retaining a position level with the goal line.

The AR will ensure no encroachment occurs and that the ball has been placed correctly.

If a goal results from the corner and the AR sees no infraction committed by the attacking team, he sprints about 15 yards towards the halfway line keeping his flag firmly by his side while maintaining eye contact with the Referee. If instructed by the Referee to do so, he then writes the time of the goal and the scorer's number in his book and assumes the position for the kick off as previously mentioned.

If the AR sees an infraction by an ATTACKING player, he will make the appropriate signal and hold his position at the touchline. Whether or not he is responsible "in the box" for infractions committed by any defender is determined by the Referee's pre-game instructions.

If a goal kick results, the AR is to move to the proper position for the ensuing goal kick.

- ***At the taking of a throw-in:***

Generally, the AR should be in the same position as when the ball is in play. However, and if in doing so he is going to be in the way of the player taking the throw-in, he should temporarily abandon the on side/offside line by moving a yard or so TOWARDS THE CORNER FLAG and quickly recover to the on-side/off-side position following the throw-in. This is one of the few occasions when the on side/offside line may temporarily be abandoned. In any event, the AR should always position himself on the line DOWNFIELD from the player taking the throw-in and NEVER step back from the touchline during play.

- ***At the taking of a free kick:***

The AR is to be in line with the second to last defender unless the Referee indicates by a sweeping downfield motion of the arm that he wishes the AR to move to the corner flag. The AR should move as soon as he receives this signal, whereupon the Referee--instead of the AR--will assume the duty of judging offside, while the AR will be in an uncontestable position to act as goal judge in the event of a direct shot on goal.

- ***At the taking of a penalty kick:***

As soon as the Referee indicates that a penalty kick has been awarded, the AR is to move to a position on the goal line where it intersects with the penalty area line. He should position himself so that he is able to judge whether the ball goes over the goal line. This is his SOLE responsibility at the taking of a penalty kick. If a goal is scored, he will immediately sprint back to, and up, the touchline and assume the kick off position. If the ball remains in play, he will return to the touchline as fast as possible to assume the on side/offside line position. If a goal kick or corner kick results, he will assume the relative positions as previously discussed.

- *At the end of each half:*

The referee and his ARs should be the last to leave the field of play, so that they may be able to observe the players' conduct at all times. Having blown his whistle to end the first half (or the end of the game), the referee will collect the game ball while the ARs furl their flags and collect other balls used during the contest. The ARs should then jog to meet the Referee in the center of the field and then, in line-abreast fashion, should leave the field with the Referee.

THE ASSISTANT REFEREE'S SIGNALS

Some points need to be made concerning the type of signals, their duration, and the carrying of the AR's flag before getting into the appropriate signals for specific situations.

In carrying the flag, the AR must remember that every movement of the flag carries a message to the Referee. The flag should never be carried above the waist unless it is necessary to indicate to the Referee that an incident has occurred. At all times, the flag should be carried pointing downward toward the ground. It is accepted practice to run at all times with the arm carrying the flag extended straight down. The loose end of the flag should not be held in the other hand.

The flag should always be carried in the hand nearest to the field of play. When a signal requires the flag to be changed from one hand to the other, it should be accomplished BEFORE the flag is above the waist. Do not raise the flag then change hands. Likewise, the flag should not be raised with the arm extended across the body.

Avoid giving hasty signals. A slight delay will give the AR the split second to confirm in his own mind the correctness of his signal. Throw-ins given the wrong way, incorrect goal kick/corner kick decisions, etc., reduce the credibility of the officials even when corrected prior to the re-start of play.

A slight delay is particularly important when signaling for offside.

The length of time an AR should hold his flag up varies on the situation. For a throw-in, it may only be for a few seconds. Once the AR realizes both the players and the Referee have seen the signal, the flag should be lowered.

In an offside situation, the AR must hold his position with the flag raised until acknowledged by the Referee...whether confirming OR "waving-down" the AR's call...or until such time as the defending team has taken control of the ball and the ball has been "cleared" up field.

Occasionally a Referee will "wave down" an AR's signal. The AR should not be offended nor should he display any emotion but, rather, continue to carry out his responsibilities as outlined.

If a Referee does not see the AR's signal, under no circumstances should the AR gesticulate verbally or physically to attract the Referee's attention.

- ***Ball out of play over the goal line:***

If the ball crosses the goal line in between the goal posts, the AR will either move quickly about 15 yards along the touch line towards the half way line as previously described to indicate that a goal has been scored, OR:

- If the goal scorer was offside at the moment the ball was played to him--signal offside.
- If there was a foul by an attacker—indicate the foul with the appropriate signal as well as the direction of the restart.

The AR should maintain these positions either until the Referee acknowledges the signal (he may come over to verify what it was the AR saw) or until the kick off occurs. Once the game has restarted the Referee cannot call back the goal, so the AR should resume his position on the on side/offside line and resume his responsibilities.

If the ball crosses the goal line on the far side of the field from the AR and should the Referee look pointedly at the AR, he is asking, "did the ball go over the line and/or is it a goal kick or corner kick?"

The AR will signal by pointing the flag at the nearest corner flag for a corner kick or horizontally into the field of play for a goal kick. If the AR was able to determine that the ball went out of play but is unable to determine who played the ball last, he should avoid making any signal. The Referee will then determine whether a goal kick or corner kick will be given. The AR will then assume the appropriate position for the restart.

