Laws of the Game
2020/21
Changes and clarifications
(and changes to the VAR protocol, Glossary and Practical Guidelines)

The International Football Association Board
April 2020
Outline summary of Law changes

Law 1 – The Field of Play
- Goalposts and the crossbar may be a combination of the four basic shapes

Law 10 – Determining the Outcome of a Match
- Yellow cards (YCs) and warnings are not carried forward into kicks from the penalty mark (KFPM)
- See also changes to Law 14 relating to KFPM

Law 11 – Offside
- Deliberate handball by a defending player is considered ‘deliberate play’ for offside

Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct
- Handball:
  - the boundary between the shoulder and the arm is defined as the bottom of the armpit (see the diagram on p. 14)
  - ‘accidental’ handball by an attacking player (or team-mate) is only penalised if it occurs ‘immediately’ before a goal or clear goal-scoring opportunity
- A goalkeeper can receive a YC or be sent off (RC) for ‘illegally’ touching the ball a second time after a restart (e.g. goal kick, free kick etc.) even if the touch is with the hand/arm
- Any offence (not only a foul) which ‘interferes with or stops a promising attack’ should result in a YC
- A player who fails to respect the 4m required distance at a dropped ball should receive a YC
- If the referee plays advantage or allows a ‘quick’ free kick for an offence which ‘interfered with or stopped a promising attack’, the YC is not issued

Law 14 – The Penalty Kick
- An offence by the goalkeeper is not penalised if a penalty kick misses the goal or rebounds from the goal (without a touch from the goalkeeper) unless the offence clearly affected the kicker
- The goalkeeper is warned for the first offence; it is a YC for any further offence(s)
- The kicker is penalised if the goalkeeper and the kicker offend at exactly the same time

VAR protocol
- Only one ‘TV signal’ is required for a VAR-only review

Glossary
- A definition of the offence of holding has been included
- A player’s position at a restart is the position of the feet or any part of the body which is touching the ground (except as outlined in Law 11 – Offside)
Clarification

If at a goal kick or free kick the goalkeeper ‘flicks’ the ball up and a team-mate heads/chests the ball back for the goalkeeper to catch, the kick is retaken; there is no disciplinary sanction (unless this occurs persistently)

Editorial changes

A few editorial changes have been made to make the order of the text more consistent/logical; they are underlined in the Laws:

Reorganised text

Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct
• The order of the bullet points defining handball offences has been rearranged

Law 14 – The Penalty Kick
• Additional bullet points relating to goalkeeper offences have been included
• The summary table of offences at a penalty kick has been updated and reorganised

VAR protocol
• The text in the ‘Review’ section has been rearranged to emphasise the expectation that most VAR reviews will be ‘on-field reviews’ (OFRs)
Details of all Law changes

The following are the changes to the Laws of the Game for the 2020/21 edition. For each change, the new/amended/additional wording is given, together with the old wording, where appropriate – followed by an explanation of the change.

- Text to be deleted = football
- New text = football

### Law 1 – The Field of Play

#### 10. Goals

**Amended text**

(…)

The goalposts and crossbar must be made of approved material. They must be square, rectangular, round, or elliptical or a combination of these in shapes and must not be dangerous.

**Explanation**

The goalposts and crossbar may be a combination of the four basic shapes.

### Law 2 – The Ball

#### 2. Replacement of a defective ball

**Amended text**

If the ball becomes defective:

- play is stopped and
- restarted by dropping the replacement with a dropped ball where the original ball became defective

**Explanation**

Wording changed to be consistent with Law 8.
Law 4 – The Players’ Equipment

4. Other equipment – Electronic performance and tracking systems (EPTS)

Amended text

Electronic performance and tracking systems (EPTS)

Where wearable technology (WT) as part of electronic performance and tracking systems (EPTS) is used in matches played in an official competition organised under the auspices of FIFA, confederations or national football associations, the competition organiser must ensure that the technology attached to the player’s equipment is not dangerous and must bear the following mark:

(meets one of the following standards: IMS (International Match Standard) or FIFA Quality.

