

# GOALKEEPER CONTROL OF THE BALL [1]

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**April 16, 2010**

## **Question:**

I was centering an Academy game and the away team was deep into their offensive penalty box with an attack. They took a shot at the goal which the keeper stop but did not gain immediate control of the ball with his hands. The keeper fell to the ground (on his back) and managed to trap the ball under his legs. For the that instant the ball was fully in control by the keeper with his legs. The attacker was kicking at the ball and managed to get it out from under his legs and shot and the goal and it went in. I did not allow the goal and felt I had 2 rational reasons. My first thought was the keeper did have “control” of the ball with his legs and therefore the attack should have been stopped. The second thought was that it was dangerous play to try and kick the ball out from his legs (especially considering it was lodged under them) and an indirect free kick should have been awarded.

My question is this, does a keeper have to control the ball with his hands for it to be considered under control or if he or she has definite control with other parts of his body (legs, stomach) is that considered control?

## **USSF answer (April 16, 2010)**

While we agree with your notion that the referee should have stopped play immediately, it would not have been because the goalkeeper had possession of the ball. Possession by the goalkeeper requires “hands-on” control of the ball, something he did not have. Here is an excerpt from the USSF publication “Advice to Referees on the Laws of the Game” that spells out goalkeeper possession:

*12.16 GOALKEEPER POSSESSION OF THE BALL*

*The goalkeeper is considered to be in control of the ball when the ball is held*

*with both hands, held by trapping the ball between one hand and any surface (e.g., the ground, a goalpost, the goalkeeper's body), or holding the ball in the outstretched open palm. Once established, possession is maintained, when the ball is held as described above, while bouncing the ball on the ground or throwing it into the air. Possession is given up if, after throwing the ball into the air, it is allowed to hit the ground. For purposes of determining goalkeeper possession, the "handling" includes contact with any part of the goalkeeper's arm from the fingertips to the shoulder.*

*While the ball is in the possession of the goalkeeper, it may not be challenged for or played by an opponent in any manner. An opponent who attempts to challenge for a ball in the possession of the goalkeeper may be considered to have committed a direct free kick foul. However, a ball which is only being controlled by the goalkeeper using means other than the hands is open to otherwise legal challenges by an opponent. The referee should consider the age and skill level of the players in evaluating goalkeeper possession and err on the side of safety.*

We see no offense by the goalkeeper. If, as it appears, the goalkeeper had the ball between his legs and did not delay unduly in attempting to extricate himself from this predicament, he did not play dangerously and the opponent was wholly at fault for taking unfair advantage of his situation. Merely making kicking motions would constitute the dangerous play offense, but actually making contact with the kicking motion turns it into a direct free kick offense plus a card (the referee would normally think red — due to "kicking," but this could possibly be downgraded to a yellow if there were mitigating circumstances.)

1. <http://www.askasoccerreferee.com/?p=2270>