

Weston AYSO Region 644



January 1, 2007

Welcome back to the AYSO Region 644 Bi-Weekly Newsletter. After a long hiatus we are back to bringing you all the exciting news from AYSO Region 644 as well as training tips, laws of the game and soccer news from around the world. Upon subscribing, you will receive your free newsletters to your email box every two weeks. Be the first to learn about online registrations, training dates, tryouts for our select teams and coaching and referee clinics. To subscribe to these free newsletters, go to our website at www.ayso644.org and click on subscribe to newsletter on the left side of the home page.

There have been a lot of exciting things going on in our region. We have introduced a new program, AYSO Select, which is designed for the advanced player ages U10 through U19. Players in the select program receive additional soccer training from Cor4 Soccer and participate in all of the AYSO Soccer Friendlies, Florida State Games Tournament and assorted tournaments during the year such as the Plantation Thanksgiving Tournament and tournaments in Disney, Jupiter and Cocoa Beach. Our main focus is the development of the player both in soccer skills as well as love of the game. For additional information please contact Byron Merino at 954-349-9786 or email him at BMerino@myacc.net.

Our VIP program, a soccer program for emotionally and physically challenged individuals, has grown to almost 80 players. Through sponsorships and internal organizational funding this program remains free of charge to all of its participants. If you are interested in the VIP program as a sponsor please contact Valeska McDonald-Munoz at 954-349-9786 or email her at vmm@teacher.com.

AYSO Region 644 is pleased to announce that beginning with the Spring 2006 season, Puma will be the official soccer uniform supplier for AYSO Region 644. Puma, U.S. based in Boston, MA., has the long-term mission of becoming the most desirable Sportlifestyle company. With great quality uniforms and sports apparel, we are not only excited at outfitting our players but also our coaches in Puma uniforms and coaches polo shirts.

Our spring league registrations once again increased by over 20% from the year before. Thank you so very much for your continued confidence in our soccer programs. Our player evaluations are set for Saturday January 20th and Saturday January 27th. All players will be required to attend one of the evaluation dates. Evaluation times will be released and posted on our website in the coming days at www.ayso644.org as well as being reported in our next edition of the bi-weekly newsletter.

I hope that you enjoy this edition of the AYSO 644 Newsletter. Everything we do here in AYSO is ever evolving. If you have any comments or suggestions, please do not hesitate to email me at Strikersoccer1@aol.com.

Sponsor Highlight

We want to take this opportunity to thank Publix Supermarkets for their continued support of our program over the years.

Publix has four locations in Weston: 1601 Promenade Blvd. in the Town Center Shopping Center, 1170 Weston Road in the Country Isles Plaza, 294 Indian Trace Boulevard in the Weston Lakes Plaza and 4567 Weston Road in the Weston Commons Shopping Center.

Publix.

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Featured Products

Publix Florida Pink Shrimp

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Whether you add them to a pasta dish, sauté them for a savory appetizer, toss them in a salad or serve them chilled with cocktail sauce, Publix Florida Pink Shrimp make quite a tasty impression. This versatile seafood is simple to incorporate into any number of meals or party foods. At Publix, our Florida Pink Shrimp must meet rigorous standards for appearance and quality. And, our seafood associates will be happy to steam your shrimp for you at no extra charge.

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Facts

Facts About Publix Florida Pink Shrimp

- For holidays or any days, you can rely on Publix Florida Wild Pink Shrimp for sea-breeze freshness and superior quality. Plump and luscious, they are handled with care and sorted to meet Publix rigorous specifications of whole, unbroken shrimp of uniform size and shape with full tail.
- Publix is the largest supporter of Wild Florida Pink Shrimp that are caught from the natural, pristine waters of Florida. Available year-round, they are 100% natural and free of antibiotics.
- Publix Florida Wild Pink Shrimp have light to dark pink shells with a pearl-like texture. The pink shell coloring, which turns a deeper shade of pink when cooked, comes from their feeding ground in the clean coral sand. The succulent meat is white with pink tones. Florida Wild Pink Shrimp taste sweet and have a firm texture and crisp bite.
- Florida Wild Pink Shrimp are a naturally renewable species. In addition to the superior flavor and environmental benefits of domestic shrimp, enjoying Publix Florida Wild Pink Shrimp also preserves the livelihood of Florida Shrimpers.
- You can always trust Publix seafood associates to be available for assistance and reliable expertise in helping you to select and properly prepare all of your shrimp and other seafood purchases.

Sources: Publix Seafood Department, Florida Department of Agriculture and Consumer Services

Keepers Corner

QUOTABLE

"Football is a team game until the goalkeeper makes a mistake and then it becomes an individual sport."---**John Keeley, Former English professional keeper**

To Catch or not to Catch?

Friday, 27 october 2006

By: Rob Parker, Assistant Women's Soccer Coach, University at Albany

How many times have you witnessed a match's outcome decided by a goalkeeper's handling error? A simple rebound off the keeper's hands from an initial shot have left many questioning the goalkeepers' lapse of judgment, as the rebounded goal decides the match.

The act of making a save is a split-second decision. The decision of how to handle the shot, either to catch or

deflect, whether right or wrong, will determine either success or failure. A goalkeeper's error in such a high pressure situation is magnified multiple times compared to that of a field player. Many inexperienced soccer observers, not soccer junkies, like you and I, will only remember the rebound off the keeper's hands, not what developed to allowed the shot to occur in the first place.

Many of our developing keepers today, at every age and experience level, still have difficulty making the correct handling decision. As a result, in many of these situations, they are punished for their mistake by conceding a goal. Through proper shot-risk assessment, habit-building training and realistic, game-like training exercises, the decision making process can be developed to improve making the right decision every time.

As coaches, we know that the safest place for a ball on the field is either in your keeper's hands or in the other team's net. We always want our keepers to collect every ball cleanly using their hands while securing the shot. Unfortunately, there are situations where this is just not possible. In these cases, technique and result are equally important to insure the successful defense of the goal. Correct deflecting technique can be utilized in these situations when a goalkeeper is unsure they can guarantee holding and landing with the ball cleanly. During these crucial situations, the ability to deflect a ball is paramount to the success or failure of the save.

As a young goalkeeper, my coach gave me this very important piece of advice, "If in doubt, deflect it out." The "if in doubt..." refers to factors affecting cleanly collecting the ball. Examples include pace of the shot, positioning, weather and ball movement to name a few. Depending on these aspects, and a keeper lacking 100% confidence they will be able to hold onto the initial shot, the necessary and effective form to keep a ball out of the back of the net might require deflecting or parrying the ball away from its intended target (the back of the net) and to safety, either by redirecting the ball wide of the net where risk is less, or over the endline. Though we prefer to concede as few corners as possible, it is more

important not to concede the goal off an unnecessary rebound of a shot the goalkeeper was unable to hold.

Choosing whether to catch or deflect a shot is important. Once the choice is made, the keeper must execute its technique properly. Should the keeper choose to catch the shot, mastering the technique of a basket, contour, side contour or high contour catch is imperative. If the keeper chooses to deflect the shot, they must, depending on the speed of the shot, use either the heel of the hand (for hard shots) or the fingertips (for soft shots to keep control of the strike.) Though I as a keeper coach prefer using the palm of the hand in deflecting situation as a safe option, either are acceptable. A mistake in the type of deflection however, can severely affect the result. Do not slap at the ball, but rather, make contact with a purpose. Remember, we do not want to concede a rebound in front of our net, but rather re-direct the ball to another area that is safer. If the ball is played low, we are looking to re-direct the shot around the post while if played high to either the corner or the roof of the goal, we are looking to re-direct it either wide around the post or over the crossbar.

While making the choice to either catch or deflect a shot, the goalkeeper must also place themselves in a position to make the save. Our hands are the leaders in making the save, but our footwork and technique will get us to the ball. Without proper footwork and diving technique, many saves to the corners are just not possible.

Footwork is an aspect of goalkeeping that I think is overlooked. As a Division I college coach, every college recruiting showcase I see shots which could be saved but are not due to the goalkeeper not utilizing proper footwork. Footwork is a technique that must be continually improved through practice. Whether it's the side step or cross over technique, a goalkeeper can always improve their footwork which will assist them in better positioning technique and finally extending their range to defend their goal consistently.

