

Some Thoughts on Refereeing Korfball

1 Introduction

This note is intended to help referees to take their first steps towards confidence and competence. It should be read together with, and is not a substitute¹ for the rulebook. If you read footnote 1 then you are already familiar with Rule 6c governing the substitution of players². And if you read the second footnote then you have two rules tucked up your sleeve to defend³ against criticism of your refereeing⁴. I guess if I carry on like this it may become a little tedious but footnote 4 has got me to my next section heading.

2 The referee controls the game

Imagine a two-year old being given a whistle. The first sounds are hesitant, barely audible and variable in volume. This is similar to the sound produced by the nervous beginner referee. The first point is to blow the whistle firmly with a crisp sound. Indeed the very first blow is decisive when you call the captains together. Get this right and the players will already be thinking "sounds like we've got a decent ref at last".

You need to look the part as well. Wear obviously different colours from the two teams, sports kit or tracksuit and appropriate footwear. Your attitude should be that you are going to run as much as the players because a good ref does. A few stretches might not go amiss. If anyone laughs at you, book 'em (no, I don't mean it).

To control the game you need to look like you know what you are doing, sound like you know what you are doing and know what you are doing. This does not mean that you will always be right. Refereeing is not easy and you are called upon to "decide in cases of doubt". The important thing is to be decisive. Get your positioning right, concentrate, make a decision, blow decisively (once to stop the game and once to start it again) and keep the game moving.

1 Up to four players of a team can be substituted without the approval of the referee. After the aforementioned four substitutions, players can only be substituted when they are injured and can no longer take part in the match. In these cases the referee must decide whether the substitution shall be allowed. A substituted player cannot return to the match.

2 When one or both teams are incomplete the games can only start, or be continued, if a line-up is possible which ensures that no zone has less than three players from each side and that in no division one female and two male players are opposed by one male and two female players.

3 It is prohibited to shoot from a defended position. The shot must be considered defended when the hindering defender satisfies each of the following three conditions:

- be must be within arm's length of the attacker and must have his face turned towards him
- be must actually try to block the ball
- be must be nearer the post than the attacker, except when he and the attacker are near and on opposite sides of the post. In this case the first two conditions alone are sufficient.

4 The referee controls the game.

The classic positioning relies upon a figure of eight movement behind the posts and changing sides as you cross the halfway line. Keep close to the play. Note that from behind the post you can keep attackers, assist and rebound players in your sight all at the same time. Mind you, when the ball is then lost and moved into the other division you have got to run quickly to catch up with play. The mistake to avoid is that of just walking on one side of the pitch five metres either side of the halfway line. If you give a decision and you are close to the players, they are far more likely to accept it.

When you blow, indicate which way you have decided. This can simply involve describing the colour of the team who are to have the ball. Hand signals are not very important although you can use them to point in the direction of attack of the team that has won the free pass. If someone disagrees, don't get involved in a long argument. Get yourself in the right position and get the game moving. If a particular player continually questions your decisions Hang on, why should I do all the work? Look up the explanatory notes under 8d.

I mentioned above that as a referee you need to know what you are doing. This is essential. Read the rules. Study the rules. Become one of those boring people who can quote from the rules. Nothing quells dissent from a player as well as a quote from the rulebook (although a nasty stare can be quite useful). The next two sections refer to mistakes that learner referees make because they haven't read the rulebook and to difficult areas even for the most experienced referees because they require interpretation.

3 Common mistakes

"Stand up, stand up" - I bet that you to have heard that being screamed when someone falls over with the ball in their possession. They do not need to stand up. They could even shoot if they wanted, provided they were not defended. Rule 16c simply forbids "taking hold of the ball in a fallen position" which is where any part of the body other than the feet is touching the ground.

"I didn't mean to kick it ref " - touching the ball with the leg or foot is still a foul even if unintentional, unless no important influence is exerted on the game.