![IMS International Match Standard](image)

This mark indicates that it has been officially tested and meets the minimum safety requirements of the International Match Standard developed by FIFA and approved by The IFAB. The institutes conducting these tests are subject to the approval of FIFA.

Where electronic performance and tracking systems (EPTS) are used (subject to the agreement of the national football association/competition organiser) provided by the match or competition organiser, it is the responsibility of that match or the competition organiser to ensure that the information and data transmitted from EPTS to the technical area during matches played in an official competition are reliable and accurate. (…)

The following mark indicates that an EPTS (wearable or optical) device/system has been officially tested and meets the requirements in terms of reliability and accuracy of positional data in football:

![FIFA Quality](image)

Explanation

Wording reflects updates to the FIFA performance standards for EPTS devices.

Law 10 – Determining the Outcome of a Match

3. Kicks from the penalty mark

Amended text

Kicks from the penalty mark are taken after the match has ended and unless otherwise stated, the relevant Laws of the Game apply. A player who has been sent off during the match is not permitted to take part; warnings and cautions issued during the match are not carried forward into kicks from the penalty mark.
3. Kicks from the penalty mark

Amended text

During kicks from the penalty mark

- If the goalkeeper commits an offence and, as a result, the kick is retaken, the goalkeeper must be cautioned. If the goalkeeper is warned for the first offence and cautioned for any subsequent offence(s).

- If both the goalkeeper and the kicker commit an offence at the same time:
  - If the kick is missed or saved, the kick is retaken and both players cautioned.
  - If the kick is scored, the goal is disallowed, the kick is recorded as missed and the kicker cautioned.

Explanation

- Most goalkeeper encroachment results from mis-anticipating when the ball will be kicked, so the goalkeeper should be warned for a first offence but must be cautioned for any further offence(s) at the retaken kick and/or any subsequent kick.
- When (rarely) the goalkeeper and the kicker offend at exactly the same time, the kicker should be penalised, as it is the ‘illegal’ feinting that causes the goalkeeper’s encroachment.

Law 11 – Offside

2. Offside offence

Amended text

A player in an offside position receiving the ball from an opponent who deliberately plays the ball (except from a deliberate save by any opponent), including by deliberate handball, is not considered to have gained an advantage, unless it was a deliberate save by any opponent.

Explanation

Clarification that deliberate handball by a defender is considered ‘deliberate play’ for offside. As ‘legal’ deliberate play (e.g. a kick or header) causes a player in an offside position to no longer be offside, ‘illegal’ play should have the same outcome.
Except for the above offences, it is not usually an offence if the ball touches a player’s hand/arm:

(…)

**Explanation**

Clarification that:

- if an attacking player accidentally touches the ball with their hand/arm and the ball then goes to another attacking player and the attacking team immediately scores, this is a handball offence;
- it is not an offence if, after an accidental handball, the ball travels some distance (pass or dribble) and/or there are several passes before the goal or goal-scoring opportunity.
1. Direct free kick – Handling the ball

**Amended text**

The goalkeeper has the same restrictions on handling the ball as any other player outside the penalty area. If the goalkeeper handles the ball inside their penalty area when not permitted to do so, an indirect free kick is awarded but there is no disciplinary sanction. However, if the offence is playing the ball a second time (with or without the hand/arm) after a restart before it touches another player, the goalkeeper must be sanctioned if the offence stops a promising attack or denies an opponent or the opposing team a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity.

**Explanation**

If a goalkeeper deliberately plays the ball a second time at a restart (before it has touched another player) and stops a promising attack or denies a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity, the goalkeeper should be cautioned (YC) or sent off (RC). This applies even if the second touch was with the hand/arm, as the offence is not ‘handball’ but ‘illegally’ playing the ball a second time.

