

Wow! I could have had a V-8!

In the 1998 revision of the Laws of the Game great effort was put into simplifying the laws so that referees would have a clearer understanding of their application. There were fewer words and better pictures, but gone was that little paragraph in Law 5, International Board Decision 8 which said:

The Laws of the Game are intended to provide that games should be played with as little interference as possible, and in this view it is the duty of the referees to penalize only deliberate breaches of the Law. Constant whistling for trifling and doubtful breaches produces bad feeling and loss of temper on the part of the players and spoils the pleasure of the spectators.

The reason it was removed was not because it no longer applied, or that changes in the Laws over the years had superceded it, so as to make it redundant, but because the authors felt that it was so obvious, so fundamental, and so integral to the game, that everyone already embraced this concept. Unfortunately, for the new generation of referees who have entered our ranks, since the Laws were revised, Law 5: IBD 8 (aka V8) is no longer a clear or well understood concept.

V8 goes beyond just the "pleasure of the spectators" - Law 5: IBD 8 is key to the enjoyment and satisfaction that we, as referees, can achieve, regardless of the level of the game. To help us all improve our game, and increase our own enjoyment, Bob Evans, National Referee Instructor and the author of the USSF Guide to Procedures for Referees, has written the following three part series on what Law 5 IBD 8 means and how to make it part of your game.

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Part one of three.

Law 5: IBD 8

by Bob Evans, National Referee Instructor

I thought it might help to put some historical, analytical and experiential stitching into the tapestry of the laws of the game to make it, if not clear, then at least visible to those who may not have decades of football lore in their system, and who struggle with the evident inconsistencies that critics and others have pointed out quite correctly.

(And as a prefatory request, may I ask that you don't try to pick this piece apart as you would a submission to a court of law. Read it for its message, not for its legal defensibility. Don't do something similar to what one respondent did, when he pointed out that when I quoted the law, I did not complete the sentence of law 3 that says ". . . any player may change places . . . provided that the referee is informed . . .etc." By picking at that he missed the whole point I was trying to make.)

Let me start with the business of doing the least that is necessary to control the game. A study of the history of football reveals that officials of any kind were a late addition: first umpires (off the field), then on the field, then umpires with a referee off the field to "refer to", then with the advent of professionals, a referee on the field making independent decisions and not solely when asked by the players. The fundamental point? The game could be played just by the players, until it became seriously competitive. Then some kind of arbitration was needed, materializing in the body of a referee. But even after that time in the late 1800s, the following principle was established and maintained: The man would not interfere with the game, and would render a decision only when it was necessary for preservation of safety and sportsmanship.

It did not take long for the framers of the laws to realize that regrettably, many referees enjoyed the power of the position and did not temper it with the wisdom of their forbears, and so early in the last century the framers had to exhort officials not to adhere strictly to the letter of the laws, but to referee with wisdom and without interfering with the pleasure of the other participants. That eventually became IBD 8. Now what does it mean to our every weekend referee?

IBD 8 applies to every level of the game. When Ed and I wrote on the subject, we wrote for every referee. (Sorry, but our work was not aimed solely at the upper level audience.) So, to the almost plaintive question recently by a referee who wasn't sure how to apply IBD 8 in the kids' games he does, I will say: "Do the least that is necessary to control the situation -- in your particular game." And what you do will not be the same as a referee in a tough Sunday afternoon men's league game.

In the kids' game if you see a child becoming hysterical and out-of-control, rather than bring out a card, you might need to walk over to his coach and suggest that for the good of all, he remove the player and give the kid a chance to cool down. In the men's game, you might have to use one of a number of options: lecture the player, appeal to his sense of fair play, reason with him, laugh at him, share a joke with him, put his name in the book, send him off or do some other thing "...that is necessary to control the situation." The great beauty of IBD 8 is its applicability to every game we will ever see, and the important thing is to do the least, L--E--A--S--T, that's necessary. And if you choose to book a player for changing shirts with the goalkeeper, you've missed one hundred and fifty years of history, and the collective wisdom of thousands upon thousands of referees.