With footwork, the goalkeeper must be able to attack shots, cut the angle of the shooter and in some cases,

dive, extending their bodies across the mouth of goal that footwork would not otherwise allow them to get their body behind the ball in time. By diving at a forward angle, the goalkeeper will be afforded a better angle to deflect the shot, if that is the technique chosen. However, in many cases, I witness goalkeepers diving at a backward angle, which leaves part of the corner of the goal exposed and in many cases, any deflection effort is pushed into the goal instead of around the post. These simple errors, have resulted in tons of success for field players and disappointment for goalkeepers.

While on the training field, working to implement the development of this decision-making technique, it is important that we train both catching and deflecting situations. Progressive functional training where the goalkeeper must decide which technique to utilize is key. Though individual goalkeeper training drills can be used to ensure proper technique, game-like realistic situations will develop the entire package resulting in the successful defense of the goal. Through scrimmaging, small sided training or finishing exercises, promoting the goalkeeper to continue developing their form and decision-making skills is imperative. By requiring field players to follow their shots when the goalkeeper concedes a rebound will give the keeper an important life-lesson that is more rewarding to the keeper's development than not facing these difficult reality decisions until a game counting situation.

Remember, if in doubt, deflect it out!

Play hard, train harder!

Rob Parker is an Assistant coach with the University at Albany Women's Soccer Team and has served on the Eastern New York Olympic Development Program staff.

By Rob Parker, Assistant Women's Soccer Coach University at Albany,
rparker@uamail.albany.edu

More Keeper Stuff

Welcome to the first edition of the Keepers Newsletter. This is being written to help goalkeepers learn more about the position and become better keepers.

Today's topic is very simple. It's a bastardized version of the 5 P Rule (for those of you who don't know what that is, it's Proper Planning Prevents Poor Performance). In this case, it stands for Proper PRACTICE Prevents Poor Performance. I see so many keepers not concentrate during training sessions and maybe make a save but not worry about doing it right every time. To use another cliché, remember that practice does not make perfect but rather, practice makes permanent. Keepers who make lazy kick saves in training will make that same lame attempt in a game because that is what you are conditioning yourself to do. Any keepers who have trained with me know that I start every training session the same way with an emphasis on the fundamentals. Some have commented how boring this is but then they should look at it from my perspective: I have seen those same drills every training session I have run for 17 years plus the time I actually spent as a keeper. The only reason I don't change is that it WORKS! Constant repetition of correct fundamentals is the way to pursue perfection.

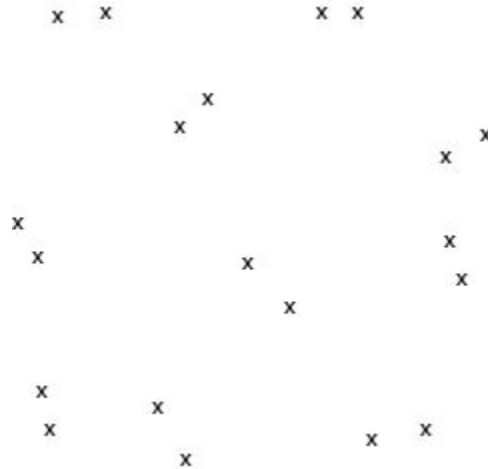
A couple of examples of what I am referring to are the basic warm-up. If while having a catch, the keeper doesn't concentrate on catching the ball properly, getting both hands on the ball at the same time, getting their body behind the ball, watching the ball into their hands and finally pulling the ball in every time then they will not do these very basic things when they are put under pressure. Another example of developing good (or bad) habits is the way keepers prepare to dive. I watch so many keepers do drills where they are sitting down and the coach/trainer/idiot throws the ball over the keepers head and the keeper rolls on her back and catches it and then throws it back. What exactly is accomplished by this drill besides encouraging the keeper to dive backwards onto her back (a definite no-no) Why not encourage the keeper to do things the correct way and serve the ball to the side and force the keeper to catch the ball while coming forward to meet the ball. Is there a big difference in these two drills? It's easy to say no until you realize one is encouraging bad technique and the other is working on the correct technique.

As a keeper, it sometimes it is important to realize that many of the drills you are involved in with the rest of the team are not designed for you. Because of this, many keepers don't take them too seriously since they aren't expected/able to save a large percentage of the shots. The common solution that I see keepers choose is to make a halfhearted effort for balls without regard for the tremendous damage they are doing to themselves (as well as to the team but that is an entirely different subject). This is when it's important to realize that you are developing habits all the time, why not make them good habits?

So the moral of today's story is Proper Practice Prevents Poor Performance. Next weeks subject will be on how to create a good training session when you are the only keeper available (unless I decide to write about something totally different or someone suggests a different topic)

Soccer Drills

The first thing to do is start with a warm up for this drill. Set a number of gates up throughout half of the field like below. Each gate should be 2 yards wide (a gate is imply two cones set up as things to go through such as a goal)



x's are cones

Have half the players wear white and the other half blue. Have a white and a blue player match up with each other with one ball per pair. This is simply a 1v1 game where the players try to score points by dribbling through as many gates as they can. The white player starts with the ball and tries to score as often as possible in the first one minute half. If the blue player wins the ball, then she tries to score goals. The only restriction is that the players can NOT dribble through the same goal two times in a row. After a one minute half, they rest (and stretch) for a minute, then play the second half with the blue player starting with the ball. With a team of 16 players, there will be 8 games of 1v1 going on at the same time. This will encourage the players to dribble with their heads up (or run into each other). At the end of the second half, you might let the winner rest for a minute while the loser does some type of "punishment" such as burpees. The key is to turn this into a very competitive match. The next game should feature a white winner matching up with a blue winner and also have the losers match up with each other. You can do this three times and get a very strenuous work out going which will continue into the next drill.

The next progression of this series (which will begin to work with spacing and switching fields) is set up the exact same way with the gates remaining the same. It's essentially the same game with the major change being that there is only one ball for the whole team. Now it's all of the whites against all of the blues. In order to score a goal, the ball must be passed through a gate and received by a teammate. Those are the only rules that need to be explained. Start them off playing a 6 minute game with a 1 minute break at "halftime". This break is very important because typically, the first 3 minutes of this drill is dreadful. It has been my experience that players will try to dribble to a gate and then pass the ball through to a teammate who inevitably is marked up. During this one minute break, explain to the players that it actually takes 3 players to score a goal and not just the two they are trying to use (the player with the ball and the target through the gate). The three players are the player with the ball, and then two other player who are working together to find an open gate. Once they find an open gate, the player with the ball can drive (or chip) the ball to one of these open players who then play it through the gate to the other one). Once they start to think in terms of needing three players to score a goal and that two of them must find an open (or unmarked) gate, then they will start to experience success in this game.

As the players get accustomed to this game, they will get more comfortable with playing with their heads up and looking to players who have proper support and spacing. This drill is a great way to prepare for the next drill that will continue to work on getting better spacing and the switching of fields in the attack.

Soccer Positions/Terminology

Lets start from the back and work forward as is done when talking about a formation (when you hear 4-4-2 that means 1 goalkeeper which is implied, 4 backs, 4 midfielders and 2 forwards). The first position is the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper (also referred to as a keeper or goalie. The goalkeeper's primary responsibility is to keep the ball out of the goal from a defensive standpoint.

Next are the fullbacks (also known as backs or defenders). They have primarily defensive responsibilities. To break these players positions down a bit more specifically, there are marking backs (whose primary responsibility is to mark or guard a specific player to prevent them from scoring or creating scoring opportunities). There are also sweepers (whose primary responsibility is to provide support to the other defenders. Usually the sweeper will play behind the other backs and will help them whenever her help is needed). In front of a sweeper is a stopper who will either mark the center forward (if playing against three forwards) or the first center midfielder down field. When a team uses two marking backs, a sweeper and a stopper it's called a diamond defense because the two marking backs are frequently even with each other with the stopper in front of them and the sweeper behind them (making the shape of a diamond). Another version is to play a zone in back at which point you would have two outside backs and either one or two center backs. Instead of making the shape of a diamond, they tend to play a bit more in a straight line since they are more responsible for a particular area of the field rather than for a particular player. It should be understood that while I am writing from a defensive standpoint, these players can and should go forward to attack.

