

Advantage

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The sensible and sympathetic application ADVANTAGE is one of the most powerful weapons in an umpire's armoury. With it, the umpire can make or break a game. The ability properly to apply ADVANTAGE is a major factor in CONTROL and thus in an umpire's ability to command the respect and co-operation of the players, whose game it is.

Advantage: a penalty shall be awarded only when a player or team has been clearly disadvantaged by an opponent's offence.

Careful reading of the ADVANTAGE Rule will show that it is concerned with the team against which an offence has occurred. The umpires must consider carefully whether the offence has **disadvantaged** the opponent, regardless of which team has possession of the ball when the decision is made. The umpire must assess the effect of the breach, whether or not to blow the whistle and, if blown, what level of penalty to apply and whether a personal penalty is also required if misconduct accompanied the breach.

Before going any further, it is important to appreciate that minor technical breaches of the Rules occur but, unless they are likely to affect the outcome of the game or are intentional, should normally be ignored. No player or team should ever be permitted to commit an intentional breach of the Rules without the umpire's taking action, though not necessarily immediately.

When a breach occurs, either the player/team committing the breach will have possession of the ball, or the opposing team will. Let us first consider the team that committed the breach gaining or retaining possession, i.e. clearly putting the opposing team at a disadvantage.

Typical examples might include knocking the opponent's stick off the ball, obstruction (especially third party), shielding the ball with the stick and kicking the ball forward when playing it. The list of possible breaches is almost endless. The point at issue is that a breach occurs which gives the offending team possession of the ball, i.e. possession is denied to the team against which the breach occurred. In these circumstances, it will be rare indeed for the team committing the breach not to gain an ADVANTAGE and it will usually be necessary to apply an immediate penalty rather than wait to see what happens next.

The other case to consider is when a breach occurs but the player or team **against** which the offence is made gains or retains possession of the ball. This happens very often and is the greatest cause for umpires to apply ADVANTAGE incorrectly. All too often retention of possession is simply not good enough if the team that committed the breach actually disadvantaged the opponents by doing so.

For example, a right winger who is moving up the sideline and being incorrectly tackled from the reverse side, usually by the left half, and often with ankles suffering, can be forced into the corner and unable to make an effective pass. When the pass is eventually made, other defenders will have had time to move into position to intercept it or the player who is to receive it. Not only does the winger need protection, but also a whistle early enough to enable an **effective** pass.

On the other hand, an attacker going through to the 23-metre line in front of the circle and retaining possession despite a breach may well be able to avoid a defender, either to make an effective pass or to beat the goalkeeper, and have an opportunity to shoot for goal. To blow the whistle in such a case would increase the disadvantage already forced by the defending team in the first place by giving the defence time to regroup.

The point can be carried further. An attacker in possession of the ball who retains **EFFECTIVE** possession, even though tackled dangerously, possibly intentionally so, should be allowed to proceed without hindrance of a whistle if it is safe to do so **BUT** - and it is a big **BUT** - it is important that the umpire remembers who committed the dangerous or intentional bad tackle and deals with the offending player as soon as it is convenient to do so, e.g. the next time the whistle is blown or if the ball goes out of play. Misconduct such as this should **NEVER** be ignored.

Judgement of ADVANTAGE can also be affected by the timing of the whistle. A player in possession and being offended against can often retain the advantage to make an effective

pass by a well-timed whistle that keeps the offending team clear for that critical moment when a quick free hit is taken. This must be borne in mind by the umpire when play is in the 23-metre area and the offence is intentional and by a defender. Whilst a penalty corner might be the correct technical penalty for the intentional offence, the more effective penalty might well be a well-timed free hit. There is always time later, as already described, to deal with the offender. It can thus be seen that some offences justify more than the basic penalty; they may need a personal penalty for MISCONDUCT, either immediately or as soon as convenient.

There is a school of thought that ADVANTAGE must be immediate and obvious. This cannot always be so. Indeed, in many cases, it MUST not be so. Consider two examples. In the first, a defender illegally tackles an attacker just as the latter is about to pass the ball. The pass may be made but delayed for the fraction of a second that is enough to give another defender time to mark the player receiving the pass. The umpire must wait to see if the receiving player has time properly to receive and play the ball without interference. If the recipient has not, the umpire should consider blowing the whistle and applying the appropriate penalty where the offence actually occurred.

