

Subject: Youth Soccer Insider: Throw-ins: What refs get wrong and what coaches can do right

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Throw-ins: What refs get wrong and what coaches can do right

By Mike Voitalla

What rule do refs in the youth game tend to get wrong most often?

I haven't gotten a consensus when I've asked coaches and refs. But the throw-in has to be up there.

First of all, it's great when throw-ins aren't used at the earliest ages, when it's best to have a few adults surround the field and prod the ball back in, or let the little players dribble or kick the ball in.

But after the time comes to introduce the throw-in, you'll see refs pounce on what they perceive as an "illegal" throw with a vigor that's often missing in their reaction to dangerous fouls.

Many refs seem inclined to call a foul throw-in if they see the ball spin, if the kid's body is twisted, a foot leaves the ground within a second of the throw, the ball flies in an unexpected direction -- if it simply looks awkward.

In fact, [the rules](#) aren't that restrictive:

At the moment of delivering the ball, the thrower:

- faces the field of play.
- has part of each foot either on the touch line or on the ground outside the touch line.
- holds the ball with both hands.
- delivers the ball from behind and over his head.

The need for restrictions on how the ball can be thrown is to limit the height and distance of the throw, because that can create ugly soccer. If you've had the bad luck to watch a game with a Herculean thrower you know what I mean -- lots of head-clashing when every throw-in in the final third turns into a cruder version of the corner kick.

If it were up to me, the rule would be simplified even more. You must face the field, have both feet on the ground, and have



two hands on the ball when released.

What would be so bad about a two-handed, under-handed throw-in that delivers a low ball to the teammate?

But the throw-in rule is fine as it is. Youth coaches just have to spend time teaching their kids to throw robot-like in case they run into one of those refs.

Making good use of throw-ins ...

Quite common in youth soccer is for coaches to encourage players to throw the ball in as hard as possible down the sideline. It makes sense intuitively that this would launch an attack. But this tactic rarely works because it's so predictable and the narrow space favors the defender.

Better is to suggest to young players to mostly throw the ball to a teammate facing the thrower. That teammate then returns the ball to the thrower.*

This encourages a possession game.

And you can make a warm-up activity out of it, which also trains throw-ins. In pairs, one throws, the other controls the ball and returns it (or tries one-touch). It's a chance to work on controlling balls with the foot, thigh or chest, followed by a crisp pass.

During a game, for the thrower to get the ball back is smart tactically, because the thrower is almost always open, and will have time on the ball. A chance to do something creative.

* *Stan Baker* had this suggestion in his excellent book, ["Our Competition is the World."](#)

(*Mike Woitalla*, the executive editor of Soccer America, is co-author, with **Tim Mulqueen**, of [The Complete Soccer Goalkeeper](#) and co-author with **Claudio Reyna** of [More Than Goals: The Journey from Backyard Games to World Cup Competition](#). Woitalla refs youth soccer in Northern California and coaches at [East Bay United/Bay Oaks](#).)

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