



To: National Referees
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From: Paul Tamberino, Director of Referee Development
Alfred Kleinaitis, Manager of Referee Development and Education

Subject: Interfering with the Goalkeeper's Release of the Ball

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Law 12 (Fouls and Misconduct) includes the words “prevents the goalkeeper from releasing the ball from his hands” as an offense punishable by an indirect free kick. By tradition and interpretation, this violation is described more generally as any action by a player which interferes with the opposing goalkeeper’s ability to get the ball back into active play freely and quickly.

A goalkeeper is considered to be in the process of “releasing the ball” from the first moment when he or she has clearly taken hand control of the ball until the moment when the ball has been clearly released into play. This includes any time when the goalkeeper is:

- bouncing the ball
- running with the ball
- in the process of dropping the ball in preparation for kicking it
- throwing the ball.

During the time the goalkeeper has control of the ball and is preparing to release it into active play, an opponent may not stand or move so close as to restrict the direction or distance of the goalkeeper’s release.

In the 70th minute of a match between D.C. United at Philadelphia Union on April 10, 2010 ([clip found here](#)), D.C. forward Moreno followed, moved in closer to, waved arms at, and made various head and body “movements” toward Philadelphia goalkeeper Seitz while Seitz was holding the ball and preparing to distribute it. During the course of this interference, Seitz dropped the ball and Moreno shot the ball into the net. These actions by Moreno constituted a violation of Law 12. The goal should not have been allowed and an indirect free kick should have been given where Moreno interfered. Moreno’s behavior additionally could have been cautioned as unsporting behavior.

Whenever a goalkeeper has taken possession of the ball and an opponent is either nearby or begins moving toward the goalkeeper, referees and assistant referees must recognize the possibility of interference and allow their attention to continue to focus on the goalkeeper. More proactively, a quick word to the opponent might well prevent this sort of offense.