The ball is out of play as soon as it touches a boundary line of the field of play, the ground, a person or an object outside the field of play. So the ball is still out if I reach across an external line to a ball that is on the ground outside the line in the hope that I can keep it in play. If the ball is in the air having been thrown by the other team and I go outside the pitch and catch it before it has bounced, the free throw goes to the other team. In this situation, I should have let it bounce outside the pitch and then the free pass would have been mine.

Free pass arrangements always cause problems. Read rule 19 closely but here is the gist of it.

- The players of the opposing team may come within 2.5 metres as soon as the person taking the free pass has moved the ball

- the players of the team must keep a distance of 2.5 metres until the ball is brought into play
- the ball must travel 2.5 metres before a player of the same team may touch the ball, unless an opposing player has touched it
- if the free pass is taken in the attack zone (that includes throw-offs) each player of the same team, as the taker of the free pass must remain at least 2.5 metres from each other until the ball is brought into play.

Note that you need to understand what "brought into play" means (see rule 19c) and to have a fair idea of how far 2.5 metres is.

Now that all of that is clear, let us move on to the problems of interpreting some of the key rules.

4 It is not easy being a ref.

Refereeing requires a certain amount of judgement. Who caused the contact, was the defender closer to the post than the attacker? Practice makes better but you won't always get it right. The important things are to know the rule, to get in the right position and to decide. But I'm repeating myself already.

What about running with the ball? The rulebook distinguishes three cases.

1. If I stop as I catch the ball, I can only pivot on one leg, although I can change the pivot leg if I don't thereby change position.
2. If I am running and then catch the ball, I must try to stop as quickly as possible (no mention of the number of steps). Once I have stopped rule 1 applies.
3. If I am running when I catch the ball and I throw it again before I have stopped the rules state that "the player is not allowed to still be in possession of the ball at the moment that he places his foot on the ground for the third time after receiving the ball".

The last paragraph is the one that is relevant to running-in shots. Players will normally try to catch the ball while in the air by doing a skip just prior to catching. This gives them an extra step.

What about defended shooting? Let me remind you of the rule. It is prohibited to shoot from a defended position. The shot must be considered defended when the hindering defender satisfies each of the following three conditions:

- he must be within arm's length of the attacker and must have his face turned towards him
- he must actually try to block the ball
- he must be nearer the post than the attacker, except when he and the attacker are near and on opposite sides of the post. In this case the first two conditions alone are sufficient.

Common mistakes are to blow defended because the defender could touch the attacker when the defender is leaning right forwards. In your mind, you need to put both players vertical and then decide if there is an arm's length between them. For distance shots it is rare that players are so close and if they are they can usually touch the ball. But touching the ball is not enough for a shot to be defended. I may be able to touch the ball by jumping towards the shooter but if I was not within arm's length at the time of shot then this is not defended. Lastly, the defender must try to block the ball. Simply waving the arm in the air is not enough. Again, read the explanatory notes of rule 16n. All will become clearish.

Some referees love penalties. They blow until they are blue in the face and accompany this with frantic arm and body movements. This is not my style. The important thing is just to blow confidently. But when should a penalty be given? There are two distinct cases:

- I. Loss of a scoring chance
- II. Other infringements which repeatedly hinder the attack unfairly

Note that under the first of these, a penalty should be given where a pass is illegally impeded to a player who is free to shoot. Under the second, repeat infringements should lead to penalties where the defence is repeatedly gaining an advantage by breaking the rules. Examples are repetitive contact, over-hindering and beating the ball out of hands. Typically the first such offence is noted mentally by the referee, at the second offence he warns the infringing player that the next such foul will lead to a penalty and the third foul and every subsequent foul of that type would lead to a penalty. Remember two fouls on the same free pass is an automatic penalty.

The last grey area that will be mentioned here is the contact rule. It is illegal to push, to cling to or to hold off an opponent. These are all examples of contact. Impeding the free movement of an opponent is a foul whether deliberate or not. Note that "this rule does not force a player to give way for another player". It is the person who causes the contact that commits the foul. But a player cannot increase his/her size by holding out arms or legs. If contact results from this then it will be that player's responsibility.