



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

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Subject: Contact with Game Officials

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In several recent matches, there have been instances where players have indicated their disagreement with decisions by match officials by initiating or continuing unacceptable, unwanted, and aggressive physical contact with the referee, an assistant referee, or the fourth official. It does not matter if this contact occurs during a match or when the official is still in the area of the field before or after a match. Four clips related to this issue are attached.

Obviously, not every occasion when a player physically makes contact with a match official is misconduct. Players may seek to offer sincere congratulations for the work of the official or to greet in friendly fashion an official with whom they have had previous experience. Officials should **not** tolerate physical contact by a player (including a substitute, substituted player, or any other person under the authority of the referee) which:

- involves force or aggression (grabbing, pushing, slapping, bumping, stepping on feet, and so forth)
- the official has sought to avoid by moving away and by making a gesture which clearly indicates any further approach is unwelcome (continued pursuit by a player, if performed in a threatening manner, is included here even if physical contact does not result)
- is initiated from an unexpected direction and unaccompanied by any warning
- is delivered in a context which clearly includes disapproval, lack of friendliness, or anger
- restrains or prevents an official from withdrawing from the contact (e.g., by blocking retreat or holding)

It follows, however, that officials themselves should not initiate contact with players under similar circumstances except to the minimum extent needed to perform the responsibilities required by the Laws of the Game. Where an

official observes one or more approaching players who appear intent on making impermissible contact, it is appropriate to take reasonable measures to avoid the confrontation, but this should not require the official to retreat in haste or for an excessive distance. The official should indicate as quickly as possible that the approach is unwelcome, at which point player movement toward the official should cease. If it does not, the action by the player could be dealt with in accordance with this memorandum or, if it involves several players without physical contact, under the guidelines for mass confrontation.

Under no circumstances can aggressive, unwanted physical contact with officials be tolerated and all instances must be dealt with firmly both by the appropriate action under the Law (red card for violent conduct) and by including all details in the match report.

The four video clips associated with this memorandum provide useful examples of how these guidelines can be applied.

- NY Red Bulls and FC Dallas (July 8, 2006): the referee's hands are slapped down by a player. This is aggressive contact and must be dealt with severely (USSF advises a red card).
- Chivas and Colorado (July 20, 2006): a player grabbed the referee and forced him to turn around. Again, this entirely unnecessary and aggressive contact requires a very strong response (USSF advises a red card).
- Kansas City and Los Angeles (July 1, 2006): the referee is aggressively pursued despite attempts to indicate that the player should not approach further (preferably, some sort of warning gesture in addition to moving away would have sent this message even more clearly to the player). This is covered by the second bullet point (the player had already been sent off so his subsequent impermissible actions need to be described in detail in the match report).
- Colorado and Real Salt Lake (June 9, 2006): The player's actions are aggressive and unwanted. Even more importantly, they were directed toward the assistant referee who was then forced to call upon the referee for a response. This behavior also needs a firm response under these guidelines (USSF advises a yellow card).