Next we have the midfielders (also known as halfbacks, mids and links). These players are responsible for both attacking and defending and basically keep the forwards and backs connected (hence the term link). There are frequently two outside midfielders who are responsible for creating space offensively and taking away space defensively. Frequently, these players do more running and have a higher work rate than any other position.

Next we have the forwards (also knows as strikers and target players). People consider their primary role to be to set up and score goals. The term striker is used because these players are expected to strike the ball to score goals. The reason for the term target player is that frequently these players are expected to establish a presence up front so that the backs and midfielders can play it up to them to get the ball into the attack. Usually, I will use the term target player for a big strong forward who will be able to receive the ball and either turn and strike the ball toward goal or she will be able to hold the ball to allow the other players to run off this target player. If a player is more geared toward making runs to receive the ball, I tend to use the term forward. If there are three frontrunners (yes, that is yet another term for this position), then frequently you will have a center midfielder and two wingers. The center forward frequently will be a target player while the wingers will stay much wider and try to create space to either dribble into, pass into or serve the ball from.

Please understand that these terms are very simplified descriptions of the positions responsibilities. Forwards, defend and backs attack. My simple purpose of writing this topic is to make it easier for people to understand what a coach means when he uses these different position names.

Training Sessions

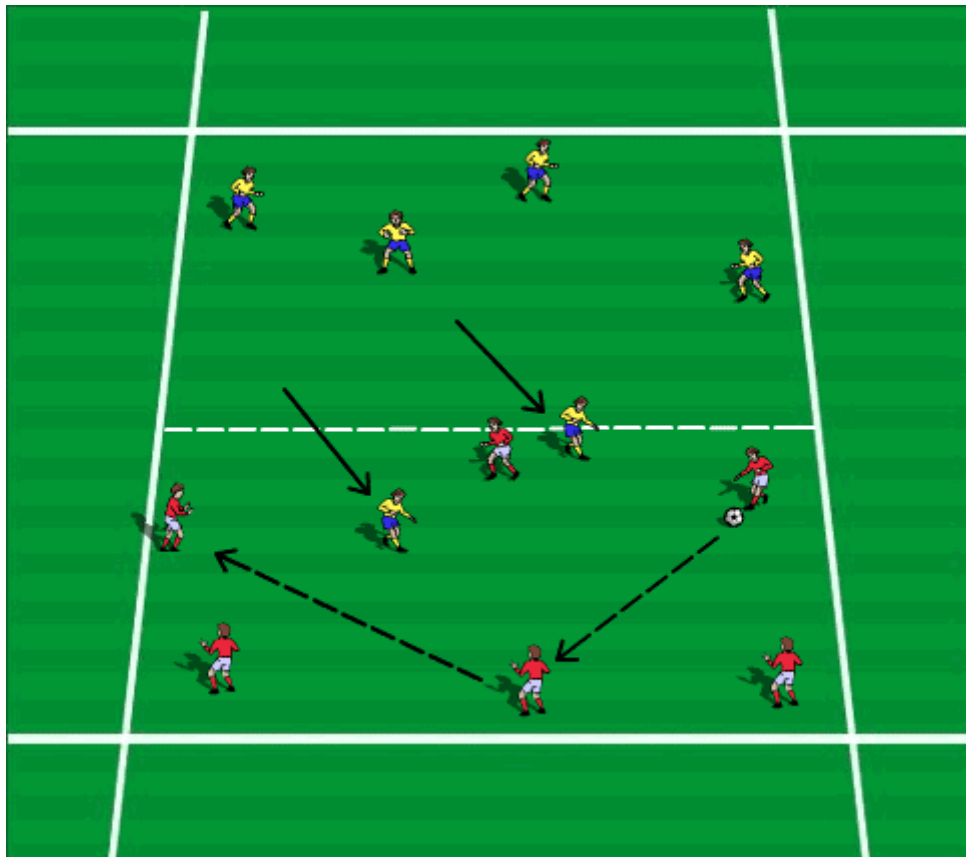
Session - Passing and Moving Small-Sided Game

This small-sided game is contributed by subscriber Alistair Henderson who coaches at the Wilmette Wings Soccer Club in Illinois. Henderson likes to use this drill often as the players are constantly receiving a ball in open space and passing and moving. It is a busy, quick drill that requires good technical skill. Henderson believes that one of the most important skills he can pass on to his team is the ability to receive the ball with a good first touch under pressure, so he works on that a lot.

Passing and Moving Small-Sided Game

Organize two teams, one in each half of the field. The field size depends on the age and numbers of players.

The dark team starts with the ball and pass to keep possession. Two of the white team enter their half of the field and attempt to win the ball. Once they win it, they pass it back to their half of the field and rejoin their four teammates. Two dark players then enter that half of the field and attempt to win possession.



Coaching Points

- Four passes equal a goal

Referee Section- Offsides

LAW 11 - Offside

[Text](#) | [Thumbnail](#) | [Commentary](#) | [FAQ](#)

Thumbnail

The offside rule generally provides that a pass cannot legally be made to an off-ball attacker who is ahead of the ball and in the attacking half unless there are at least two defenders (one of whom may be the goalkeeper) between him and the goal when the ball is passed to him by a teammate.

Specifically, under the offside rule, an off-ball attacker who is in his opponent's half of the field must stay even with or behind the ball or, if he goes ahead of the ball, he must stay even with or behind the second-to-last-defender (2LD) until the ball is played or touched by one of his teammates. Normally, the 2LD is the last field player. However, the 2LD term is used instead of "last field player" to provide for situations where the keeper comes out of the box and the last two defenders may be field players, or the keeper may become the 2LD.

If the off-ball attacker is ahead of the ball and closer to the opponent's goal than the 2LD, then he will be called for an offside infraction IF the referee decides that he interfered with play, or interfered with an opponent, or gained an advantage from being in an offside position. It is not necessary that the player in an offside position (OSP) actually participate in play to be called for offside (technically, if an attacker is lying unconscious in front of the goal, and the keeper cannot get to the ball because of him, he will be called for an offside infraction even though he never participated in play at all). However, an infraction will not normally be called if a player in an OSP is passively standing on one side of the field while a teammate dribbles the ball up the opposite side and scores.

If an offside infraction is called, the opponent is awarded an IFK.

Commentary

The basics of the offside rule are pretty easy. The attacker has to be in an offside position (OSP) **and** interfere with play, or an opponent, or gain an advantage from being in that position. While some occasional differences in opinion do occur from referee to referee on what "interfering" means, and on what "gaining an advantage" means, this is a normal by-product of making split-second decisions, and coaches should expect that variations will occur. Some of the common times when these difference arise will be discussed later.

A. What is an offside position?

Five things must occur before an attacker can be in an OSP:

1. He must be across the halfway line, in his opponents' half of the field (i.e., in the half of the field with the goal which his team is attacking).
 - o He cannot be in an OSP in his own defending half, even if ahead of all of the opponent's defenders. So, if the opponent's defenders decide to push up over the midline, an attacker can station himself behind them as long as he stays in his own defending half.
2. He is closer to his opponents' goal line than the second-last defender (**note:** if he is even with the second-last defender, he is **onside**).
 - o He is onside as long as there are two or more defenders between him and the goal (i.e., even with him or ahead of him).
3. He is ahead of the ball.
 - o The ball is always considered to be onside, so an attacker can play a ball laterally (called a "square pass") or hook it back to another incoming attacker who is even with the ball when it is passed, even if they both are ahead of all the defenders - even the keeper. This occurs often in games, especially at the older age groups when keepers become more daring.
4. He is **not** receiving the ball directly from a goal kick, a corner kick or a throw-in.
 - o An attacker can be ahead of everyone on the field on a throw-in, a goal kick or a corner kick, and legally receive the ball and score.
5. His team has possession of the ball, so that the ball is being played or touched by one of his teammates.
 - o Normally, you cannot be called for offside if the ball is in the possession of, and being played by, the opposing team. However, where the ball simply ricochets off the keeper or the 2LD, they are not considered to have played the ball, so an attacker can be called for offside if he receives the ball from such a ricochet.

