



What Type of Foul Is It...Careless, Reckless or Excessive?

One of the key elements of managing the game is the distinction between fouls that are Careless, Reckless or Excessive. Examining the criteria that raises a foul from the level of Careless to that of Excessive can assist in making this distinction and in responding with the appropriate level of punishment and communication with the players.

From USSF Advice to Referees:

12.2 The Direct Free Kick Fouls

Ten offenses are described in Law 12 for which, if play is stopped as a result, the restart is a direct free kick (or a penalty kick if committed by a team within its own penalty area).

These offenses are referred to as direct free kick fouls. They are divided into two groups:

1. Seven actions (kick, trip, jump at, charge, strike, push, or tackle, including the attempt to kick, trip, or strike) for which the referee must evaluate *how the act was committed*; and
2. Three actions (holding, spitting, deliberately handling the ball) for which the referee need *only* decide *if the act occurred*.

Referees should not punish actions that are accidental or inadvertent. In the case of the first group, the action becomes an offense only if the referee decides that it was committed carelessly, recklessly, or with excessive force. In the case of the second group, the action alone is an offense, no matter how it was committed.

12.3 Careless, Reckless, involving Excessive Force

"Careless" indicates that the player has not exercised due caution in making a play.

"Reckless" means that the player has made unnatural movements designed to intimidate an opponent or to gain an unfair advantage.

"Involving excessive force" means that the player has far exceeded the use of force necessary to make a fair play for the ball and has placed the opponent in considerable danger of bodily harm.

If the foul was *careless*, simply a miscalculation of strength or a stretch of judgment by the player who committed it, then it is a normal foul, requiring only a direct free kick (and possibly a stern talking-to).

If the foul was *reckless*, clearly outside the norm for fair play, then the referee must award the direct free kick and also caution the player for unsporting behavior, showing the yellow card.

If the foul involved the use of *excessive* force, totally beyond the bounds of normal play, then the referee must send off the player for serious foul play or violent conduct, show the red card, and award the direct free kick to the opposing team.