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Subject: **The "Pass Back" Violation**

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The attached clip from a match played by Columbus at Toronto last Saturday, May 17, involves an often misunderstood offense commonly referred to as the "pass back" violation. Unfortunately, the phrase "pass back" itself can be a source of confusion.

This rarely seen infraction came into the Laws of the Game in 1992 as part of the general effort to restrict opportunities for goalkeepers to waste time by unfairly withholding the ball from active challenge by taking possession of the ball with the hands. Other measures along the same lines include the 6 second limit on goalkeeper possession, the second possession restriction, and the throw-in to the goalkeeper by a teammate.

The offense rests on three events occurring in the following sequence:

- The ball is kicked (played with the foot) by a teammate of the goalkeeper,
- This action is deemed to be deliberate rather than a deflection, and
- The goalkeeper handles the ball directly (no intervening touch of play of the ball by anyone else)

When, in the opinion of the referee, these three conditions are met, the violation has occurred. It is not necessary for the ball to be "passed," it is not necessary for the ball to go "back," and it is not necessary for the deliberate play by the teammate to be "to" the goalkeeper.

In the incident clip, Toronto and Columbus are tied and the match has entered the second minute of a total of two minutes of added time. The Columbus goalkeeper punts the ball well past midfield. After a brief but vigorous competition for possession, a Toronto player passes the ball apparently in the direction of his fullback but the ball

actually enters space where a Columbus attacker actively pressures for control and the ball, chased by this attacker and defender, continues onward to the Toronto goalkeeper who picks it up with the onrushing attacker only a few steps away.

The offense must be properly understood in the following terms:

- The ball was clearly **kicked** by a Toronto defender
- The ball was neither deflected nor accidentally misdirected -- that is, the pass was **deliberate**
- It is irrelevant that the pass was arguably not to the goalkeeper
- The goalkeeper clearly **handled** the ball directly from the kick by his teammate
- Instead of playing the ball in some other way, the goalkeeper chose to handle it, thus removing the ball from active challenge by the Columbus attacker

Referees must be alert to the possibility of even uncommon offenses such as this. The requirements of the "iron triangle" (played by the teammate's foot, deliberate action, goalkeeper directly handling) were met and the violation should have been called.