

Everyone thinks that referees are blind, biased and bloody ignorant. But could you do any better? We dare you to test your knowledge – and find out how little you know

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Most people think they know the rules of football. But then, most people thought that Glenn Hoddle was synonymous with open, inventive football. In actual fact, there are many grey areas on which fans, players, managers – and even referees, maybe – are hopelessly confused.

That's because Fifa has allowed the rules to become so complicated it's hard for anyone to carry them around in their head. So we all tend to view referees' decisions through a filter of half-forgotten childhood memories, myths and misinterpretations.

Think you know better? Pick up your whistle, then and don your shining silver shirt, practise brandishing your cards and test your knowledge of the six most contentious rules with *FourFourTwo's* specially designed quiz... then amaze your friends with your newfound authority and knowledge!

Q1 Is it a penalty?

Michael Owen runs at speed into the Anfield penalty box, twisting this way and that. You see a terrified Gary Pallister desperately trying to get out of his way, but he isn't quick enough. Owen brushes Pallister as he goes past and the contact brings Owen to the ground. Do you:

- a) award a penalty because even though it wasn't intentional, a foul was committed?
- b) wave play on because the contact was accidental?

Answer... b

... although it isn't quite as simple as that.

Of the ten ways to concede a penalty (see box on page 98), six of them require the act to be careless, reckless or with excessive force. One of the acts does require intent and, for three of them, an attempted act is just as much a foul as the act itself. Confused? You will be.

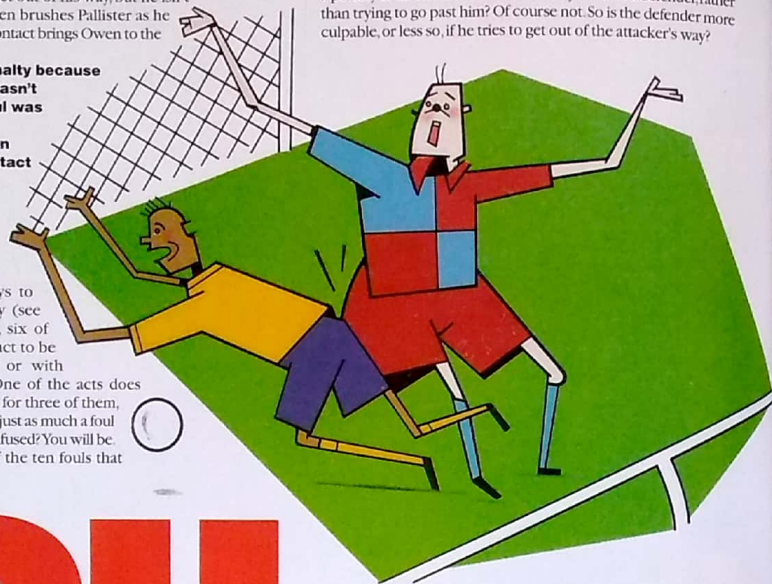
At most, two of the ten fouls that

concede a penalty are relevant to this incident. The first is if the defender tackles an opponent to gain possession of the ball, making contact with the opponent before touching the ball. The second is if the defender trips an opponent 'in a manner considered by the referee to be careless, reckless or using excessive force'.

The first rule is the one that leads to all those penalties awarded for a mistimed tackle. The defender doesn't have to intend the foul in order to concede a penalty but for this rule to apply the defender has to be tackling the opponent to gain possession of the ball. So if the referee believes that the defender was trying to get out of the attacker's way, the defender cannot have been trying to gain possession. So, no penalty under that rule.

The second rule doesn't require an attempt to win the ball, but the defender has to be careless, reckless or using excessive force to give away a penalty. It's hard to see how a referee can think the defender was any of those things if he was trying to get out of the attacker's way. So, again, no penalty.

So you're not convinced? Then ask yourself this: would you award a penalty to an attacker who deliberately ran into a defender, rather than trying to go past him? Of course not. So is the defender more culpable, or less so, if he tries to get out of the attacker's way?



After you, Claude: how important is intent when it comes to conceding a pen?

you are the ref!

Over the top and out? Is it a red or yellow card for one serious foul? Pass notes (below, right): can one of the opposition play you onside?



Q2 Should Paul Ince see red?

Paul Ince makes a bad tackle. It's his first foul of the game, but it's a bad one and you're unsure what punishment to mete out. Do you:

- a) send him off, because all serious fouls should be punished by a red?
- b) book him, because although the foul was serious, it was his first of the game – and a yellow card will act as a deterrent for the rest of the match?

Answer... a

Contrary to popular belief, none of the yellow-card offences under the rules is a milder version of a red-card offence (see box on page 98). If a foul tackle is serious or violent, the rule requires a red card. End of story. The only offence listed in the yellow-card rule that could possibly arise out of a bad tackle is 'unsporting behaviour'. (That's right. All those tackles that get a player booked are because the referee thinks he was being unsporting.)

Try this test

Player S goes slamming into the back of Player B, dumping him on the ground. While he's lying there, face down in the grass, B petulantly flicks out a leg at the upstanding S. The ref decides that one of those players is guilty of violent conduct (red card) and the other of unsporting behaviour (yellow). But which player is which?

If you wanted to give the yellow card to S and the red card to B, your name is probably Kim Nielsen and you refereed *that* game at France 98.

If you're anyone else, wouldn't you – now that you know the rules – dispense the cards the other way around?

Q3 Isn't he offside?

The newly revitalised Spurs defence catches Harry Kewell in a blatantly offside position when Lee Bowyer threads the ball through to him. Before the ball gets there, Ramon Vega, trying to cut out the pass, merely succeeds in helping the ball on to the back-tracking centre-forward. When he receives the ball, Kewell produces a brilliant bottom-corner finishes past Ian Walker. Do you:

- a) award a goal – Kewell is no longer offside, having been played on by the defender?
- b) disallow the strike – Vega's contact is irrelevant to Kewell's position?

Answer... b

Kewell is not played back onside by Vega touching the ball. From the moment one player hits the pass to his team-mate in an offside position, the referee is entitled to blow for offside. Nothing that happens subsequently can bring the offside player back onside. To avoid being given offside, the sequence of events would have to be this: Kewell starts out in an onside position when Bowyer passes the ball, but he moves into an offside position by the time Vega touches it. The defender's intervention doesn't put the attacker offside, because the offence can only arise at the moment a team-mate plays the ball. (The phrase 'played on' isn't in the rules and never has been. The rule simply says that offside can only arise when a team-mate touches the ball.) Refs almost always get this one right, but it doesn't stop them getting a lot of stick from the crowd for it. ♦