B. When is OSP determined?

Offside position is determined at the moment that the ball was last played by one of the other attackers. It is **not** determined at the time that the ball is received. It often happens in a game that a speedy attacker will be well ahead of the 2LD by the time that the ball comes down. However, as long as he was even with the 2LD or behind him (i.e., closer to his own goal than the 2LD), then he was not in an OSP and he should not be called for an offside infraction.

Even if a player is standing in an OSP, this does not automatically mean that offside will be called. An offside infraction occurs only if the attacking team gained an advantage from the fact that he was in an OSP, or where the OSP player interfered with play or an opponent.

C. Once the player is in an OSP, what makes this an infraction?

The player should only be called for an offside infraction if he interferes with play, or interferes with an opponent, or gains an advantage for his team by being in that position.

- a. What is "interfering with play"?

"Interfering with play" typically means playing or attempting to play the ball. The most common offside infraction is the situation where the ball is served to the off-ball attacker who is in an OSP, and this player immediately collects the ball and goes towards goal. To avoid delay, however, the foul is usually called as soon as the player in an OSP makes a step towards the ball, rather than waiting for him to play it. Some referees don't even wait for the step, and call the foul immediately (even though the player technically may still be just in an OSP). While this may not be in full accord with the Laws, the referee has such broad authority to determine offside that there is no point in arguing. It is much smarter and more productive to instruct the players to watch how the referee interprets the rule, and to be sure to always stay onside if you get a strict constructionist.

b. What is "interfering with an opponent"?

"Interfering with an opponent" typically means getting in the way of an opponent, or otherwise distracting him so that he is less able to play the ball. A common example would be where an attacker in an OSP steps in the way of a defender, and interferes with the defender's path towards the on-ball attacker. Another common example would be where an attacker in an OSP near the far post shouts loudly for the ball, distracting the keeper.

c. What is "gaining an advantage"?

This is the term which allows the referee to call an offside infraction when, for instance, an unconscious attacker in the box still gains an advantage for his team by getting in the way of the keeper. Arguably, he is also interfering with an opponent. However, this broader language makes it clear that he doesn't actually have to be moving, or involved in the play, to be called for an offside infraction.

D. How can I tell that an offside infraction has been called?

Offside is signaled by the Assistant Referee (AR), if ARs are being used, by snapping the flag so that it is held straight up. When the Center Referee (CR) looks over, the AR then shows where the ball needs to be placed (pointing the flag high means far side; straight out means middle of field; low means near side).

E. What is the penalty for offside?

The Laws specify an indirect free kick IFK, to be taken from the place where the player in an OSP was standing at the time when the ball was last touched by another attacker (assuming that he immediately interfered with play or an opponent). However, because it can take a few seconds for the AR to decide that an offside infraction has occurred, and another few seconds for the CR to notice the offside flag, the OSP player often will have moved a considerable distance by the time that the whistle is blown. As a result, the IFK may be ordered to be taken some distance away from the spot where he ended up when the whistle was blown.

Questions on Law 11

11.01 Can the offside rule be used as a tactical weapon?

Absolutely. By taking advantage of Law 11, defenders can pull the off-ball attackers up and away from their own goal, since the attackers have to stay even with the defenders to avoid being called for an offside offense. However, by pushing up, the defenders run the risk that a speedy attacker will be able to outrun them if a ball is played into the spaces behind the defenders for the off-ball attacker to run onto. Coaches constantly strive to strike a balance between pushing up too far, and not pushing up far enough, and the offside rule is an important part of their decision-making process.

11.02 I have heard of an offside trap. What is this tactic?

The offside trap is a tactic in which the defenders wait until the last possible moment, then take a large step upfield in order to throw their opponents into an OSP. It must be carefully timed, so that the step forward is made before the ball is played. It also relies heavily upon having an alert AR who will be looking at the 2LD, and not looking upfield, when the ball is played. Especially at the younger age levels where less-experienced ARs are likely to be found, this tactic is unlikely to work well. In addition, younger players rarely have the observation skills to be able to time the move properly.

11.03 Can you suggest some tactical considerations for an attacking team to use in coping with an offside trap by the defenders?

The key to beating an offside trap is for attackers to either patiently wait for the precise moment the ball is kicked before they begin their run into the area behind the defenders, or to time their runs carefully so they don't pass the defenders until immediately after the ball is kicked. Diagonal runs instead of straight, upfield runs work much better for purposes of flexibly adjusting to the uncertain timing of the kick, since the angle of the run can be easily altered to delay getting past the 2LD. There is also a tactic which upper-level teams employ which actually turns the offside trap against overly-smug defenders. These teams have a decoy attacker who deliberately steps offside or runs into an offside position before the ball is played. In the meantime, the ball is actually played to another attacker who is making a run down the opposite side of the field. Seeing the attacker in an offside position, defenders often will hesitate (expecting an offside flag). Instead, the decoy goes passive while the opposing attacker takes the ball in. Obviously for this to work, the ploy must be timed perfectly - and the attackers must have referees (and especially an AR) who will not raise an offside flag unless the decoy actually appears to be trying to get involved in the play, since the ploy won't work if the AR tends to flag anyone who steps into an offside position.

11.04 The AR signaled offside, so our players stopped playing and the other team scored. The CR let the goal stand, which seems unfair. Can he do this?

It is **very** important to train your players to "Play the whistle and not the flag" - ie., ignore the offside flag and keep playing until the CR agrees and accepts the call. Inexperienced ARs may raise flags for someone who is just in an OSP (just being in an OSP is often called "passive offside", meaning that the attacker did not interfere with play or gain advantage from his position - for example, he was on the other side of the field when another attacker dribbled the ball in and scored, so he never participated in the play). As a result, the CR often will overrule such calls. Your players will gain a huge advantage if they know to keep playing until the whistle blows. It is better to assume that the flag was raised in error, and keep playing, than to assume that CR will accept the call. This is true at all ages, but especially true at younger age levels where the ARs are likely to be less experienced and more likely to be overruled.

11.05 Our club starts using the offside rule at U9 and above. This rule seems way too complicated for kids who are just 8 years old. What should I tell them to make it simple?

SOS (simple offside) requires that you be able to:

1. Identify the ball. If you're behind it, you can't be offside.
2. Know one half of the field from another. If you're in your own half, you can't be offside, and
3. Be able to count to two. If you can count two defenders between you and the goal, you can't be offside.

11.06 Is there anything else which can help get offside across with younger players?

It generally helps young players to go out on the field and physically show them when an attacker is offside, by moving an attacker around a defender so that he is ahead of him, behind him or even with him. You also will want to explain to your defenders that they don't want to let any attackers get behind them if they push up over the midline, because the attackers don't have to worry about offside in their half where their goalie is. Then, show them that once the other team steps over the "magic boundary" (the midline) into their half, your defenders have the power to decide how close to let the opponent get to their goal by pushing up to the boundary line. Younger children get the idea more quickly about where they should be for attacks than on where they should be for defense, as it worries them to leave an attacker in an OSP. Relax. Almost all of them will know enough to apply the rule by U10 or U11.

Realize that younger players usually do not have the mental ability to extrapolate, or to convert mirror images. So, if you show them something which happens on one side of the field, they will not make the mental leap to correlate this to the same thing happening on the other side. In fact, it is not uncommon that the players on one side will tune the coach out if she is showing something on the other side of the field, as they will assume that this explanation is just for the people on the other side of the field.

11.07 The AR in our last U10 game kept on missing offside calls, and we lost by a big margin. This really made all of us angry, and it didn't get any better when we yelled at this stupid AR. Why don't the clubs get better referees?

