

Common Soccer Misconceptions

"But I got the ball first!"

One of the most common thoughts in soccer is, if the player makes contact with the ball before making contact with an opponent, there cannot be a foul. In many (you could go as far as most) cases, this is true; Law 12 states that a direct kick is awarded when a player, "tackles an opponent to gain possession of the ball, making contact with the opponent before touching the ball" - meaning, in most circumstances, that if you get the ball first, you're in the clear.

However, that's not 100% true!

Law 12 also talks about fouls that are due to the player being "careless, reckless, or using excessive force." The United States Soccer Federation's "Advice to Referees on the Laws of the Game" (available in the Referee's section of ussoccer.com), expands on the concept of Careless, Reckless and Excessive Force, saying it applies to all fouls:

12.3 CARELESS, RECKLESS, INVOLVING EXCESSIVE FORCE

"Careless" indicates that the player has not exercised due caution in making his play.

"Reckless" means that the player has made unnatural movements designed to intimidate an opponent or to gain unfair advantage

"Involving excessive force" means that the player has far exceeded the use of force necessary to make a fair play for the ball and has placed his opponent in considerable danger of bodily harm.

The "Advice to Referees" goes on and says that reckless play should be treated as a normal foul, "requiring only a direct free kick (and possibly a stern taking-to)", reckless challenges should be cautioned, and challenges involving excessive force should be sent-off.

What does this mean to me?

It means that you can make a *technically legal challenge* (contact with the ball before contact with the opponent), and **still be called for a foul, be cautioned or even sent off!** It's the referee's job, based upon the level of play in the game, to determine which one of those three classifications should be used.