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Subject: **Objects on the Field**

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Soccer matches are exciting events, attended by partisan fans who celebrate the successes and bemoan the reverses of their favorite team. They wave flags, blare trumpets, beat drums, swirl scarves, and, sometimes, they throw things onto the field. Usually, what is thrown onto the field (confetti and streamers) is inconsequential, at most a momentary distraction.

At times, however, what is thrown onto the field constitutes a serious interference in the match, either because of the specific nature of the object (e.g., bottles or lit fireworks) or because of the volume of the material covering the field and making the surface dangerously unstable. In such cases, the referee must suspend play, preferably at a stoppage called for some other reason but otherwise without delay if the issue is the safety of the players, the officials, or team personnel in the technical areas. Before play can be resumed, it is the responsibility of the home club (the organization sponsoring the match) to resolve the problem without undue delay. Under certain circumstances, the referee may consider removing players from the field for their safety during this time.

A more difficult case is presented when what is thrown onto the field is not intrinsically dangerous but carries the threat of interfering with play in some significant way. Referees are, of course, alert to such interference when a ball enters the field and comes close enough to play to be mistaken for the match ball. Another example that might be cited is an EPL match (Sheffield United v. Manchester City) in which, about 10 minutes into the first half, the ball was played into the attacking third of the field at a time when more than a dozen balloons were also in the area (it may be important to note that the balloons were generally similar to the match ball in size and color).

On a shot across the face of the goal, the ball hit a balloon, causing the former to be redirected slightly and the latter to be knocked toward the goal. Further play resulted in other balloons moving and bouncing in front of the goalkeeper. A goal was scored during what may have been a very confusing few seconds.

In these “gray area” situations, the referee must evaluate a number of factors in order to determine if and when play should be suspended until the problem is resolved.

- What is the likelihood that the foreign object(s) might interfere with the safe movement of the players?
- What is the likelihood that the foreign object(s) might confuse players and/or disrupt the flow of play?
- Is the problem with foreign object(s) primarily at one end of the field and therefore more likely to disadvantage one team over another?

Play should not be suspended for inconsequential reasons and the referee must remain vigilant to the possibilities of the match being disrupted by the sudden appearance of unwanted objects on the field. Match officials must be sensitive to things which interfere unduly with the beauty of the sport and make a mockery of skilled play.