

The Goalkeeper & The Law

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The goalkeeper in his or her own 44 x 18, penalty area:

- Enjoys use of hands;
- After a save, is given 6 seconds to put the ball back into play;
- Has a unique shirt;
- And, must obey certain restrictions (ie. taking ball in hands from kick by teammates, teammate throw-in, etc.).

But, once we get past these special provisions, the keepers are just like the other players...

...Or are they?

An important skill of officiating is the recognition that, within their own penalty area, the goalkeeper is never just like the other players. Special care and attention must be applied at every level, every time the ball is played near the keeper.

The Goalkeeper & Safety

The referee must scrutinize every charge against the goalkeeper and call any infringement (Law 12). If a charge is careless, reckless or done with excess force it is a direct free kick offense. If play is dangerous or opponent prevents keeper from putting ball in play it is an indirect free kick offenses. In all cases, the referee must recognize and punish any offense which is clearly against the letter of the Law.

Remember, the only fair charge allowed under the Laws is shoulder-to-shoulder. If a goalkeeper is flat on the ground, or stretched out exposing vital organs, face or fingers, then a charge using a foot is not fair. Whistle to stop play. It may be a free kick at a minimum. If thought unsporting, it may necessitate a caution (yellow card), or if serious foul play/violent conduct is involved, a send-off (red card).

If the keeper has only one finger on the ball, then attackers must back off. Referees need to be particularly alert to illegal charges here. Good mechanics at the youth level mean the referee must be on top of the situation, have a clear view as the play develops, and be prepared for a quick whistle to prevent injury. Even if the keeper's hands are close - **safety for the keeper is the most important consideration.**

Between a goalkeeper and a player, a so called "50-50 ball", usually is **not**. Often it means an attacker throws his foot, leg or body at the keeper, presumably with the ball in mind? Keepers have doubts!!!

In the youth program such collisions between young children means an unnecessary risk of injury. A keeper's hand against an attacker's foot, leg or body is not 50-50. It is not fair, not balanced, it is just not right. It must be stopped immediately. Further repetition by anyone, must be dealt with severely.

We all know that soccer is a tough, physical, combative contact sport. But is also by Law, tradition and spirit of the game: fair and sporting. This A # 1, top of the list, priority for kids means: keeping the keeper healthy! All referees at the youth levels have a responsibility to help coaches, parents and players to learn the skills of the game of soccer in a safe, sane, sporting environment. Players in harm's way, do not learn proper technique.

This is different from professional or high level adult play. Both the keepers and players at the higher levels develop the skills and techniques to minimize injury and protect themselves. Younger players have not. This is why youth soccer must be safety first. That begins with the most vulnerable person on the field - the goalkeeper.

Here are some guidelines to help you ensure the safety of the keeper and promote the Spirit of the Game at the youth level:

1. Most important, referees need to be close to such anticipated action. Stay alert! Attackers who put keepers at risk must be warned, penalized if necessary; served a yellow or red card if necessary.
2. If the keeper is unfairly charged head on, from the rear, by a foot or by a feet first challenge, then referees are expected to protect the keeper, stop play, deal with it! Because of the exposure the keeper risks, referees must give the benefit of the doubt to the keeper.
3. Kicking at a ball near a keeper's face or head, while she or he is on ground is not sporting. In fact if contact with the face is made, the forward may very well receive a red card for serious foul play.
4. Keepers are open to injury simply by the nature of their position. Never mind foul play. That's more jeopardy.
5. Coaches, players and referees must be sensitive to this fact and behave and advocate safe play: when contact around the goalkeeper is at issue. Coaches must teach responsible challenges. Players must learn to back off. It is a soccer community effort to do the right thing.
6. Referees must admonish any potentially risky behavior. Stop any action that threatens the well being, health and safety of the keeper.
7. Referees must intervene, perhaps to call fouls, issue cards or send off (red card) players who: abuse goalkeepers, infringe the laws, flout the spirit of the game, and also defy common sense.