

I'd offer a part of a summary I wrote regarding the way the offside concept has changed over the recent past. The change has all been in judging the involvement of players in an offside position.

- Over the last ~15 years, the interpretation of the offside infraction has moved from passive offside (position is sufficient for a whistle) to participation in any form and now to active participation. The original interpretation was based solely on the attacker's position, with the exception of an attacker who clearly indicated his intent not to participate unsporting from an OP in which he found himself (as if by accident.)

That "passive offside" died with the 1997 re-write of the law book, when Law 11 was remodeled to begin by saying, FIRST THING:

It is not an offense in itself to be in an offside position

- The second stage of the evolution gave us a focus on participation. The emphasis for refs was still to recall that position is not an infraction. However, the interpretation still included the concept of "zone of active play" which meant that if the OP player was TOO CLOSE to the ball or its trajectory, then his position would be considered as participation, thus perfecting the offside infraction.

The current, third stage of evolution, is based on the idea that we were blowing the whistle too soon, cutting off possible attacking plays that would be exciting soccer. Now, the OP player must

(a) play or touch the ball, or

(b) really, actively interfere with an opposing defender, or

(c) get the ball that comes to him from being in the OP.

This requires that we judge the OP player's participation in the play, and decide whether it merits a whistle. THIS IS NO CHANGE FROM 15 YEARS AGO, and I suspect it was the same before I began studying the laws. We were taught that an offside whistle required 3 Ps: position, participation, and a penalization decision by the ref.

Now, if we discard passive or "position-only" offside, then we need to have a criterion for judging involvement, and that has been the basis for the second two phases of development, as well as the basis for the recent controversy. It has also been the basis for the latest FIFA pronouncement of the IFAB's views on the subject

<http://www.fifa.com/en/media/index/0,1369,105502,00.html>

" Interfering with an opponent means preventing an opponent from playing or being able to play the ball by clearly obstructing the opponent's line of vision or movements or making a gesture or movement which, in the opinion of the referee, deceives or distracts an opponent."

This presumably was what FIFA told Chicago, as Alfred Kleinaitis' memo alluded. (Thanks to John Shield for posting the memo at

<http://pete.uri.edu/cgi-bin/wa?A2=ind0604A&L=SOCREF-L&P=R5360> )

Everybody else has offered an opinion, and I want to offer MNSHO too: Interference with an opponent should be judged as offside when it affects the way the defender PLAYS (as in playing the ball, playing for the ball, going to the ball, or dealing with the attacker who has the ball.) If "It is not an offense in itself to be in an offside position", then we need to exclude dummy runs off the ball, use of space or adjustment of team shape on the field and other actions, even though they might very well lead defenders (who are not playing the ball) to adjust their own position or situational awareness. If the defenders aren't playing, or playing for, the ball, an OP attacker shouldn't be judged as interfering with them.

Having built this theoretical house of cards, I now want to build a firmer argument on top of it, regarding interference with a keeper.

I think we all accept the interpretation that an OP attacker might be inside the goal or near it, having made an attack and not yet returned to an onside position, and we would judge that OP attacker NOT to be offside if he does nothing overt to interfere with the keeper.

It's a half-step further for us not to penalize an OP attacker 6 yards in front of the goal who is hanging there while his teammate takes the ball down the line to the corner, thus extinguishing the first attacker's OP. There's no effect yet on the keeper's PLAY against the attacker with the ball, and if the play progresses with a centering pass to the onside attacker in front of the goal, I think we'd see nothing wrong.

As I understand the USSF memo, USSF wants us to consider as offside participation an overt act that interferes with the defender (goalkeeper) who is trying to play or defend against the play. Thus, when the keeper is watching the attacker with the ball who is getting set to take a shot, it should be offside participation for a couple of other attackers to make that run close to the keeper and goal. ITOOTR, acting while in OP to overload the keeper's concentration and deceive or distract the keeper, while he's trying to play the ball, is an easy offside call. We just have to remember to watch for this type of thing, and I think THAT was the point of the USSF memo.

<snip>

Regards,

Jim Gordon

In subsequent email, Jim wrote:

One comment to fine-tune what I wrote, if you were interested in that section:

If the first stage was passive, position-only offside, the second stage was position in the area of active play AND involvement, and the third stage is active involvement where the involvement affects the defenders' play.