

Subject: Youth Soccer Insider: Tips for reffing on artificial turf

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Tips for reffing on artificial turf

By Randy Vogt

A few years ago, I wrote about the increasing number of soccer games [being played on artificial turf](#). In the past, teams used to say that they needed to get used to playing on artificial turf. Now I am hearing just as many teams say that they need to get used to playing on grass.

Approximately half my outdoor games every year are played on synthetic turf. Generally, these are the higher level games such as college, high school and often adult and older youth games.

First of all, the corner flag keeps falling in games played on turf on windy days, even if the flag has a base that is supposed to avoid it from falling. There needs to be a hole in the ground so that the flag can be placed and it would not fall. As corner flags must be a minimum of five feet tall, manufacturers could make them a little more than five feet so if they are placed into a hole on turf fields, they will still be five feet tall.

Unfortunately, it's a different game on turf as the speed of play is so much quicker, causing me as a ref to run so much more. Recently in a cup final, I was able to stay right near the ball for critical calls in a game played on grass. I would have been out of luck in providing such coverage on turf as the ball moves more rapidly.

It's much more challenging to ref on artificial turf instead of grass during hot days as the turf surface can become searing, although not as bad as how hot the old Astroturf fields became. After I refereed three boys U-15 games on turf during a summer tournament, I lost a lot of weight and was tired for the next two days. The players quickly became fatigued as well but they could be substituted. I was not as fortunate.



Maybe the heat of the field is the reason I am replacing many more pairs of socks today (because of holes in them) than in the past. My colleagues report the same issue of socks developing holes rather quickly.

The most challenging games to ref on artificial turf are games without AR's and no other sport's lines on the field. As the one official, you will need to compromise your position a bit and anticipate the best position for calling both fouls and offside, just as you would be doing on grass. So you might want to go a little wider than normal should there be close offside decisions that need to be made as you would have a better view there to determine offside. Although you are going to still be unsure for some very close decisions as you will not be able to be parallel to the second-to-last defender, particularly on turf, covering the game by yourself.

Without ARs, the football lines can be a real help to the ref to determine offside. In those games, the ref can utilize the diagonal and use the 5-yard lines that go across the field (almost to the touchline) to help the ref determine if the player was offside. Yet refereeing by yourself is never an optimum situation.

With ARs, I prefer to ref an artificial turf game without other sport's lines on the field as the lines can be confusing.

Regarding this, it's hard to distinguish the halfway line with all these lines on the field. Youth teams have corner flags but almost never put halfway line flags one yard from the touchline, which in a perfect world would be placed in a hole. So the ref could place a garbage can as a marker parallel to the halfway line and near the touchline to glance at to see where the halfway line is in the critical moment an attacker is waiting by the halfway line, with only the goalkeeper in the other half of the field, as the ball is passed to the attacker.

Most soccer goal lines are at the end of the football end zone so the 18-yard line for the penalty area would be between the 5- and 10-yard line on the football field. The football field lines are the easiest to see in white and often the soccer lines are in yellow. Yet I have officiated games where the soccer lines were in red and, worse yet, in blue as that color is very challenging to see on a green turf field.

I've seen goalkeepers become confused on turf where the 18-yard line is and have officiated games where I whistled handling as the keeper clearly went outside the penalty area and handled the ball there before punting it. Yet I was often able to warn the keepers distributing the ball that they were about to go outside the penalty area before they did so.

More problematic is if the keeper handles a shot going toward goal while outside the penalty area as it's a sending-off foul for denying an obvious goalscoring opportunity. But here the ref might want to try and use some common sense on whether the keeper knew if he or she was outside the penalty area. This would not be part of the equation if the keeper was 30 yards from goal but certainly something to be considered if the ball was handled right near the 18-yard line.

Whistling a penal foul committed by the defense near the 18-yard line on turf can be very challenging as it's not easy to clearly see if it was inside the penalty area with all the lines on the field. The AR could be very helpful to the ref as the AR will sometimes have a better view whether it was inside the penalty area or outside, just as in any other game.

Again, with soccer goal lines at the end of the football end zone, the penalty spot is going to be a yard away from the mark where football teams line up for extra points (for high school and college games). This can be confusing to see two similar marks near one another so the ref needs to be especially cognizant which line to use for the taking of a penalty kick. An easy way to do this is mark off 10 yards and you will be at the football goal line, then two more yards to the penalty spot and that's the line you use.

Finally, the soccer goal line often has other colored lines right near it. You will have to do your best and remember which line to follow for those critical decisions on whether the ball went into the goal.

(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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