

The Wall

by Ed Rae SDI

"Something there that doesn't love a wall..."

When a free kick is about to take place, very often defenders will line up in a "wall." The spirit and letter of the law do not allow the delay of the free kick. (Wall or defenders lining up shoulder-to-shoulder, 2-3-4-5 players at a time, in line with expected path of the free kick.) There is no stated prohibition in the Laws about setting up a "wall." It is not mentioned.

Defenders are expected to surrender the 10 yards or proper distance, in an expeditious fashion.

Delaying the restart or failure to respect the proper distance is a cautionable, yellow card offense. Serious? How many good free kick opportunities does a team get? How many chances like that occur in a match?

Here a team has already been victimized by a foul. Now, if denied proper distance - denied their freedom - you will have let them be victimized again! This is misconduct, injustice!

Justice is required! So it is, indeed, serious.

Serious enough, so a golden card may come out of hiding. Sometimes a yellow card, shown early, will make defenders get religion. (The offense is unsporting conduct, delay of game by failing to respect the proper distance on a restart, or encroachment) Next time they'll do the right thing: give 10.

The offended team, fouled though they were, may want to take the free kick right away, immediately. As long as ball is not moving; is at spot designated by referee, they may do so. Even if defense is not the proper distance away-it is the kicking team's choice.

However, if their perceived shot, pass or surprise, in a quickly taken kick goes for naught, they cannot ask to have "10 yards." No proper distance, no second bite at the apple. They cannot take it over. They had their chance, took their shot. No sweet serendipity? So be it.

A free kick is awarded. Alertly, the referee, in the meantime can tell the defense to get back; point to where they have to go; use body language to encourage the surrender of proper yardage. The Referee can remind the defense proactively. Warn that encroachment is possible misconduct. Advise that misconduct has consequences.

The referee does not need the kicking team to ask him or her to take preventive measures. This will help management in other free kicks situations, later in the game.

In most cases, the kicking team need not wait for another signal from referee to take their free kick. They are entitled to the quick restart before the defense can set up.

In the case, when the kicking team indicates a plan to wait, or formally ask for proper distance, the referee may tell them to please wait for that second signal. The ceremonial kick ensues. Often the referee will hold up and point to the whistle- meaning 'wait for my whistle', until the wall is set at the right distance .

The referees should not pace off the ten yards, but know it from prior practice. Referees must have established a sense of what 10 yards looks like, in their mind's eye. Then indicate with sweep of their arm/hand where the wall should be.

The key: defenders must surrender proper distance on their own. They have no rights. They have obligations: to give up 10 yards; cede correct distance; allow all around acreage- 360 degrees.

The referee has ways to help show defenders the path of righteousness: firm voice, clear gesture (pointing, waving) or being first person, 'brick' in wall- standing alongside where wall must be. When a quick kick is not indicated, the referees should be careful to face both defenders and attackers. Be sure the ball is not moved closer, as the wall gathers form, at its legal distance.

If defenders deduce that they must give the correct distance, that is good. If defenders know it, at the very first free kick of the day, that is good. Then most often, this sets a cooperative tone for the rest of the game. Perhaps a reluctantly realistic defender attitude.

That is better.

Referees do their duty. Free kicks are "free." Yellow cards stay in hiding. Justice prevails. **That is best.**

*"And on a day we meet to walk the line
And set the wall between us as we go....
Good fences make good neighbors."*

--from *Mending Wall*, by Robert Frost