



# BOARDING

By Garth Elgie, National Referee Instructor



## *Definition of Boarding as per The Rules of Indoor Soccer:*

- Boarding is **contact** by a player that **forces** an opponent to hit the boards in a manner that **endangers the safety** of that opponent.

## *Mandatory Instructions for Boarding Offences:*

- Any **contact**, legal or otherwise, by a player that **forces** an opponent to hit the boards in a manner that **endangers the safety** of that opponent will result in the offending player being sent off for boarding.



The definition of Boarding and the mandatory instructions for boarding offences have not changed over the past few years. Yet, we continue to see inconsistencies in their application, how challenges near the boards are being penalized, and just as importantly, how boarding is perceived by players, coaches and spectators alike. Boarding is a send-off offence. Often what is misinterpreted is whether the **'result'** of the action that caused a player to make contact with the boards constitutes a send-off (boarding) or a lesser offence (no stoppage, a foul or, in addition to a foul, a blue card or caution).

### **Three requirements must be met for the infraction to be boarding.**

There are three requirements for boarding to be a send-off offense. Simplistically they are: contact, forcing the opponent to hit the boards, and endangering the safety of the opponent.

Referees are penalizing the **'outcome'** not the action which caused the player to make contact with the boards. It is important to understand that referees are judging the action of the event for every other foul decision they make in a game, and this is exactly the opposite.

Often people are looking at what kind of action took place to propel that player into the boards, not looking at the result, specifically whether that player's safety was compromised or endangered!! And when we refer to outcome, we are not looking to see if the player needs a stretcher to be taken off of the field.

If, in the opinion of the referee, that player's safety was endangered at the time there was contact with the boards, at that instant, then boarding has occurred. If the player's safety was not endangered, then a lesser offence may still have occurred. A player does not have to be injured to constitute boarding and it should never be looked at as one of the criteria. Many times injuries are not evident at the time and can appear later, so using this as something to put in the criteria is not in the player's, or the game's, best interests.

If you read the Mandatory Instructions for Boarding closely, it states that **"Any contact, legal or otherwise....."**. It does not have to be a careless, reckless or an excessive force foul. In fact, it does not have to be a foul at all.



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It could be something accidental or incidental, or an otherwise fair challenge like a legal shoulder charge, something which is not a foul, yet if it forces an opponent to hit the boards, and the result, in the referee's opinion, is that that specific action resulted in endangering that player's safety, it is a send-off for boarding.

### Does it make a difference who initiates the contact?

One of the concerns expressed is who initiates the "contact"? For example, if a player is in control of the ball along the boards, and an opponent comes in aggressively to challenge, perhaps themselves making contact or 'initiating' the contact with the player in possession and control of the ball, and that opponent ends up being sent into the boards, who is at fault and who should be punished? It would not be reasonable or fair to punish the player in control of the ball along the boards, if the opponent tries to get around him/her, initiates making contact with the player and then hitting the boards, their head hitting the boards with a thud. Do you punish the player for protecting the ball or do you deal with the player who 'initiates' the contact and ended up being the victim of the contact from their own actions, not those of the player in possession?

As mentioned above, everyone has to take responsibility for their actions when they are near the boards. Whether it be close man-to-man marking, going near the boards at a fast pace with an opponent nearby, or challenging for the ball near the boards, etc. Everyone needs to be aware where the boards are in relation to their movement

and actions during the game. The boards do not move, they are permanent and part of arena soccer, so player's need to adjust their thinking, strategy, and movement to eliminate the risks if they are close to the boards and looking to challenge an opponent for possession.

In summary; there are three criteria that must be met for boarding – **contact, forcing an opponent to make contact with the boards, and, endangering their safety.** We are penalizing the outcome (not the action). Everyone (referees, players, coaches, spectators) must understand the definition of boarding. And, it takes courage to make the right call.