

Q) One of our coaches recently encountered a situation where his player was on a "breakaway" about 6 yards from the goal, when the ref blew the whistle to end the first half..... just before the shot that successfully went into the goal. Naturally, the coach was disappointed. What determines precisely when a half ends?

A) This is a classic example of a topic which is hotly debated among referees. The Laws only state how long the halves are (45 minutes unless shortened by league rules), and that the referee has discretion to add time for various reasons. Below is the relevant text and I've include a link to the online Laws of the Game (LOTG).

Allowance for Time Lost

Allowance is made in either period for all time lost through:

- . substitution(s)*
- . assessment of injury to players*
- . removal of injured players from the field of play for treatment*
- . wasting time*
- . any other cause*

The allowance for time lost is at the discretion of the referee.

http://www.fifa.com/documents/fifa/laws/LOTG2005_e.pdf

The debate over WHEN is an appropriate time to blow the whistle, given the imprecise nature of "adding" time, is never-ending.

"Tradition" says that, in general, the referee does not end the game when a team is threatening its opponent's goal. My own thoughts are that this tradition harkens back to the days when time was kept on a pocket watch, sans a "second" hand. It strikes many, myself included, as odd, that in today's era of digital timing, we still defer (mostly) to this long-standing tradition.

However, there is a minority of referees who do NOT defer to tradition, and who will whistle the half over regardless what's happening on the field. There was a famous incident in the World Cup some years ago, where the ref whistled the half over with a ball in flight just prior to entering the goal. The goal didn't count, and the result stood, though my understanding is that that particular referee never reffed another WC match.

So..... in this scenario, if the ref did not blow the whistle PRIOR to the full half's time expiring, his action is entirely defensible. If he blew it precisely at 35 minutes (or whatever), then my biggest concern is that he makes a habit of doing so. What we never want to see is a referee ending a half arbitrarily in a manner that favors a particular team.

Some people also mistakenly believe that the ball must be in play in order for the half to end. The only situation where the laws demand completion of an action prior to the end of a half is the taking of a penalty kick. If time expires after the foul, but prior to the kick, the referee is required allow time for the completion of the penalty kick. There is no requirement to allow completion of a corner kick, goal kick, throw in, free kick, etc.