New referees typically start as ARs, and that they often will miss offside calls while they are learning. This cannot be helped, as they have to work in game situations to become competent, and they usually get assigned to the recreational games at the younger levels (U12 and below) to learn. It takes most beginning referees about 20-30 games to get proficient at calling offside. While this can be very frustrating, it does no good to yell at these new refs. Not only is this against club rules, but you are increasing the chance that they will quit just when they had started to get more proficient, which means that your team likely will get somebody even worse and less experienced the next time. Besides, remember that teams switch places at the half. This rule was designed so that, if an AR was horrid, both teams got an equal shot at having bad calls. By yelling, you actually may have caused the CR to hang back a bit when your opponent got this new AR in the second half, so that your yelling actually may have insured that your opponent didn't get the same bad calls which your team did!

11.08 Okay, if yelling doesn't work, what should our team do if we get an inexperienced AR who always makes bogus offside calls by calling offside when our guys were in an OSP or even onside?

If the AR "over-calls" offside, so that players who are just in an OSP still get called for the infraction, your attackers will need to play back a bit more to insure that they don't get caught in an OSP. It can be helpful to ask them to just put a hand out to keep track of where their defender is. More experienced attackers actually can watch their man, and just listen for the ball (this is also what experienced ARs do), but it takes a bit of time to develop this knack. If you have a real speedster on the wings who usually gets the jump on his defender, you also may want to have him count to 1 or 2 before taking off, to give the AR time to see that he was onside. New ARs will watch the play, then turn their heads to recheck on players who are in an OSP, and often will call offside if the attacker is ahead of the defender at the time that they turn back to check. If the players are right next to the AR, this really makes for a tough angle for the AR to watch the game and these two players, so another adjustment is to put your attacker farther over into the middle of the field, which may make the job easier for the new AR.

11.09 What if we get a poor AR who doesn't call offside, even when the opponent is 10 feet or more ahead of our last defender - or a CR who has no ARs and is working the game alone?

The answer is so obvious that it is amazing how many folks refuse to see it - and then blame the referees for their coach's failure to adjust to this common situation. When you have a poor AR, or no AR, it is lunacy to try to use offside as a defensive weapon. You simply have to mark every attacker, even if this means letting them within inches of your own goal. This is far more effective than complaining - since you will have the benefit of this same situation on your own end in the second half and your team may want to take full advantage of the sloppy calls (or, if you are more sporting, at least push the envelope a bit). Sometimes, of course, you will not get this poor AR until the second half, so a smart coach will watch how both ARs are calling the match, and make any needed adjustments at half-time.

11.10 In our last game, we had a player who was standing in an offside position at the far post. Another one of our players shot the ball; it bounced off of one of the defenders; and this player shot the ball into the net. The goal was disallowed. Was this the right call?

It sure was. Your player was in an OSP and gained an advantage, right? After all, he scored a goal. The ball is considered to be last played by one of his teammates, because the defender is not considered to have played the ball when it merely ricocheted off of him to your player.

11.11 What happens if the ball ricochets off an attacker in an offside position into the net? Is he considered to have played the ball?

It is not necessary to be playing the ball to be called for an offside infraction. Remember, he could be lying unconscious and still get called for the infraction if his team gained an advantage from his position. Since your team gained an advantage, and the ball was last played by one of your teammates, and your attacker was in an OSP, your team should be called for offside.

11.12 We had a situation recently where an opponent was in an OSP, realized this after the ball was played, and got back onside by the time that the ball reached him. The AR raised his flag, but our team got the ball back immediately and cleared it. The CR waved down the flag. Was this the correct call?

The player technically committed an offside infraction (he was in an OSP, and arguably interfered with play when he managed to play the ball briefly). However, the CR always has the option to "play the advantage", which means that the CR can decide to ignore a foul if a whistle would just disrupt the game and awarding a free kick would give no advantage (or would actually be a disadvantage) to the team which otherwise would get the call. In other words, he can use common-sense in applying the rules. In this situation, many CRs would wave down the flag - but many others would blow the whistle. This is a recognized gray area of the Rules, so don't be surprised if you get different calls from both ARs and CRs in an identical situation. In fact, some experienced ARs will not raise the flag if no real advantage was gained from the offside infraction, in order to avoid gripes when the flag should obviously be waved off.

11.13 In a recent game, an opponent was in an OSP, but his teammate kicked the ball too hard, and our keeper caught it easily. The player in the offside position did move towards the ball, but never really got near it. No flag went up, and some people on our side grumbled that we would have had better field position if the ball had come back upfield, rather than requiring our keeper to punt it. Was the AR right not to raise the flag?

This is another recognized gray area. Some referees will argue that an attacker cannot have interfered with play (and surely got no advantage) when he was miles away from the ball when it was controlled by a defender. These referees will not make the call if a CR or raise the flag if an AR, preferring to let play continue uninterrupted unless a clear advantage materialized. Other referees will argue just as strongly that situations come up where the keeper feels rushed by the incoming attacker (even if he really did have ample time), and it is wrong to reward the attacker in an OSP if the harried keeper misclears the ball. These referees will always call offside in this situation, just to be on the safe side (and also to penalize the attacking player to teach him to be more observant of his positioning). Because the laws give broad discretion to the referee, the coach will simply have to adjust to the style of different referees, and expect differing calls in these types of situations.

11.14 I'm confused. In one game recently, there was a player who was in an OSP at the far post near the goal area, and another teammate shot the ball, which our keeper saved. There was no offside call. In this identical situation in a different game, offside was called

when the player moved towards the ball, even though the keeper saved it. Which call is correct?

Strange as it may seem, both calls may have been correct! This is true because the referees have to make a split-second decision about whether attacking team gained an advantage by the acts of the attacker in an OSP. The laws give the referees wide latitude to make this decision, so different referees may have different opinions (even in the same fact setting) about whether an advantage was gained in this situation. For example, if the player in an OSP did something (called for the ball, perhaps) which distracted the keeper, this would be enough for many referees. Others look for a concrete advantage to the attacking team, and will want for the player to actually play the ball or get in the way of an opponent, before they will make the call. While this can be frustrating at first, more experienced coaches learn to "read the referee" and will adjust their game to the calls being made. In general, the safest course is to train your players (and especially your keeper) to assume that all attackers are onside until they hear the whistle.

11.15 Once a player is in an OSP, how does he clear this status and get to be considered onside again?

This is a very tricky area of the rule, and an area where you will get lots of variation among referees. As you will recall, the off-ball attacker must be in an OSP at the moment that the ball is played by a teammate, and commits an offside infraction if he interferes with play, etc. Technically, if the player in an OSP was deemed passive at the instant that the ball was played to his teammate, he should no longer be considered to be in an offside position once his own movement, or that of other players or the ball, has put him back onside. As a practical matter, however, most referees will flag offside if the offside player quickly returns to play without a few seconds of obvious passivity (since the player in an OSP was ahead of everyone else, he usually will have gotten enough of a headstart that he will be considered to have gained an advantage by being in an OSP if he rejoins play before enough time has elapsed for that advantage to have been cancelled out). Expect differences between referees on when the offside status will be treated as having been cleared. The safest course is to tell your players that, if they realize that they are in an OSP, they should start heading back towards an onside position (or, if they will get in the way of play, start towards the touch line). This will signal to the AR that they have taken themselves out of play, so the AR is more likely to "reactivate" them as soon as they get back onside (since the AR usually will stop paying close attention to them once they have clearly taken themselves out of the play).

11.16 Is it ever possible for an on-ball attacker to get in a position where he could be called for offside?

No. An on-ball attacker technically could get into OSP (for example, after taking the ball to the endline and cutting back sharply, he could be closer to the endline than both the ball and all of his opponents). However, he cannot be called for offside, because the rule requires that he is OSP when the ball is played to him by a teammate. So, if he was onside when he got the ball, he should be safe from any offside call as long as he retains possession. Of course, once he passes the ball to someone else (or the ball is stolen by a defender), he becomes just another off-ball attacker.

11.17 We have a very speedy forward, who likes to station himself right at the midline and then run onto long balls served over the top. Recently, he was standing with one foot on the line and the other in our defending half, but was bent over in a typical runners stance (so part of his body was over the line). When he took off, the AR immediately raised the offside flag - and stated that he was offsides because a part of his toe and part of his body were in the attacking half. He has never gotten any flag for this before. Was this the right call?