The second case might be in the circle at a penalty corner where a defender moves into the circle before the hit-out is taken and reaches the player who is to stop the ball just as it arrives. The umpire must wait. It may well be that the receiving attacker can slip the ball so that another attacker can set up a fair shot at goal. If the shot cannot be made, or the actual slip is intercepted by a defender, another penalty corner can be awarded and, if this is a recurrence of the offence, the umpire might also caution the defender[s] concerned.

Timing is important, then, not only in ensuring that a player against whom an offence is being committed is given time a clear opportunity to play the ball, but also to assess whether a breach really does put the opposing team at a disadvantage. A player against whom such a breach has been committed must have space from the nearest opponents and time in which to control the ball and make an unforced decision about the next move.

There will nevertheless be times when the umpire should not delay blowing the whistle. Mostly, these will be when the ball is outside the circle. Perhaps the most common need for a quick whistle is in a player-to-player confrontation in which, once a breach has occurred, any further play between the players concerned could lead to loss of self-control by one or both of them and a further breach. Generally, there is no profit in allowing such situations to develop.

When there is danger to a player or a group of players the umpire should blow the whistle **immediately**. THERE IS NO ADVANTAGE IN DANGER, whether from an accident or a breach of the Rules.

There will inevitably be occasions when breaches occur but the disadvantage to the opponents would be increased rather than decreased by blowing the whistle. In these cases the umpire has no recourse but to allow play to proceed. The intention to do so should be signalled using the correct ADVANTAGE signal. The signal not only warns the other umpire that the offence has been seen but also communicates the umpire's awareness of the event. If the breach is dangerous or intentional, the offender should be dealt with as soon as convenient. Similarly, when a breach occurs from which NO disadvantage accrues, the umpire should signal ADVANTAGE for play to proceed. This is particularly important to prevent the other umpire's unwittingly interfering and, again, lets players and spectators know that the umpire is alert to the event.

A useful tip for an umpire in deciding whether to penalise an offence or not is to question: "What would the offending team's captain LEAST like me to do?"

Alternatively, the umpire should aim to penalise the offence in the harshest possible way. With luck, and very often, that will mean NOT whistling but signalling with the ADVANTAGE signal and, if appropriate, calling "Play on". In other words, application of ADVANTAGE can be seen as a penalty in itself.

There are a couple of other useful tips to remember. First, in all but a very few cases, the only ADVANTAGE for the defence in the 23-metre area is a free hit. Avoid gambling with the defenders' ability to recover from an offence against them. In other words, BLOW QUICKLY.

The second concerns the attackers, especially in the circle. This time, gambling may be the right thing to do. An attacker would prefer a one-in-a-hundred chance of a shot at goal than go through the routine of a penalty corner, knowing how low the scoring rate is at penalty corners. In other words, for the attack, BLOW SLOWLY.

Summary

- ADVANTAGE is about the team that commits an offence putting the opponents at a positive DISadvantage.
- Do not confuse POSSESSION with ADVANTAGE. To be of value, it must be EFFECTIVE POSSESSION if the offending team is not to profit from the breach.
- Decide:
 - a. Was there a breach?
 - b. If YES, did it put the opponents at a disadvantage?
 - c. Would whistling increase or decrease that disadvantage?
- Act:
 - d. If whistling would **increase** ADVANTAGE to the offender (increase DISADVANTAGE to the opponent), signal PLAY ON with the Advantage signal.
 - e. If whistling might **decrease** the disadvantage, **wait and see what happens** next unless there is danger of player-to-player confrontation. If necessary, signal PLAY ON with the Advantage signal but be prepared to return to the event and apply a penalty where the offence occurred.
 - f. Blow once, loudly.
 - g. Time the whistle and determine the penalty to achieve the greatest reduction in ADVANTAGE to the offender.
 - h. If play has been allowed to proceed following an intentional or dangerous breach, remember to deal with the offender as soon as convenient. The less-scrupulous player will be quick to capitalise on an umpire's weakness in this area. Avoid being officious, however.
 - i. Learn to discriminate between the merely technical breaches and those that will or could affect the outcome of the game.
 - j. Appreciate that NOT blowing the whistle, i.e. allowing play to proceed following a breach of the rules, is itself a penalty.
- For defenders, BLOW SHORT. For attackers, BLOW LONG.

Now:

READ THE ADVANTAGE RULE AGAIN:

ADVANTAGE: a penalty shall be awarded only when a player or team has been clearly disadvantaged by an opponent's offence