3. Disciplinary action – Delaying the restart of play to show a card

**Amended text**

Once the referee has decided to caution or send off a player, play must not be restarted until the sanction has been administered, unless the non-offending team takes a quick free kick, has a clear goal-scoring opportunity and the referee has not started the disciplinary sanction procedure. The sanction is administered at the next stoppage; if the offence was denying the opposing team an obvious goal-scoring opportunity, the player is cautioned; if the offence interfered with or stopped a promising attack, the player is not cautioned.

**Explanation**

If the referee allows a ‘quick’ free kick after a DOGSO offence, the (delayed) RC becomes a YC, so to be consistent, if the referee allows a ‘quick’ free kick after an offence which interfered with or stopped a promising attack, the (delayed) YC should not be issued.
3. Disciplinary action – Advantage

**Amended text**

If the referee plays the advantage for an offence for which a caution/sending-off would have been issued had play been stopped, this caution/sending-off must be issued when the ball is next out of play. **However, if the offence was denying the opposing team** except for the denial of an obvious goal-scoring opportunity, **when the player is cautioned for unsporting behaviour; if the offence was interfering with or stopping a promising attack, the player is not cautioned.**

**Explanation**

If the referee plays advantage for a DOGSO offence, the RC becomes a YC, so to be consistent, if the referee plays advantage for an offence which interfered with or stopped a promising attack, the YC should not be issued.

3. Disciplinary action – Cautionable offences

**Amended text**

A player is cautioned if guilty of:

(…)

• failing to respect the required distance when play is restarted with a dropped ball, corner kick, free kick or throw-in

**Explanation**

Inclusion of dropped ball in cautionable offences for ‘failing to respect the required distance’.

3. Disciplinary action – Cautions for unsporting behaviour

**Amended text**

There are different circumstances when a player must be cautioned for unsporting behaviour, including if a player:

(…)

• commits a foul any other offence which interferes with or stops a promising attack, except where the referee awards a penalty kick for an offence which was an attempt to play the ball

**Explanation**

A promising attack can be stopped or interfered with by an offence which is not a foul challenge (e.g. ‘illegally’ playing the ball a second time after a restart), so the wording now includes all such offences other than handball, which is covered in the previous bullet point.
Law 14 – The Penalty Kick

2. Offences and sanctions

Amended text

(...)
If, before the ball is in play, one of the following occurs:
(...)
• the goalkeeper offends:
  • if the ball enters the goal, a goal is awarded
  • if the ball misses the goal or rebounds from the crossbar or goalpost(s), the kick is only retaken if the goalkeeper’s offence clearly impacted on the kicker
  • if the ball is prevented from entering the goal by the goalkeeper, the kick is retaken
  If the goalkeeper’s offence results in the kick being retaken, the goalkeeper is warned for the first offence in the game and cautioned for any subsequent offence(s) in the game.
• the goalkeeper or a team-mate of the goalkeeper offends:
  • if the ball enters the goal, a goal is awarded
  • if the ball does not enter the goal, the kick is retaken; the goalkeeper is cautioned if responsible for the offence
• a player of both teams offends the Laws of the Game, the kick is retaken unless a player commits a more serious offence (e.g. ‘illegal’ feinting)
• if both the goalkeeper and the kicker commit an offence at the same time:
  • if the kick is missed or saved, the kick is retaken and both players cautioned
  • if the kick is scored, the goal is disallowed, the kicker is cautioned and play restarts with an indirect free kick to the defending team

Explanation

• Confirmation (as outlined in IFAB Circular no. 17 – August 2019) that if the goalkeeper offends at the taking of a penalty kick and the ball misses the goal or rebounds from the goalposts or crossbar (i.e. the goalkeeper does not ‘save’ the kick), the goalkeeper is not penalised unless the goalkeeper’s action(s) had a clear impact on the kicker.
• Most goalkeeper encroachment results from mis-anticipating when the ball will be kicked, so the goalkeeper should not be cautioned for a first offence but must be cautioned for any further offence(s) at that kick and/or any subsequent kick.
• If the kicker and goalkeeper offend at exactly the same time (a rare event), the goalkeeper’s offence is usually caused by the kicker’s ‘illegal’ feinting, so the kicker is penalised.
### 3. Summary table

