



To: National Referees
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State Directors of Instruction
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From: U.S. Soccer Referee Education Resource Center

Subject: **“I Got the Ball”**

Date: August 5, 2011

In a match played on July 29, 2011 (Philadelphia Union v. Colorado Rapids, at Philadelphia), an illegal tackle occurred which was neither whistled by the referee nor signaled by the assistant referee and did not lead to any card shown for misconduct.

Tackles occur regularly in soccer. Most of them are legal but some are not, and the difference between a legal and an illegal tackle has been discussed often in USSF publications. The following points must be kept in mind by all referees and, where appropriate, assistant referees:

- Getting the ball first does not make a tackle legal.
- Not getting the ball first does make the tackle illegal.
- Getting the ball first but following through with the rest of the body in a careless or reckless manner or using excessive force does make the tackle illegal.
- **“Getting the ball” cannot be used as an excuse for committing a tackle which is out of control.**

In the case of the tackle in question, performed by Colorado #15 (Thompson) on Philadelphia #25 (Williams) in the 63rd minute of what was then a 2-0 match for Colorado, Thompson came sliding in from the front with the left leg extended. Unfortunately, after contacting the ball, the rest of Thompson’s body followed through and upended Williams. This is often termed “bridging” and, could be considered misconduct based on such factors as:

- The direction of tackle
- The speed of the tackler
- The height of the tackler’s leg or legs (ball height or above)
- Exposure of the studs

The tackle by Thompson was from the front, no higher than the ball, and no studs were exposed. However, the speed of the tackle (which produced a rather spectacular upset) could have been considered reckless, thus warranting a caution.



Where the referee's angle of sight might obscure important elements of the tackle, making it appear legal, the assistant referee must be prepared to signal a foul of this potential severity and provide information regarding elements of misconduct for the referee's consideration.