The lines are considered to be a part of the area which they enclose, but the midfield line encloses both halves. Therefore, a person who is standing right on the line technically could be considered to be in his own half - or in the opposing half. As a result, you are going to find occasional differences between referees on these types of calls. While the majority probably will not call an offside infraction where a player has both feet on or behind the line (after all, it is still about 50-60 yards to the goal, so an inch or so likely won't matter), you will find some who will consider a player to be "in the attacking half" if any part of his body touches or encroaches over the midline. When this happens, you simply will have to tell your player to back up about 5-6 inches - as arguing will not get you anywhere.

11.18 In a recent game, one of the opposing team's attackers was clearly offside, but was trying to get back onside when the ball was played in his direction. By the time that the ball reached him, several defenders were between him and the goal. The AR still called offside, even though it didn't look like our player had gained any advantage from being offside. Besides, it sure looked like the other defenders had made our attacker onside again when they got nearer to the goal than our attacker was. Why can't our club get better ARs?

Actually, it sounds like you have some pretty good ones already. This was clearly the correct call (and one often missed by beginners, so this AR likely had some solid experience). This player was clearly in an OSP, right? At the time that the ball was played to him by a teammate, he was ahead of the ball and apparently ahead of all of the defenders except the keeper. Furthermore, he then participated in play by trying to play the ball, right? When he did this, he is considered to have interfered with play, so it was entirely proper to make an offside call in this case. Remember that OSP is judged when the ball is played - not when it is received - so it does not make any difference that the defenders were between him and the goal when he received the ball. He was still OSP when it was played, and he then interfered with play, so he did commit the offside infraction and properly was called for that infraction. Of course, there still may be times when an experienced referee will choose to ignore the infraction because it was considered trivial or because the call would penalize the wrong team (for example, the ball is mis-kicked and goes directly to a defender, who quickly clears it upfield for a breakaway, so it would be a penalty to the defenders to bring the ball back). However, in most cases, experienced referees will make the same call which was made here.

11.19 I took a look at the Offside law at the FIFA website, and it says that an indirect free kick is awarded to the opposing team for an offside infraction, which is to be taken from the place where the infringement occurred. However, I am hopelessly confused. In our club, the ball usually is placed even with the AR, even if the offside attacker was standing several yards past the last defender. Sometimes, with really lazy attackers (or tired ones, late in the game), they can be considerably behind the last defender, so there are times when the placement of the ball seems like it could make a difference. So, can you tell me what the "official" rule is on where the ball should be placed?

It sounds like the referees in your club follows the standard rule-of-thumb on placement of the ball. In most cases, putting the ball even with the last defender (which is where the AR usually is stationed) is a workable guideline to give to newer referees - since most attackers normally are trying to stay onside and are fairly close to the last defender. However, as you point out, there are times when there is considerable distance between the OSP attacker and the last defender. Technically, since OSP (and offside) is judged "at the moment the ball is played", the infraction occurs at the place where the OSP player was standing when the ball was last touched by his teammate. Thus, in your example, the ball probably should have been brought back to where the tired attacker was standing. However, as a practical matter, the placement of the ball is rarely something which any team will choose to gripe about as long as their side is getting the ball back and getting the IFK. Besides, if the worst mistake made by the CR or AR on your game is to miss the placement of an IFK by a few yards, your team has been pretty lucky to get such good officials.

11.20 Okay, if an attacker is OSP just across the midline, and then comes back into the defending half to get the ball, does this mean that the IFK should be awarded from an point in the attacking half where he was standing OSP when the ball was played?

Yes. This would be the correct placement of the ball. However, don't be surprised to see the ball placed where the AR is standing at the time the flag is raised (which likely will be somewhere right around the midline). Also, since the ball is still in the defending half, the CR is likely to be looking closely on whether to simply let play continue (considering the offense to have been trifling), so there is a higher chance of the offside infraction being ignored than would be the case if the attackers were closer to their opponent's goal.

11.21 I would like to know more about the offside law than is contained in this summary and FAQ, and look at some diagrams to be sure that I fully understand the rules. What resources do you suggest?

The FIFA website at <http://www.fifa.com> includes a full copy of the laws (as well as diagrams). Copies of the laws also may be ordered from your national federation. In the USA, the USSF (United States Soccer Federation) is located at 1801-11 S. Prairie Ave., Chicago, Ill. 60616. Phone: 312- 808-1300. There are several companies which produce summaries of the Laws which may be suitable to give to parents and players. One inexpensive pamphlet which many of the members have found helpful is "The Rules of Soccer: Simplified" by [Soccer Learning Systems](#). However, no exhaustive search has been made of these resources (the writers of this FAQ have all been referees for several years), and there may be other publications equally as good and inexpensive.

News From Around The Soccer World

USA: Bradley goes with names he knows

12/20/2006 12:49:00 AM

By Ridge Mahoney
Senior Editor

Drawbacks there are to the selection of **Bob Bradley** as interim head coach of the USA national team, but unfamiliarity with the domestic player pool isn't one of them.

Of the 29 players he's named for a training camp that starts Jan. 3, only **Heath Pearce** of Danish club Norjsaelland doesn't play in MLS. **Clint Dempsey** and one or two others might be bound overseas early in the New Year, of course, but there's no FIFA international window by which to summon European-based players anyway, and so the first two games of the year %96 against Denmark Jan. 20 and rival Mexico Feb. 7 %96 will be contested by domestic players, more or less.

Still, 10 of the players named by Bradley have never been capped, and only **Sacha Kljestan** %96 whom Bradley coached at Chivas USA last season before taking up with U.S. Soccer %96 is age-eligible to play on the Olympic/under-23 team that Bradley is also in charge of.

"That's the exciting part of trying, in this next cycle, to find the right moments for young guys to play in more important international games and get experience, and find out which ones really have it," says Bradley. "In these camps these guys get to know each other and have a chance to compete together."

The only field players 29 or older %96 **Jimmy Conrad** and **Pablo Mastroeni** %96 played in the 2006 World Cup. (The other players from the 2006 squad are **Landon Donovan**, **Clint Dempsey** and **Chris Albright**.) Eight players have a maximum of two years' experience in MLS, and three %96 **Dasan Robinson**, Kljestan, and Rookie of the Year **Jonathan Bornstein** %96 are fresh off their first pro seasons.

%93I know our players, I know our league,%94 says Bradley, whose tour of duty included Chicago, the MetroStars and Chivas USA as well as being Bruce Arena's assistant at Virginia, D.C. United, and the national team program. %93I've coached a lot of these guys, I've coached against a lot of these guys. The familiarity that I have with all of that are things that become important.%94

Bradley has drawn heavily from the D.C. United and New England rosters, picking 11 players from teams that normally play variations of a 3-5-2 system. Under Arena, the national team primarily played with four in the back. Bradley will have plenty of options while he tinkers with formations and personnel in training camp and the first two games of 2007.

And while he's going to look at a lot of players in the next few months, including a few who've been out of the loop, there's a clear directive to anyone summoned.

%93There are a lot of people in this country who have given their heart and soul to the game, and honestly, to get to the other side for a second, I probably don't have that much time for the ones who aren't willing to do that, or who pretend that they do," he said. That's the only way to be successful in anything.%94

Here's a short rundown on the players called at each position:

Goalkeeper: **Joe Cannon** and **Matt Reis** have three caps between them, **Brad Guzan** has one, and **Troy Perkins** has none. Yes, the scramble for spots behind likely long-term No. 1 **Tim Howard** is wide-open, but Cannon and Reis are both 31, and hardly fit the bill if grooming young talent is the goal. Yet both are solid keepers well steeped in the pro game.

Defenders: Conrad is the only central defender with significant experience (17 caps). The other central choices are MLS Defender of the Year **Robby Roswell** and the 2005 Rookie of the Year **Michael Parkhurst**, both of whom play in three

man back lines for their MLS teams, and **Eddie Robinson**, who anchors the middle of Houston's 4-4-2 formation. Boswell's club teammate **Bryan Namoff** is also in the squad. **Dasan Robinson**, Bornstein, and Pearce are the choices at left back %96 if a four-man defensive line is used %96 and on the other side, Albright has been the best right back in MLS the past few seasons.