If the ball crosses the goal line on the AR's side of the field between the near-post and the AR's corner of the field, the AR will signal by holding the flag 45-degree up from his leg in the direction of the corner flag to indicated a corner kick OR horizontally and fully extended in front of him to indicate a goal kick.

- ***Ball out of play over the touch line:***

During the pre-game conference, the Referee will have instructed the ARs about their specific responsibilities with regard to throw-ins. Normally, the Referee will request that the AR watch the thrower's feet to insure the throw is taken correctly. If a "foot foul" occurs, the AR will raise his flag and wave it very briefly in a small circular motion and indicate the direction the throw-in should now be taken. He will also remind his ARs that the throw-in must be taken from the place where the ball went out of play. It is the Referee's responsibility to ensure this rule is complied with. However, it is in the spirit of the game to assist the players in taking the throw-in at the correct place. The AR should, consequently, assist players whenever possible while not sacrificing his on side/offside line position.

On his side and in his half of the field, the AR will raise his flag with arm fully extended at an angle of 45 degrees above horizontal in the direction the throw should be taken. The flag should be held in this position until the Referee and players recognize the signal. Should the Referee overrule the AR's signal, the AR should immediately bring his flag down. Occasionally, the AR will not be sure which direction the throw-in should be taken. In these infrequent circumstances, he should raise his flag vertically without giving any indication of direction to indicate to the Referee that he has determined that the ball completely crossed the touchline for a throw-in but that he is not able to determine the direction for that throw-in.

On his side but in the Referee's half of the field, the Referee has primary responsibility for **determining** when a ball crosses the touchline. However, and in most instances, the AR should indicate the ball crossing the touchline for a throw-in by raising his flag vertically above his head but NOT indicate direction unless the Referee has instructed the AR to also signal direction during the pre-game instructions.

- *Offside*

This is the AR's most important responsibility. It is also the most difficult infraction to determine. A slight delay in making the signal will provide the AR with the opportunity to be sure an offside infraction has occurred. Hasty signals that are subsequently "waved down" by the Referee will invariably lead to irritation and potential "dissent situations" may ensue.

When an offside infraction occurs, the AR will raise his flag vertically and look at the Referee while holding his position on the touchline, in line of where the infraction occurred. When the Referee whistles to stop play, the AR then lowers his flag to a position that indicates where the infraction took place:

- 45 degrees **above** the horizontal into the field of play when the infraction occurred on the **far side of the field**
- **Horizontally** into the field of play when the infraction occurred in the **middle** of the field
- 45 degrees **below** the horizontal into the field of play when the infraction occurred on the **near side** of the field

After signaling the area of the field where the offside occurred, the AR should lower his flag but remain stationary so that he can determine the correct placement of the ball.

If the Referee does not see the signal, the AR should hold his position, with the flag raised, until either the Referee "waves the flag down" or the defending team gains possession and clears the ball up field.

- *Fouls*

This is a difficult signal for the AR to give and should only be given with great deliberation and care because of the implication of the advantage clause.

During the pre-game conference, the Referee should explain his expectations of the ARs regarding fouls emphasizing, in particular, the areas of the field and circumstances under which he wants the assistance of the ARs.

The AR should only signal for fouls if he is **ABSOLUTELY SURE** that the Referee could not have seen the offense **AND** if it is a serious and significant foul. If that is so, he should raise the flag vertically, **WAIT UNTIL EYE CONTACT IS GAINED WITH THE REFEREE**, and then wave the flag very briefly in a small circular motion to indicate to the Referee that the game should be stopped. One of the following signals must then be used to indicate to the Referee the nature of the foul:

- **Award of a Free Kick**-- Point flag at 45 degrees above the horizontal along the touch line in the direction in which the ball should be put into play.

- **Award of a Penalty Kick**-- the AR first indicates a penalty kick by holding the flag horizontally across the lower body and then begins walking toward the corner flag, stand rigidly at attention until the Referee points to the penalty spot. The AR then assumes his position at the junction of the goal line and the penalty area line or at another appropriate point if the Referee orders a different restart.

There will be occasions when the Referee requires assistance in determining whether an infraction he has whistled for is inside or outside the penalty area. The Referee will look questioningly at the AR. If the offense occurred outside the penalty area, the AR will stand at attention with the flag pointing clearly downward at his side. If the offense occurred inside the penalty area committed by the defensive team and the restart should be a penalty kick, the AR should signal this by holding the flag horizontally across the lower body.

- ***Substitution:***

The AR will hold his flag above his head with both arms straight up and the staff of the flag extended horizontally between the palms of his hands. Once the Referee has acknowledged that he has seen that a substitution has been requested, the AR immediately lowers his flag. When the Referee stops play to enable the substitution to be made, the AR moves to the halfway line to supervise the exit and entry of players if, when doing so, he does not necessitate a delay in the game in order to resume his offside position for the restart.

- ***Time remaining:***

ARs are expected to confirm to the Referee any amount of time remaining at the end of both halves, once that amount of time becomes less than 5 minutes.

The signal consists of extending the proper number of fingers against the shirt or shorts of the AR's uniform.

- ***End of half or game:***

If in the opinion of the AR time has expired for the half or for the game, the AR should signal this opinion to the Referee by extending a clenched fist against the shirt or shorts of the AR's uniform.

- ***An Important Note:***

The Referee is the final judge of all incidents that may occur in the match. He may overrule the AR's signals if he sees fit to do so. This must not discourage the AR from continuing to perform his duties...even if he believes that his signal was correct.