

Hey Ref, Handball !!!

By Ed Rae, SDI

When a young man came up to him in Zurich, and said, "May I kiss the hand that wrote Ulysses? James Joyce replied, somewhat like King Lear, "No, it did a lot of other things too."- Oxford Book of Literary Anecdotes.

On any given bright May morning. On a clear, crisp October afternoon. On gorgeous game days, otherwise pleasant grandparents in lawn chairs, yell: 'Hey Ref, handball!' Are hands doing a lot of things at 10-year-old games, that they should not be doing?

Ah, but it is not just blue - gray haired, youth game spectators. It is not just those, who did not grow up with the game. It is not just the unschooled, shouting handball! Who then? It is seemingly knowledgeable college mentors; experienced high school staffs; players of all skill stripes; premier paid, advanced license, pedigreed coaches too. Why all the indignant vocal vibrations?

Let's fumble in the football archaeological digs, for the forbears of this hand thing. We can examine a London, England meeting of 1863. The seismic, redoubt of the rugby rift. An English school schism sent Association Football one way, Rugby Union another. ***'No player shall carry the ball, nor pass it to another...no player shall take the ball from the ground with hands, while it is in play...'***

Hence the first Laws of the Game changed the shape of the rugby ball. Ruggers handle the elliptical ball. Footballers handle the soccer, spherical ball – NOT !

Evolving over time, the sporting minds of 1891 codified the illegality, in detail: ***"...if any player shall...deliberately handle the ball...Handling is intentionally playing the ball with hands or arm."*** (A History of the Laws of Association Football, by Sir Stan Stanley Rous and Donald Ford, FIFA, Zurich Switzerland, 1974)

Appearing pretty clear? Yet, go to any game. Any field. Any day. Any level. Listen to chattering; to clattering; to angry, tattered tongues:
"Handball! Why isn't the ref calling it?"

We have an epidemic of invincible ignorance. Everywhere. So it seems. The legendary street smarts, of Josh Billings chide: ***"It is better to know nothin', than to know what ain't so."***

Intimidated, inexperienced referees often blow cold whistles, on innocent players. This contradicts the referees' chart of the FIFA International Board: ***"...not unless the hand or arm strikes or propels the ball, it is not a foul: far too often a player is penalized when the ball touches the arm or hand through no individual action..."***(1976)

Usually High School Federation and NCAA college rules follow this international lead. The spirit of the laws is universal. World Cup famed referee, Jack Taylor, lends a practical viewpoint: ***"It is sometimes difficult to decide if a player has handled intentionally or just been struck by the ball...you can give the benefit of the doubt, where players are not so highly trained or so swift to react."***

"The act is not criminal unless the intent is criminal." - Ancient legal maxim

The British Football Association booklet (1986), Know the Game, states: *"It may be impossible for a player to avoid 'handling' the ball, having no time to withdraw a hand or arm, before the ball strikes...even though...may thus gain advantage, because the ball is directed along a different path; if it was unintentional, the referee should not penalize it."*

The NCAA rule; *"Unintentional handling (the ball touches the hand or arms) shall not be penalized, even though the player or that player's team gains an advantage by such unintentional handling."*

Why then, all the hoots and howls? Hippocrates advises, *"Life is short, the art long. Timing is exact, experience through judgment difficult."*

Often partisan fans, influence-bent coaches, biased players - all- get paid in their own coin: fateful free kicks, painful penalty kicks, against their side. Enjoyable play, in the soi-disant 'handball' din, dims. This bogus call, like the grim reaper, cuts down all sides, all players. Flow stutters. Game spirit stifled. Injustice. Ignorance prevails.

How to judge?

- Did the ball hit the hand? **No whistle**
- Was it an instinctive, reflexive reaction? **No call.**
- Protecting vital body parts? **No call.**
- Was it just an aimless, bouncing ball? **Nothing then.**
- Accident? **No call.**
- No fault? **No call.**
- Not on purpose? **No call.**
- Did hand hit ball? Rare. But it might happen. If, in the opinion of the referee, it was deliberate, then, and only then **make the call.**

Many officials routinely make faux calls. Inadvertent balls striking hands. In the middle of the field. The same referees then later become shy. Never a sorry whistle inside the 44 x 18. Or worse, misguided somehow, they let all other accidental incidents go, then trumpet ugly-a penalty kick out of the clear, inconsistent blue.

"An error cannot be believed sincerely enough, to make it the truth." - Robert Ingersol

Just because it looks bad; simply because it appears advantageous; only because people yell- does not make anything illegal. Not at all. With experience, there is hope officials will summon courage enough to evaluate, not the result of the act, but whether or not it was deliberate.

Then maybe we will hear, **"Hey Ref, good no-call !"**