

Whether visiting or working various competitions as an assessor, referee, volunteer, North Texas Soccer Board Member or just as a spectator, I have been exposed to several different methods of addressing the wearing of jewelry, extra equipment and other apparel by players. Some ways are correct and others are not correct.

Found under the title “Safety” in Law 4 of the “FIFA Laws of the Game” it states: “A player must not use equipment or wear anything which is dangerous to himself or another player (including any kind of jewelry).” There are those in the soccer community that believe a piece of tape will make wearing jewelry during the game safe. As a referee I must remember that under Jewelry in Law 4 it states: “Players are not allowed to use tape to cover jewelry. Taping jewelry is not adequate protection.” I might determine based on what is found in the Laws of the Game that the simple mandate would be sufficient and there is no reason to give it any additional thought.

However, I have reason to register my extreme disagreement with those who are of the opinion that merely placing a piece of tape on or around jewelry will protect the wearer or other participants in the game. My personal experience involves the wearer of the jewelry who in this instance was my daughter when she played in a youth recreational soccer league. She like many her age wore stud earrings while she was playing and had covered them with a piece of tape. During the course of the game another player kicked the ball very hard striking my daughter on the side of her head right on her ear. Did the piece of tape protect my daughter’s ear as intended? No, not for a minute, the ball pushed the earring through her earlobe leaving a big hole in the earlobe. She was not able to wear earrings for several years afterwards. The only thing the tape did in this instance was make it easier to find the earring on the field.

When I referee I do not allow players to wear earrings, taped or not, This has led to my being inundated by any number of excuses and justifications in an attempt to convince me to grant exceptions to portions of Law 4. Such as the following: “They are permanent, I can’t take them out.” “They were just pierced and the earrings are supposed to stay in.” (I wasn’t aware the ear lobes could grow back together in less than 2 hours). When faced with these excuses I always give the player the same two choices, remove the earrings and play, or leave them in and watch the game from the bench. With the options given, most players decide to remove the earrings and play.

There are a few exceptions which may allow players to wear jewelry. Medical Alert jewelry is allowed provided it is properly taped down and does not pose any danger to the wearer or other participants. (The referee has the final say as to whether it is safe or not to allow the player to play.)

When religious articles are worn by players, the referee has other instructions to follow. If it is easily recognizable as a religious article of a well known faith or religious order the referee should allow the player to wear the religious article provided it is safe to the wearer and all other participants. However, the referee probably will not know all the rules pertaining to every faith or religion. Therefore, it is the responsibility of the player to request from their league a variance well enough in advance of the game to allow the league to present the request to the State Referee Committee. The State Referee

Committee can then see the referees working that league's matches are properly informed. At all times we must keep in mind the referee remains bound by Law 4 concerning the safety of the participants if the religious article is worn by the player even though a request was properly made. The referee may not allow a player to "wear anything which is dangerous to himself or another player." The referee at each match is the judge of the safety of the equipment/apparel worn by each player while competing in that match. Referees must stand firm in protecting the safety of all players, even if is to protect the player from themselves when they attempt to wear jewelry, unsafe equipment or apparel. In closing I ask that all of you think about what you intend to wear during your games and how it will be viewed by the referee when Law 4 is applied. It is probably far better to remove your expensive jewelry leaving it in the safety of your home rather than in your car or placed in an equipment bag on the sideline of your game.

Thank all of you for all the support you give for the North Texas Soccer Referee Program and North Texas Soccer.

Fred Hiler
NTSSA Chairman, Referee Committee