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# How Referees Apply the Advantage Clause

By Randy Vogt

Advantage is a wonderful clause in the rules in which whistling the foul would actually be hurting the team being fouled by not letting play continue. Let's say the white midfielder is dribbling the ball outside the gray penalty area when a gray player pushes white. Yet white does not fall down and is still able to continue the dribble unimpeded toward goal. The ref yells "Play on!" with both arms extended, indicating to everybody that there's an advantage.

When a team scores from an advantage, I feel as good as the goal scorer for having applied this clause correctly. But just continuing to move the ball upfield is a sign that advantage was applied correctly.

Officials properly playing advantage do a terrific job of letting the game flow, increasing the enjoyment of the game for everyone. Generally, the better the skill level, the more opportunities you will have to play the advantage.

To properly maintain game control, give the proper signal of arms outstretched and yell "Play on!" Also, later try to tell the fouled player, "I saw the hold but did not call it as your team had the advantage" and the player who fouled, "No more holding. I did not call your foul as the other team had the advantage." When you briefly speak to the players later, most of them are very receptive.

When should the officials play the advantage and when should a foul be called? Use these guidelines to help you:

**A foul by the attacking team inside the defensive team's penalty area.** The ball is so far from the other goal that there is little rationale for playing advantage here. The defensive team would probably much rather have the free kick and get their team in position to receive it upfield.

One item to consider is when an offensive player fouls the goalkeeper who has hand possession of the ball. If the foul was neither a hard nor a deliberate foul and the goalkeeper is still standing, you could play an advantage as the goalkeeper would rather have the option of distributing the ball by punt, drop-kick, throw or dribble than have the goalie's team kick it from the ground by a free kick.

However, you must tell the players involved that you are playing advantage and let the attacking player know that he or she is not to foul the keeper anymore.

**A foul by the attacking team just outside the defensive team's penalty area.** With nearly all fouls of this nature, do not play advantage. Below is an example demonstrating why.

A gray defender is dribbling outside the penalty area and is tripped by a white forward with the defender falling on the ground. The ball rolls to another gray defender who plays the ball. You yell, "Play on!"

The gray defender then loses the ball to a white forward who passes the ball to a teammate who scores. The gray defender who was fouled and had fallen left that white scorer onside. That is why you rarely play advantage in this situation -- the ball is much closer to the goal of the team that fouled than of the other team.

**A foul at midfield.** You can certainly play the advantage here, particularly if the team with the ball has open space in front of it.

**A foul by the defensive team just outside the defensive team's penalty area.** If you see what could be a clear advantage, let them play, as many of these advantage situations with the attacking team going toward the penalty area wind up as goals.

**A penalty kick foul by the defensive team inside the defensive team's penalty area.** Teams score on penalty kicks most of the time. Only play an advantage here if the attacking player has the ball near the goal with an open goal beckoning.

If the referee plays an advantage for a hard foul, during the next stoppage of play, the player who fouled could be cautioned or sent off. However if this occurs, to help avoid retaliation, yell toward the players involved, "Number three, I saw that foul and I'm going to deal with you when the ball is out of play." Saying the number also helps you remember which player to card a minute or so later.

Should the referee give an advantage but quickly realize that the advantage did not materialize, the ref should blow the whistle and call the original foul.

*(Randy Vogt has officiated over 7,000 games during the past three decades, from professional matches in front of thousands to 6-year-olds being cheered on by very enthusiastic parents. In his book, [Preventive Officiating](#), he shares his wisdom gleaned from thousands of games and hundreds of clinics to help referees not only survive but thrive on the soccer field. You can visit the book's website at <http://www.preventiveofficiating.com/>)*