

**Subject:** Youth Soccer Insider: Refing Futsal (Part 1): Calling and counting fouls

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## Refing Futsal (Part 1): Calling and counting fouls

By Randy Vogt

Futsal has been growing rapidly in the USA as it's a wonderful player development tool. But refereeing it can be a different ballgame than outdoor soccer as it's much quicker, it's played with five players to a side and a smaller low-bounce ball -- plus the rules can be kind of quirky. Coaches have said to me on numerous occasions, "Geez, by the time I understand the rules, the season will be over."

Although coaches and players often have limited knowledge of the rules in outdoor soccer, this is exacerbated in futsal. So refs must educate the teams about the rules, then enforce them.

I've refereed futsal for the past 20 years and in the next four articles, I will share some ideas to make it a successful futsal season for referees.

Because of the speed involved, players with limited ball control are quickly exposed. Same too with referees, as those without good foul and misconduct recognition find games can go south even faster than when refereeing outdoor soccer.

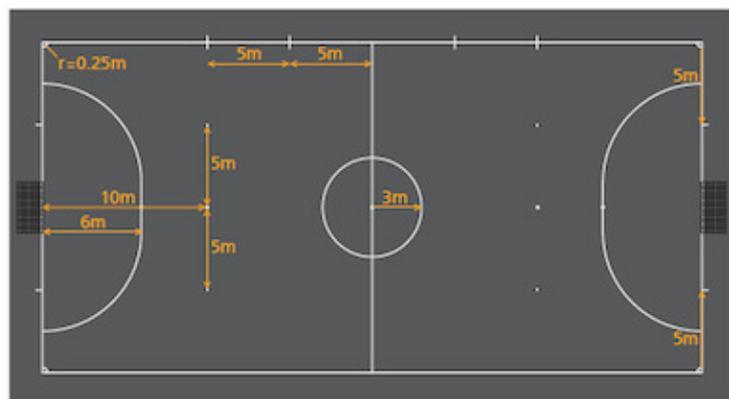
It's been said that futsal is a no-contact sport. This is not true. Futsal is not a no-contact sport but it is a low-contact sport. For example, putting a body on an opponent, accepted in outdoor soccer, is generally considered a foul in futsal. A reason for the conservative definition of a foul is most games are played on a hard surface (such as a basketball court), which is not nearly as forgiving as grass or turf when players fall down.

Foul recognition is especially important as the officials count the number of penal fouls (those punished by a direct kick or penalty kick) per team in each half. When the foul count gets to six, the opposing team receives a direct kick from the second penalty mark. This continues for every penal foul committed by that team the rest of the half.

With restarts in futsal, the player has four seconds to play the ball and he shoots from the second penalty mark, 10 meters from the goal and beyond the penalty spot. Once this direct kick has been taken, no player may touch the ball until it touches the defending goalkeeper, rebounds off one of the goalposts or the crossbar, or left the field. Beginning with the sixth accumulated foul, additional time is allowed to take a direct kick at the end of each half or at the end of each period of



overtime.



If a player commits his team's sixth accumulated foul in his own half of the field between the second penalty mark and the goal line but outside the penalty area, the attacking team decides whether to take it from the second penalty mark or the place where the infringement occurred.

While professional and international futsal have a third referee counting the fouls, those refereeing youth futsal will not have that luxury. With two refs in futsal (one on each touchline), each ref could count the fouls in their head of one team. Some refs have issues doing this. They could instead put five coins in their left shorts pocket. After each foul, they move a coin to the right pocket. Or they could use a stroke counter as used in golf, which unlike a strike counter used in baseball and softball, will go beyond four (the number of balls).

Now some futsal leagues try to get away with one ref but find out that this does not work out well. Besides the difficulty of just one ref counting fouls for two teams, keeping score and tracking misconduct, the one ref is on or by one touchline and leaves the other touchline uncovered. So the subtle foul on the other side of the field or the ball out of play is missed.

Going back to the foul count, at the fifth team foul, the ref warns the team they are up to five fouls. As teams generally stop fouling at this point, I practice a preventive officiating technique and let the team know after their fourth foul.

Should there be a penal foul but play is allowed to continue because of an advantage situation, that foul is added to the foul count. However, refs should not play advantage when it would be the team's sixth foul unless it's an obvious goalscoring opportunity.

Got all that? In the next article, we will move on to all the other restarts in futsal.

Downloadable [Futsal Rulebook](#)

*([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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