

# Only the captain can approach the referee

## Guidelines for competitions

(except those participating in The IFAB's trial at  
amateur and grassroots levels)

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## Background

Despite respect and fairness being core values of our sport, referees and other match officials are regularly subjected to verbal and/or physical dissent when they make decisions. In extreme cases, players sometimes run at referees and surround or mob them, which shows a lack of respect for the referee, harms the image of the game and can be intimidating and upsetting.

Stronger collaboration between the referee and the team captains can help instil fairness and mutual respect. In this regard, so that the referee can explain key decisions, only the captains will be allowed to approach the referee, provided that they do so respectfully and conduct themselves as such. At the same time, it will be the responsibility of each captain to ensure that their team-mates remain a reasonable distance from the referee and do not interfere in the interaction between the referee and the team captain(s).

The application of the philosophy and main principles of this measure at UEFA EURO 2024 clearly showed that such an approach could also be successfully implemented in other competitions.

The following simple guidelines should assist organisers of competitions wishing to apply the ‘only the captain’ principles. They are primarily aimed at organisers of top-level competitions, whereas organisers of competitions that do not involve teams from the top two domestic levels or senior “A” international teams should consider applying to participate in The IFAB’s ‘only the captain’ trial and implementing the associated protocol.

## Guidelines

- Normal interactions between players and the referee are allowed and remain important (to increase transparency and avoid possible frustration and conflict).
- Any player (including the captain) who shows dissent by word or action will be cautioned (yellow card).
- The referee will, where appropriate, explain important decisions to the captain(s) and/or the player(s) involved in an incident.
- To prevent players mobbing or surrounding the referee in major situations and following key incidents or decisions:
  - only one player from each team – usually the captain – is allowed to approach the referee and, when doing so, they must always interact in a respectful manner;
  - the referee may instruct/encourage players (verbally or with gestures) not to approach them;
  - the team captains are responsible for helping to direct their team-mates away from the referee;
  - players who approach/surround the referee when they are not permitted to do so may be cautioned (yellow card);
  - if appropriate, the referee may delay the restart of play to allow the captain(s) time to speak with their team-mates to explain a decision, demand proper behaviour, etc.
- Interaction with, or an approach by, any player other than the captain is at the discretion of the referee, e.g. if the player has committed an offence, been fouled and/or is injured.

**Guidelines when the captain is the goalkeeper**

- Where the goalkeeper is the captain, the referee must be told, no later than at the coin toss before kick-off, which player is nominated to approach the referee instead of the goalkeeper.
- Only the goalkeeper or the nominated player, not both, may approach the referee.
- If the nominated player is substituted or sent off, another player must be nominated.