



To: State Referee Administrators
State Directors of Referee Instruction

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**Subject: Players Temporarily Off the Field
Involvement of Fourth Official**

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The International Board (IFAB) has issued several directives which are to be implemented immediately. Although these directives will be covered in the usual annual law changes memorandum, officials in professional league matches must begin now to follow the guidelines below regarding injuries, care of bleeding, correction of equipment problems, **and the role of the fourth official in these matters.**

Players Temporarily Off the Field

The safety of players must always be the main priority of the referee when there is an injury. Some injuries may be so serious that immediate removal from the field is not possible. However, the resumption of play is an important consideration and, where possible, referees should encourage the treatment of injuries off the field.

When a player has received permission to be temporarily off the field for the treatment of an injury or has been directed by the referee to leave the field to correct illegal equipment, bleeding, or blood on the uniform, **the referee must be concerned both with allowing the player to return to the field as soon as possible and with taking appropriate account of time lost while play is stopped to assess an injury.**

- Where the injury does not involve bleeding, the referee must:
 - be aware of when the injured player is ready to return
 - grant permission to enter the field as soon as possible without waiting for a stoppage of play
 - allow the player to enter the field from the touchline if play is continuing or across any boundary line if play is stopped

- In cases of bleeding, blood on the uniform, or illegal equipment, the referee must:
 - be aware of when the player is ready to return
 - **grant permission to enter the field as soon as possible without waiting for a stoppage of play**
 - be certain that the bleeding, blood on the uniform, or illegal equipment has been corrected

- The **full measure** of time lost due to stoppage for an injury should be added to the period of play.

As of this year **and effective immediately**, it is no longer required that the referee must wait for a stoppage of play to indicate that a player can return to the field, provided that any problem which caused the player to be off the field in the first place has been corrected. The permission of the referee is still required.

Involvement of Fourth Official

As of this year **and effective immediately (April 23, 2001)**, the referee has the option of delegating to the fourth official the authority to evaluate whether the appropriate remedial action has been taken, including the correction of equipment or bleeding situations, **as a means of expediting the return of the player to the field**. If a fourth official has not been appointed, the assistant referees may be given this authorization. In either case, the referee no longer is required to perform personally the necessary inspection.

The involvement of the fourth official (or assistant referees) and permitting players to return to the field during play after correcting a bleeding or illegal equipment problem are specific changes in prior guidance and are now allowed as a means of **minimizing the time a team must play below its authorized number of players**. The pre-game meeting must include a discussion of how the referee, assistant referees, and fourth official will coordinate their actions to achieve the above results. Referees must also review the general policies of each of the professional leagues regarding injured players and incorporate the above guidelines into these policies.