

LAW 12 Fouls and Misconduct

Under Law 12 you will find something called “Deliberately Handling the ball”.

How dare they tell me I can’t use my hands, this is America! There is a reason that the game is referred to as football around the world.

Deliberately handling of the ball, usually incorrectly referred to as handball, is one of the most misunderstood Laws of the game.

WHAT IS DELIBERATE HANDLING THE BALL?- Deliberate handling of the ball on the field of play, while the ball is in play, by anyone other than the keeper in his or her penalty area, is an offense according to LAW 12 of FIFA.

WHAT DOES THE HAND INCLUDE? - The hand involves any part of the arm from the fingertips to top of the outer shoulder, about where a sleeveless shirt ends. It does not include the top of the shoulder, the fabric area of a sleeveless shirt, and a player can use this area, but this is a small area and a player must be careful since the only opinion that counts in soccer is the referee’s.

WHAT IS DELIBERATE? - Deliberate does not mean the person had to intentionally stick out the arm trying to make contact with the ball, because that would require the referee to read the player’s mind. The referee must make the decision based on what he or she sees the player do, the situation, and the results and not what is on the player’s mind or his or her thought process.

Deliberate means one of the following:

- could have avoided contact with the ball and chose not to.
- did not have his or her arm in a normal playing position when contact was made
- made accidental contact initially, but chose not to remove or lessen arm contact with intention of gaining an unfair advantage by directing the ball

Deliberate does not mean:

- Moving hands or arms to instinctively protect one from a fast approaching ball. While protecting yourself and the ball strikes your arm is not deliberate handling of the ball and therefore there is no foul to call. Example: A back is clearing the ball from his or her own penalty area and an opponent is rushing in to put pressure on the ball. The back kicks a rocket shot to clear it, the opponent goes to protect his or her face and the ball strikes the elbow and deflects into the goal -gooooooal!
 - The exception here would be if the person had time to move their body out of the way or once the instinctive, protective contact was made they tried to redirect the ball with the arm to gain an unfair advantage.

RULE OF THUMB?- When you see a ball strike a player’s arm ask this simple question; did the ball play the arm or did the arm play the ball? Was the action you witnessed, ball to arm or was it arm to ball? This is a generalization but this will help make it clear.

WHAT DOES THE REFEREE DO? - The referee will blow his whistle and signal a direct free kick in the direction the ball is going. He or she may say out loud or some referees may touch their own arm to signify a handling of the ball, but no signal other than direction and type of free kick is required. If the assistant referee spots the infraction then he or she will raise the flag to notify the referee that the foul has been committed.

WHAT IS THE PENALTY? - Field player (not including the keeper) it is always a direct free kick. If it involves the keeper then the location and situation determines the penalty:

Keeper outside penalty area-

- If the keeper is outside the penalty area, then he or she is treated the same as all other field players.

Pass by teammate to keeper inside penalty area-

- If a ball is purposely passed by a teammate to the keeper, utilizing their feet, then a keeper cannot use their hands. I stress purposely as a deflection off of a foot or a miss directed kick can be gathered in the keeper's hands.
- If a ball is purposely passed back by a teammate by any part of the body other than the feet (head, chest, thigh) the keeper can legally gather the ball in the hands.

MISCONCEPTIONS-

- You are not allowed to protect yourself and must take the ball in the face unless you want a hand ball called-NOT TRUE- players are allowed to protect themselves.
- You cannot get a yellow card or red card for deliberately handling the ball- False, if you deny a goal with your hand and not directly true for other situations- If deliberate handling of the ball occurred by a field player the infraction shall be called, but the situation may dictate that the referee do more. The referee may show a yellow or red card for the action or the conduct. The yellow would be for unsporting behavior, but if a player denies a goal in this manner red will be the color since that is one of the offenses listed that dictates a straight red. Anytime a player stops a goal or goal scoring opportunity by deliberately and blatantly use of the hands, you will be called for handling the ball and shown a red card. If you deliberately and blatantly prevent with the hand an opponent from possessing the ball you will be cautioned and shown a YELLOW card for unsporting behavior. If you deliberately and blatantly try to score a goal with the use of the hands you will be called for the foul and cautioned with a YELLOW card for unsporting behavior.
- Any player that gets hit in the hands by a ball and they benefit from the deflection, handball must be called. – I don't know how this got started because it is no truer than the legend of Bigfoot. If they deliberately handled the ball it's a foul. If they did not deliberately handle the ball it does not matter if the ball goes in the goal, there was no foul, just lucky. There is no foul for lady luck being on your side.
- I had my arms stretched out like I was flying and the ball struck my hand from behind. I did not even see the ball so how was that a deliberate handling of the ball.- Not too many players stretch out their arms like a bird when they play soccer; therefore your hands were not in a normal playing position. If that was the case we could just put several players in the goal with their backs to the ball and their arms stretched out hoping to block a shot.
- Handball is a foul. – NOPE! Handball is not a foul, but deliberately handling the ball certainly is.
- A keeper is not allowed to use their hands if the ball is accidentally deflected or kicked to them by a teammate- No! This confuses many young keepers. The key word is accidentally, meaning it was not a tactical planned pass, it was an accident and the keeper can use every inch of every finger.

Moments in History DELIBERATE HANDLING of the BALL WAS NOT CALLED (refs make mistakes too):

- The most famous is Diego Maradona's "hand of God Goal" Do a search and look for it, it's amazing and still makes the highlights today. I find it funny to listen to Maradona's comments. It is called this because he first smiled and said it was not his hand but the hand of God. He admits now that he did it on purpose and told his teammates on the field to celebrate quickly so the referees would not make the call. They don't find it funny in England!
- World Cup 2002 USA against the Germans. We were so close, could have been closer if the FIFA LAWS were applied and deliberate handling called! That should have been a red card and a PK.