



Memorandum

To: State Referee Administrators
State Youth Referee Administrators
State Directors of Referee Instruction
State Directors of Referee Assessment
National Assessors
National Instructors
National Referees

cc: State Presidents
Affiliated Members

From: Julie Ilacqua
Managing Director of Federation Services

Re: Player's Equipment

Date: March 7, 2003

USSF has received a number of inquiries recently about how officials should handle situations where players wish to wear equipment that is not included in the list of basic compulsory equipment in FIFA *Laws of the Game*. Referees are facing increased requests from players for permission to wear kneepads, elbowpads, headbands, soft casts, goggles, etc.

The only concrete guidance in the Laws of the Game is found in Law 4:

“A player must not use equipment or wear anything which is dangerous to himself or another player.”

This is followed by a list of required uniform items – jersey, shorts, socks, shoes, and shinguards. Obviously, this language is quite general. USSF suggests the following approach to issues involving player equipment and uniforms:

1. Look to the applicable rules of the competition authority.

Some leagues, tournaments, and soccer organizations have specific local rules covering player uniforms and what other items may or may not be worn on the field during play. Referees who accept match assignments governed by these rules are obligated to enforce them. Note, however, that local rules cannot restrict the referee’s fundamental duty to ensure the safety of players.

2. Inspect the equipment.

All items of player equipment and uniforms must be inspected. However, anything outside the basic compulsory items must draw the particular attention of the referee and be inspected with special regard to safety. USSF does not “pre-approve” any item of player equipment by type or brand – each item must be evaluated individually.

3. Focus on the equipment itself – not how it might be improperly used, or whether it actually protects the player.

Generally, the referee's safety inspection should focus on whether the equipment has such dangerous characteristics as: sharp edges, hard surfaces, pointed corners, dangling straps or loops, or dangerous protrusions. The referee should determine whether the equipment, by its nature, presents a safety risk to the player wearing it or to other players. If the equipment does not present such a safety risk, the referee should permit the player to wear it.

The referee should not forbid the equipment simply because it creates a possibility that a player could use it to foul another player or otherwise violate the Laws of the Game. However, as the game progresses, an item that the referee allowed may become dangerous, depending on changes in its condition (wear and tear) or on how the player uses it. Referees must be particularly sensitive to unfair or dangerous uses of player equipment and must be prepared to order a correction of the problem whenever they become aware of it.

The referee also should not forbid the equipment because of doubts about whether it actually protects the player. There are many new types of equipment on the market that claim to protect players. A referee's decision to allow a player to use equipment is not an endorsement of the equipment and does not signify that the referee believes the player will be safer while wearing the equipment.

4. Remember that the referee is the final word on whether equipment is dangerous.

Players, coaches, and others may argue that certain equipment is safe. They may contend that the equipment has been permitted in previous matches, or that the equipment actually increases the player's safety. These arguments may be accompanied by manufacturer's information, doctor's notes, etc. However, as with all referee decisions, determining what players may wear within the framework of the *Laws of the Game* and applicable local rules depends on the judgment of the referee. The referee must strive to be fair, objective, and consistent – but the final decision belongs to the referee.