The offense of impeding an opponent requires that the ball not be within playing distance and that physical contact between the player and the opponent is normally absent. If physical contact occurs, the referee should, depending on the circumstances, consider instead the possibility that a charging infringement has been committed (direct free kick) or that the opponent has been fairly charged off the ball (indirect free kick, see Advice 12.22). However, nonviolent physical contact may occur while impeding the progress of an opponent if, in the opinion of the referee, this contact was an unavoidable consequence of the impeding (due, for example, to momentum).

### 12.15 PLAYING DISTANCE

The referee's judgment of "playing distance" should be based on the player's ability to play the ball, not upon any arbitrary standard.

### 12.16 GOALKEEPER POSSESSION OF THE BALL

The goalkeeper is considered to be in possession of the ball while bouncing it on the ground or while throwing it into the air. Possession is given up if, while throwing the ball into the air, it is allowed to strike the ground. As noted in Advice 12.10, handling extends from shoulder to tip of fingers. While the ball is in the possession of the 'keeper, it cannot be lawfully played by an opponent, and any attempt to do so may be punished by a direct free kick.

### 12.17 PREVENTING THE GOALKEEPER FROM RELEASING THE BALL INTO PLAY

 An opponent may not interfere with or block the goalkeeper's release of the ball into play. While players have a right to maintain a position achieved during the normal course of play, they may not try to block the goalkeeper's movement while he or she is holding the ball or do anything which hinders, interferes with, or blocks the goalkeeper who is throwing or punting the ball back into play. An opponent does not violate the Law, however, if the player takes advantage of a ball released by the goalkeeper directly to him or her, in his or her direction, or deflecting off him or her nonviolently.
### 12.18 THE "SIX-SECOND" RULE

The goalkeeper has six seconds to release the ball into play once he or she has taken possession of the ball with the hands. However, this restriction is not intended to include time taken by the goalkeeper while gaining control of the ball or as a natural result of momentum. The referee should not count the seconds aloud or with hand motions. If the goalkeeper is making a reasonable effort to release the ball into play, the referee should allow the "benefit of the doubt." Before penalizing a goalkeeper for violating this time limit, the referee should warn the goalkeeper about such actions and then should penalize the violation only if the goalkeeper continues to waste time or commits a comparable infringement again later in the match. Opposing players should not be permitted to attempt to prevent the goalkeeper from moving to release the ball into play.

### 12.19 SECOND TOUCH BY THE GOALKEEPER

After relinquishing control of the ball, a goalkeeper violates Law 12 if, with no intervening touch or play of the ball by a teammate or an opponent, he or she handles the ball a second time. This includes play after parrying the ball. Referees should note carefully Decision 2, which defines "control" and distinguishes this from an accidental rebound or a save.

In judging a second touch with the hands by the goalkeeper, referees must take into account tactical play which may seem unsporting but is not against the Laws of the Game or even the spirit of the game. If a goalkeeper and a teammate play the ball back and forth between them, the goalkeeper can handle the ball again legally so long as the teammate has not kicked the ball to the goalkeeper. However, of course, an opponent can challenge for the ball during such a sequence of play. The

