

Trial information

Goalkeeper holding the ball for too long: increased limit of eight seconds and alternative restarts for offences

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Background

Law 12 allows a goalkeeper to control the ball with their hand(s) for no more than six seconds before releasing it into play. As well as wasting time, a goalkeeper holding the ball for too long is an unfair tactic because the opposing team has no possibility to regain possession, as the goalkeeper cannot be challenged when in control of the ball with the hand(s). This behaviour often also leads to frustration for spectators.

A goalkeeper controlling the ball with the hand(s) for more than six seconds is punishable by an indirect free kick (IDFK). However, this is rarely enforced by referees, primarily for the following reasons:

- Managing an IDFK in the penalty area is often extremely difficult, especially if it is to be taken from 9.15 m (10 yds) from the goal or closer, when the defenders have to be on the goal line between the goalposts
- Some feel that an IDFK gives the non-offending team too great an advantage, as the chance of scoring is high, whereas they had no possibility of scoring when the offence occurred, as they did not have possession of the ball

Goalkeepers hold the ball for more than six seconds to waste time, delay releasing the ball into play and decrease the risk of their team losing possession. Thus, losing possession when there is an offence is a strong deterrent. Consequently, the systematic enforcement of the prohibition on the goalkeeper holding the ball for too long, coupled with a restart that results in the goalkeeper (and their team) losing possession without giving the opposing team too big a benefit, could be effective in eliminating this offence or reducing its frequency.

Law 12 defines when the six-second limit starts:

A goalkeeper is considered to be in control of the ball with the hand(s) when:

- *the ball is between the hands or between the hand and any surface (e.g. ground, own body) or by touching it with any part of the hands or arms, except if the ball rebounds from the goalkeeper or the goalkeeper has made a save*
- *holding the ball in the outstretched open hand*
- *bouncing it on the ground or throwing it in the air*

In terms of goalkeepers holding onto/releasing the ball, analysis indicates that there are three typical situations:

- the goalkeeper quickly releases the ball into play to start an attack – in these instances, the goalkeeper usually holds the ball for well below six seconds
- the goalkeeper attempts to release the ball into play to start an attack but is unable to do so for a variety of legitimate reasons, e.g. attacking players are not available/in position or other players

(of either team) interfere with the goalkeeper's movement – in these instances, the goalkeeper usually holds the ball for around six to eight seconds

- the goalkeeper decides to waste time, often unnecessarily falling to the ground and staying there before slowly standing up – in these instances, the goalkeeper holds the ball for considerably more than six seconds, sometimes reaching 20 seconds or more

Consequently, to accommodate the second situation, a limit of eight seconds will be trialled, the idea being that this will not penalise those goalkeepers who genuinely want to release the ball into play in a timely manner but, through no fault of their own, are unable to do so.

Protocol

Restarts

Competitions taking part in the trial must opt to use only one of the following restarts for all matches:

- Corner kick
- Throw-in (to be taken in line with the penalty mark)

Procedure

The following procedure will apply:

- The referee will start counting the eight seconds when the goalkeeper has clear control of the ball with the hand(s)
- The referee will use a raised hand to clearly show the countdown from five seconds to zero (as per the four-second count in futsal and beach soccer)
- The corner kick/throw-in resulting from an offence will be taken from the side of the field of play closest to where the goalkeeper was positioned when penalised
- The goalkeeper will be warned for the first offence and cautioned (YC) for any subsequent offence(s)

Permission, organisation and feedback

This trial is available only to competitions that do not involve teams from the top two domestic levels or senior 'A' international teams. This protocol must be used in its entirety. No variations are allowed, unless approved in writing by The IFAB.

Competition organisers must apply to The IFAB, through their national FA or confederation (whichever is appropriate), for permission to take part in the trial, indicating which competition(s) will be involved. Other information may be requested by The IFAB.

Permission to take part will usually be given by The IFAB, as long as competition organisers complete the necessary undertakings, which will include a requirement to supply feedback and information/data (whenever requested by The IFAB) to allow the evaluation of the trial. **For further details or to apply to take part in the trial, please contact trials@theifab.com.**