

# Hey Ref, What's The Call?

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As AYSO referees, how often do we hear, "Hey ref, what's the call?" We hear it on the soccer field while refereeing a game, on the touchline while watching a game, and on our voicemail or email when we are nowhere near a soccer field.

Those who know you as a referee are looking for confirmation of their opinion or they genuinely want to learn more about the Laws of the Game. As trained and certified AYSO referees (and instructors and assessors), our challenge is to answer questions correctly without demeaning the questioner or the referee who actually made the call.

R-E-S-P-E-C-T! The person asking the question, whether it is a player, parent, coach, or another referee, deserves a respectful answer, just as the referee deserves respect for volunteering. Referees put their knowledge, judgment and opinions on the line by making the best calls they can. Many calls made by referees require the referee's judgment or opinion. Soccer is designed as a player's game and the referee is charged with interrupting or interfering with the game as little as possible. Decisions need to be made quickly without unnecessary delay, consultation with other officials, discussions with coaches or reviewing instant replays as may be common in other sports.

The need to know "What's the call" is minimal during the game. Three things are important to know: (1) When the referee wants play to stop; (2) Which team gets to restart play; and (3) What is the correct restart. The referee's whistle and hand signals provide all of this information in 2-3 seconds.

The whistle says "stop" and the referee's hand signals say which team gets to restart play as well as which restart is needed. None of this information requires the referee to speak. The better players, coaches, and spectators understand these referee signals, the less we will hear, "Hey ref, what's the call?"

The referee shouldn't explain every call but for younger or less skilled players, a brief explanation from the referee is often beneficial. Such comments as... "You can't push the opponent like that" or "My raised arm means the kick is indirect" or "Blue team's throw-in" or similar comments can aid with education without undue delay or interference. For older players, referees explaining calls is not always helpful and may precipitate disagreement and not be helpful for game management. Knowing what to say or not to say and whether or not it will benefit the game is a skill all referees should work hard to develop.

While watching a game you hear a spectator call out, "Hey ref, what's the call", take a teaching moment and help them understand. Respect the referee and the ARs, and their calls.

If you didn't see the foul, your answer may be "The referee has seen a foul and is indicating a direct free kick for the red team." If you saw the foul, give a brief explanation to the spectator, "The blue player deliberately handled the ball." If you didn't see the foul you might say, "The referee is better positioned than I was to see the foul so I respect the decision". Do not undermine the referee's authority.

When answering a voicemail or an email questioning a referee's call or no-call in a particular game, answer the question but remember not to be judgmental. Explain facts of the Law if needed without being critical of the referee. You might say something like, "I was not at the game so I can only comment on facts of the Law.

Referee decisions are based on what they actually see or what is confirmed by the qualified assistant referees and their perspective is often quite different than those watching from the touch line. It may be helpful if you express your concerns to the Referee Administrator who can provide additional information and training when necessary".

Respect the efforts of the referee and support the continuing education of all who ask,  
"Hey ref, what's the call?"