#### Amended table

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Outcomes of the penalty kick</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Goal</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encroachment by attacking player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encroachment by defending player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Encroachment by defending and attacking player</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Offence by goalkeeper</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td></td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Goalkeeper and kicker offend at the same time</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Ball kicked backwards</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Illegal’ feinting</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Wrong kicker</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>
### VAR protocol and handbook updates

#### 4. Procedures – Check

**Amended text**

- If the ‘check’ indicates a probable ‘clear and obvious error’ or ‘serious missed incident’, the VAR will communicate this information (but not the decision to be taken) to the referee, who will then decide whether or not to initiate a ‘review’.

**Explanation**

Reference to the final decision is removed, as the VAR is permitted to give advice to the referee about the decision but the referee always makes the final decision.

#### 4. Procedures – Review

**Amended text**

- If play has not already stopped, the referee stops play when the ball is next in a neutral zone/situation (usually when neither team is in an attacking move) and shows the ‘TV signal’.

- In both situations, the referee must indicate that a ‘review’ will take place by clearly showing the ‘TV signal’ (outline of a TV screen).

- The VAR describes to the referee what can be seen on the TV replay(s) but not the decision to be taken, and the referee then:
  - shows the ‘TV signal’ (if not already shown) and goes to the referee review area to view replay footage – ‘on-field review’ (OFR) – before making a final decision. The other match officials will not review the footage unless, in exceptional circumstances, asked to do so by the referee
  or
  - makes a final decision based on the referee’s own perception and the information from the VAR, and, where appropriate, input from other match officials – VAR-only review

- At the end of both review processes, the referee must show the ‘TV signal’ again, immediately followed by the final decision

- For subjective decisions, e.g. intensity of a foul challenge, interference at offside, handball considerations, an ‘on-field review’ (OFR) is often appropriate

- For factual decisions, e.g. position of an offence or player (offside), point of contact (handball/foul), location (inside or outside the penalty area), ball out of play etc. a VAR-only review is usually appropriate but an ‘on-field review’ (OFR) can be used for a factual decision if it will help manage the players/match or ‘sell’ the decision (e.g. a crucial match-deciding decision late in the game)

**Explanation**

- Only one ‘TV signal’ is needed for a ‘VAR-only review’ (unless a signal is also required after stopping play).

- Reorganising the text emphasises that ‘on-field reviews’ (OFRs) are expected when the incident/decision is non-factual.

**Details of all Law changes**
## Changes to the Glossary

### New text

#### Holding offence

A holding offence occurs only when a player’s contact with an opponent’s body or equipment impedes the opponent’s movement.

#### Restart position

A player’s position at a restart is determined by the position of their feet or any part of their body which is touching the ground, except as outlined in Law 11 – Offside.

## Changes to Practical Guidelines for Match Officials

### Penalty kick (p.212)

#### Amended text

If the goalkeeper blatantly moves off the goal line before the ball is kicked and a goal is not scored prevents a goal from being scored, the AR must raise the flag should indicate the encroachment according to the pre-match instructions from the referee.

## 5. Injuries (p.222)

#### Additional subheading and text

The safety of the players is of paramount importance and the referee should facilitate the work of the medical personnel, especially in the case of a serious injury and/or an assessment of a head injury. This will include respecting and assisting with agreed assessment/treatment protocols.

### 5. 6. Treatment/assessment after a caution/sending-off (p.222)

#### Amended subheading number and text

(…)

As a general guide, (…) ready for play to restart, except in the case of a serious injury and/or an assessment of a head injury.