Midfielders: Bornstein played left mid primarily in the second half of the season, **Joshua Gros** is left-sided but played a lot on the right for D.C. last year, and lefty **Justin Mapp** found some success tucking inside and pulling the strings. **Brian Mullan** is a rightie all the way, and the central slots are crowded: **Kyle Beckerman**, **Brian Carroll**, **Ricardo Clark** and **Kljestan** are the options for roles in the middle, Dempsey and **Pat Noonan** can play wide or float up top.

Forwards: **Kenny Cooper** gets his first shot at taking the big-forward role so ably filled by the retired **Brian McBride**. In his first season with FC Dallas, he proved there's touch and mobility to go along with bulk. **Nate Jaqua**, another large lad, will vie for his second cap, as will **Alecko Eskandarian**. **Taylor Twellman**, scorer of five goals in his 19 appearances, starts a new cycle of World Cup aspirations at age 26. The nimble, crafty **Chris Rolfe** (four caps) has been elusive the few times he's been on the field. Donovan will be entering camp shortly after his wedding to actress **Bianca Kajlich**.

BRADLEY'S 29 (CAPS)

84 Landon Donovan

50 Pablo Mastroeni

23 Clint Dempsey

19 Chris Albright, Taylor Twellman

17 Jimmy Conrad

13 Pat Noonan

5 Heath Pearce

4 Brian Carroll, Chris Rolfe

2 Joe Cannon, Brian Mullan

1 Bobby Boswell, Ricardo Clark, Alecko Eskandarian, Brad Guzan, Nate Jaqua, Justin Mapp, Matt Reis

0 Kyle Beckerman, Jonathan Bornstein, Kenny Cooper, Joshua Gros, Sacha Kljestan, Bryan Namoff, Michael Parkhurst, Troy Perkins, Dasan Robinson, Eddie Robinson

MLS Cup 2006 — The Great Dynamo

12/12/2006 2:24:00 PM

By Ridge Mahoney in Frisco, Texas

The team whose ownership group abandoned San Jose ended its first season in Houston with an improbable championship.

THE OMENS WERE THERE for all to see, gleaming beacons of the same hue worn by the players, fans and even executives of the newest first-year team to claim an MLS Cup title.

Buses, cars and SUVs pulled up near Pizza Hut Park to disgorge thousands of fans adorned in jerseys, scarves and caps. Raevan Valadez, Miss Teen Texas 2006, wore an evening gown shimmering with the color of the day. Dynamo head honcho Oliver Luck sported a Creamsicle-colored blazer that would irk representatives of a certain football bowl game. During the match, from a section of uniformly bedecked fans came a canister out of which billowed smoke of appropriate color.

Some Houston Dynamo players had expressed qualms about their orange jerseys, which were a drastic departure from the stylish deep blue they'd worn while winning a pair of championships in San Jose. On this day, though, all agreed the jerseys -- when saturated, splotted and stained with sweat, ice, beer, Gatorade and champagne -- look mighty fine.

Not all of the omens were color coordinated. A video clip played on the stadium scoreboard before and during the game

featured a rousing Mel Gibson soliloquy from "Braveheart." The guys wearing orange were certainly primed for the final battle, as they'd been scaling obstacles and repelling challenges for the entire year.

"Warriors is the best way to describe these guys," said Brian Ching, who scored an equalizer 111 seconds after New England had taken a 1-0 lead in overtime and nailed the clinching penalty kick. "We had to come back against Chivas [USA] and Colorado in the playoffs and we did it again today."

The first league team to change cities carried off MLS Cup 2006 by beating New England, 4-3, on penalty kicks following a 1-1 tie to top off a postseason rife with comebacks. Nearly 11 months before, Anschutz Entertainment Group ended a memorable yet ultimately futile decade in San Jose by uprooting the team and vanning it 2,000 miles east.

"That's why I say the credit belongs to the players," said Coach Dominic Kinnear, a longtime northern California resident with the deepest ties to the area he had to leave behind. "All the stuff on the outside -- the move, the heat, everything these guys went through -- could have affected them. It never did. The guys were awesome."

TURNING POINT. Houston finished second in the Western Conference behind Dallas with a record of 11-8-13, and in the playoffs trailed Chivas USA, 2-0, midway through the second half of the first conference semifinal.

If any turning point in this championship season is to be found, this is it. "We knew as soon as they scored that second goal we had to score, so we could come back on 'em at home," said Ching. "Losing by two goals killed us last year."

Last year, San Jose won the conference title but fell behind in the first leg of their playoff with Los Angeles, 2-0. Ricardo Clark scored midway through the second half; down only, 2-1, the Quakes were in a good spot, at least until Landon Donovan stunned them with a breakaway goal with three minutes left for a 3-1 win. San Jose poured on the pressure in the home leg but could only tie, 1-1. Season over.

"Last season was fresh on everybody's mind, basically, because we're pretty much the same team," said Ching. "We learned from it and matured from it."

Seven minutes after conceding a second goal to Chivas USA, Houston got one back. Brian Mullan charged up the right flank and drove a cross that Ching headed into the net. This time, Houston held firm and nearly equalized but was content to leave with a deficit of only 2-1, which it overturned at home, 2-0, though not until the second minute of stoppage time did Ching nod in that second goal.

Dwayne De Rosario wriggled free on the left flank and crossed to the far post, where defender Eddie Robinson fought off an opponent to head the ball down for Ching to lunge and nick it into the net. Robertson Stadium, awash in a crowd of 17,440 fans swathed mostly in orange, reverberated. The daring DeRosario, the rugged Robinson, and the chiseled Ching -- all vital to the team's success all season -- had thrilled those fans once again.

"First thing I want to say is, contrary to popular belief, I did not make that assist on purpose," said Robinson. "I was just trying to keep it play. I wanted to get it on target, but the worst thing I could have done is head it over the goal. Luckily, he was the one to react first."

"The biggest thing that kept everybody in good spirits and kept our team together has been the support. Anywhere and everywhere you go, the second you mention you're on the team, people say, 'Oh, we're so excited to have you here!'"

A week later, Houston rallied again. Colorado took a 1-0 lead in the fourth minute on a Jovan Kirovski penalty kick awarded when defender Adrian Serieux batted down a corner kick. The Dynamo needed just seven minutes to tie the game and 10 more minutes to claim a lead it wouldn't relinquish. A raucous crowd of 23,107 celebrated a 3-1 win that meant several thousand of them would be traveling to Dallas the following weekend.

MOVING ON. Leading up to the final, Kinnear and his players tried to balance their gratitude to their new fans with fond thanks to those they'd left behind. A month after MLS Cup 2005 and about a week before Christmas, Anschutz Entertainment Group ended years of rumors and uncertainty by announcing the move to Houston.

"Whatever the other guys went through, it was tougher for the Dom," said Robinson. "It was a really tough decision for him, whether he was going to do it. With the team he's built and the relationship he's built with a lot of the guys, I'm sure he felt it was something special. But it was definitely very hard for him."

Kinnear says the decision would have been a lot tougher had his parents been alive. His mother died in 2004 after a lengthy illness caused by an inoperable brain tumor, and his father died a few months later. He also lost a brother to a brain tumor.

"Our opening game, I stopped in the parking lot as I was driving up to the stadium, and sat in the car for a while," recalls Kinnear. "It was a really emotional time for me, because I know they would have been there for this first game. For me, it would have been easier if my mom and dad, and my brother, were still here. Because they weren't, it was harder to leave, because my wife has family as well.

"They would have said, 'You have to go. It's your job.' All of us hated to leave San Jose, but we like to think now we have two sets of fans: here and back in California."

Officially, MLS retained the team name and colors, and deemed the Dynamo a new franchise. Ching's wife stayed in California to finish pharmacy school, and a few families didn't complete the move until the school year had finished. Most staff members refused to leave California, as did Kinnear's assistant coach and childhood friend, John Doyle, who had played with Kinnear on the Fremont Celtic youth teams coached by Dominic's father, Hughie. Goalkeeper coach Tim Hanley made the move, only to return to California midway through the season.

