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Memorandum



TO: MLS General Managers
MLS Coaches

CC: MLS Disciplinary Committee

FROM: Joseph A. Machnik

DATE: May 21, 2004

SUBJECT: "I Got the Ball"

Over the past several seasons, interpretations of various Laws of the Game have been modified and, in some cases, changed. Drastic changes to the interpretation of offside have had a major impact on how the game is played. Another area under modification is when players foul their opponent either before or after making "clean" contact with the ball. Fouls, cautions and send-offs have resulted despite the fact that contact was made with the ball. Cries of, "I got the ball" sound out as players explain their point of view.

MLS has asked US Soccer's Paul Tamberino and Alfred Kleinaitis to clear up any confusion in this regard. Together, they have authored the following:

"I got the ball" is a common response by players to referees during challenges. For players making these types of challenges (please refer to Columbus player Robin Fraser's send-off for his tackle on D.C. United's Dema Kovalenko on 5/8/04), referees make their judgment as to foul or misconduct based on excessive force, the recklessness of the challenge, and if it endangers the safety of an opponent. Regardless of the contact with the ball, if any of these are evident in the challenge, the referee should award misconduct (i.e., yellow or red card).

The Law says that it is a direct free kick foul if a player makes contact with an opponent before making contact with the ball during a challenge. However, getting the ball (even "all ball") does not make a challenge legal if, during or after getting the ball, the player commits a foul against an opponent.

Additionally, if the foul is committed recklessly, the player has committed unsporting behavior and must be cautioned, and if the foul is committed with excessive force, the player must be sent from the field and shown the red card.

Please share this memorandum with your players.