

Subject: Youth Soccer Insider: Ref Watch: Players Taking Dives

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Ref Watch: Players Taking Dives

By Randy Vogt

I started refereeing in 1978 and for every game that I officiated in the United States for my first decade or so of refereeing -- nearly 2,000 games -- I did not see one player take a dive. Certainly, my ability to detect simulation was not as good as it is today as I now have much more experience.

But when I refereed in Brazil in 1987, in what was the Soviet Union in 1991 plus in Italy in 1992 and 1994, I saw players taking dives. And see it on occasion in my games today in the United States.

When I started refereeing, there were very few soccer games on TV in the United States and that's part of the reason why dives were extremely rare. Today, there is a vast array of games to watch and sadly a few of our players are emulating their role models in taking dives.

My dentist is a high school basketball ref who asked me if the dive in soccer is like the flop in basketball.

"It's similar," I told him. "Except that if a basketball ref is fooled, it's two points out of 100 while a fooled ref in soccer who makes a call that leads to a goal, it can dramatically change the game since just a few goals are scored in a soccer game."

Now I must admit where players took dives and I was fooled while other times there was a foul and I thought the player took a dive instead. Any of my colleagues who have advanced beyond pee-wees have done the same.

Let's take a boys U-13 player, No. 8, in a futsal game. He was dribbling, and as a defender approached him from behind, No. 8 fell to the ground. Unfortunately, my partner (as futsal uses two refs) whistled a foul.



After the game, I told my partner that the boy had not been touched. Before we refereed the team again, I reminded my partner that No. 8 goes down very easily. In the 5th minute, he was dribbling the ball when he was cleanly tackled yet he went down to the ground as if he had been shot and looked back to me. I went up to him and told him to get up.

Two minutes later, when he had the ball inside the penalty area, as a defender challenged him, No. 8 jumped to the ground and again looked back to me. I blew my whistle and restarted play with an indirect kick to the opposing team after giving No. 8 a caution for unsporting behavior.

At the beginning of the second half, No. 8 deliberately pushed an opponent off-the-ball so he was sent off for his second caution.

Then there was a boys U-15 game. An attacker had the ball seven yards from the opponent's goal. A defender marking him stuck out his leg. The attacker pushed the ball to the left of the defender and as it was going over the goal line, he "tripped" over the opponent's leg. He actually made a detour to the right to initiate contact with the opponent's stationary leg but he had played the ball to the left. I certainly could have given him a caution for unsporting behavior but did not as the dive was not as clear-cut as those of No. 8.

Yelling or moaning as the player goes to the ground and quickly looking at the referee are generally two signs that the player is diving.

A word of warning to the few youth players who actually take dives: You will get a reputation from both referees and opponents that you don't try to stay on your feet. And when you are actually fouled and go down, the foul might not be whistled as the ref thinks that you are trying to fool him or her again.

Yet there is the scenario of a defender who sticks out a leg right in front of an attacker and misses the ball. We cannot expect attackers to change their leg movement to avoid contact. Should the attacker trip over an outstretched defender's leg, even if the attacker goes down easily, a foul needs to be whistled.

([Randy Vogt](#) has officiated over 9,000 games during the past three decades, from professional matches in front of thousands to 6-year-olds being cheered on by very enthusiastic parents. In [Preventive Officiating](#), he shares his wisdom gleaned from thousands of games and hundreds of clinics to help referees not only survive but thrive on the soccer field. You can visit the book's website at <http://www.preventiveofficiating.com/>)

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