"We didn't have a bunch of new, young players just out of college," said Kinnear, who took three young children and wife, Colleen, to Texas. "Our guys had wives and families and houses."

Aside from midfielder Mark Chung, who retired, and defender Danny Califf, who found a job in Europe, the players headed for Houston, where the housing is cheaper but the heat is fierce. The regular season had barely begun when every day seemed like the day before, only warmer, thick with oppressive temperatures and heavy humidity.

Players shed five, six, or seven pounds a day during training sessions. Laden with padding and gear, goalkeeper Pat Onstad sweated the most. Team trainer Bruce Morgan, one of the few staffers to make the move, didn't have ready remedies for excessive, rapid, daily loss of fluids.

"I'm glad one of our sponsors is Gatorade because we really needed their products this season," says Morgan. "There's just not much time to replace all that fluid on a daily basis. At home, I set my thermostat at 80 degrees, and when I walk in the front door, it's refreshing, that's how hot it gets."

Robertson was packed for the opener, and Ching scored four goals in a 5-2 rout of Colorado watched by 25,462 fans. Crowds averaged in the mid-teens until July and August, when the heat is unbearable and just walking can be exhausting. As temperatures cooled a bit and the playoffs drew near, the numbers and noise escalated.

"You step on the [Robertson] field before the game and you think, 'Man, it's burning in here,'" said Robinson. "You're ready to go."

Kinnear had to adapt methods and procedures more because of the heat than a larger playing surface at Robertson, which is four yards wider (70) than the cozy confines of Spartan Stadium.

"We had to limit our practice time maybe a month and a half into preseason because guys get tired easy," said Kinnear. "People say, 'When can you use it as an advantage?' and I'd say, 'Whenever we become immune to heat and humidity.' I think it almost evens things out, because it really drains your energy."

FINAL VERDICT. In sunny, windy conditions at Pizza Hut Park, New England came into the final tainted by its showings in the 2002 and 2005 championship games, both overtime losses to Los Angeles in which it failed to score. Clark was suspended for a second yellow card incurred against Colorado; Clint Dempsey's sore right ankle relegated him to the substitutes' bench.

Serieux, a defensive midfielder for the recent portion of his career had come to Houston from Red Bull in a trade. Kinnear had moved him to the back line but with Clark out Serieux went back into midfield and Ryan Cochrane lined up alongside Robinson in central defense.

The teams had played 1-1 ties in their two regular-season meetings (Cochrane had scored in one of them) but even that modest scoreline seemed implausible as time ticked away in regulation, and then the first overtime, and then the second

extra period.

Onstad had denied Taylor Twellman in the first half with a reflex save of a point-blank header but had no chance to stop Twellman's second good chance that the Revs striker drilled just inside the far post eight minutes into the second overtime.

Barely more than a minute later, as the Revs basked in their satisfaction, a Mullan cross deflected off Avery John and looped into the goalmouth, where Ching peeled away from Jay Heaps to head cleanly past Matt Reis.

In penalty kicks, each team missed one of its first four attempts before Ching converted for a 4-3 Houston lead. Onstad saved a weak shot by Heaps, and the team utterly committed to the team concept had prevailed again. Kinnear had changed from his normal 4-4-2 formation to mirror the Revs' 3-5-2 and free up De Rosario, who nonetheless did a lot of work off the ball to nullify the attention of two opponents.

"It's not just me, it's everybody on this team," said De Rosario, who came on as a sub to score the winning goal for San Jose in the 2001 final and replicated that role with an assist in MLS Cup 2003. "If they put players on you, you have to create space for the other players with your movement off the ball. I ran so much I was getting cramps in the second half, but that's all right. I feel very blessed to win another championship with this team."

Family members and friends jammed into the Houston locker room to laugh and cry and sing amid the sprays of champagne and beer. Before they cleared out, the soaked and spent players gathered for pictures and as the cameras buzzed they belted out a rather disdainful description supplied by Rapids coach Fernando Clavijo: "We are so predictable! We are so predictable!"

Their reliance on pressure and flank play and sacrifice were certainly not a secret. Stopping them is another matter, yet few could have predicted this ending to a tumultuous season.

Daylight was almost done by the time regulation, overtime, penalty kick, and award presentations had concluded. Some fans streamed to their cars, others gathered around grills or chased bouncing balls. Faces turned west to savor a radiant Texas sunset illuminating a low sky and cloud-kissed horizon with that same triumphant glow.

MLS Cup 2006 was all about the orange. And attitude.

(This article originally appeared in the December 2006 issue of Soccer America Magazine.)

Backline — Joe Machnik

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Keeping an Eye on the Refs

By Mike Voitalla
Executive Editor, Soccer America Magazine

American soccer vet Joe Machnik runs MLS's 'customer complaint department.'

IN 1949, WHEN JOE MACHNIK was 6 years old, fewer than 5 percent of U.S. households had a television set. His New York City home was one of them.

"My father was an avid sports fan of all kinds of sports," says Machnik. "We watched as much as we could. I can't tell you the reason why, but I focused on referees a lot."

On the 12-inch black-and-white screen, he observed basketball officials like Sid Borgia and Mendy Rudolph. He'd watch hockey and study zebra-shirted Bill Friday, Bill Chadwick and Frank Udvari.

A half a century later, Machnik still spends endless hours watching refs.

Now he gets paid for it, and the men he keeps a close eye on have names like Kevin Stott, Brian Hall and Abiodun Okulaja.

"I haven't been out on a Saturday night during the MLS season for 10 years," says the 63-year-old MLS assistant to the deputy commissioner, aka referee boss. "I sit with two phones, three TVs going, and sometimes the laptop as well.

"I watch the games, record them, and re-watch them on Sunday."

He sends several video clips via e-mail to the MLS disciplinary committee and joins its conference call on Mondays to evaluate referee performance and player behavior.

Machnik writes brief summaries for U.S. Soccer that it includes in its ref assessments. He also spends hours on the phone with MLS coaches.

"I represent the customer," he says. "MLS is the customer of U.S. Soccer's referee services. I'm like the customer complaint department. Everyone calls me. Even players."

Machnik's own playing career started at 14. Chatting in class with a Ukrainian boy about the Boston Bruins' "Ukie line," the conversation switched to soccer. When Machnik said he'd never played, the classmate said, "Good. You can be goalie."

Machnik played high school ball, in ethnic leagues, and became an all-American keeper at Long Island University, where he also launched his coaching career.

His refereed New York City youth games, and then whistled at various levels in the Tri-State area, including high school games in Connecticut, where one boy whose play he monitored was Sunil Gulati.

Playing with the Newark Ukrainian Sitch, he befriended Walt Chyzowych, who got Machnik involved with soccer camps and the U.S. Soccer national team program, including as goalkeeper coach of the USA's 1990 World Cup team.

Machnik created the country's first national goalkeeper camps (No. 1 Camps). He refereed hundreds of college soccer games. He served as ref-in-chief and commissioner for the indoor MISL and AISA, respectively.

After MLS's inaugural season of 1996, when the league depended solely on U.S. Soccer to administrate its officials, the league hired Machnik.

"Joe has worked tirelessly over the past decade to professionalize and improve U.S. Soccer's officiating programs and to provide advice on all aspects of MLS competition," says MLS deputy commissioner Ivan Gazidis. "His level-headed approach and unique experience as a coach, referee and administrator have been a massive resource for MLS and for me personally.

"Like a good referee, he's never afraid to call it as he sees it and his inexhaustible love and enthusiasm for the game is an inspiration."

In MLS's first season, as U.S. Soccer was working to upgrade its program to serve the new pro league, many officials worked MLS games. Now fewer than 30 referees work as independent contractors who otherwise work jobs such as school teacher, accountant and truck driver.

"We've taken the current program, in which it's almost like a hobby for the refs, as far as it can go," Machnik says. "Refereeing an MLS game is a three-day commitment, and they just don't have the time to properly prepare mentally or physically because they have their other jobs."

Professionalizing the staff and having fewer referees who will concentrate solely on MLS is the next necessary step

Machnik says.

He also advocates a program in which retired players are fast-tracked to refereeing. A program that will begin %85

"As soon as a player raises his hand," Machnik says.

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