

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~~ players' equipment is not dangerous and ~~must bear the following mark~~ meets one of the following standards: IMS (International Match Standard) or FIFA Quality.



(this diagram is to be deleted)

~~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~~ must 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 to~~ the requirements in terms of reliability and accuracy of positional data in football:



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.

Explanation

Cautions (YCs) and warnings issued during the match (including during extra time) are not carried forward because kicks from the penalty mark (KFPM) are not part of the match. A player who receives a YC during both the match and the KFPM is not sent off (during the KFPM or for disciplinary purposes).

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~~ 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.

Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct

1. Direct free kick – Handling the ball

New text and diagram

For the purposes of determining handball offences, the upper boundary of the arm is in line with the bottom of the armpit.

Explanation

For the purposes of handball, the arm starts at the bottom/end of the armpit, as shown in the diagram on page 14.

1. Direct free kick – Handling the ball

Amended text

It is an offence if a player:

- deliberately touches the ball with their hand/arm, including moving the hand/arm towards the ball
- scores in the opponents' goal directly from their hand/arm, even if accidental, including by the goalkeeper
- gains possession/control of after the ball after it has touched their or a team-mate's hand/arm, even if accidental, and then the player immediately:
 - scores in the opponents' goal
 - creates a goal-scoring opportunity

~~It is usually an offence if a player:-~~

- touches the ball with their hand/arm when:
 - (...)

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

	Outcome of the penalty kick	
	Goal	No Goal
Encroachment by attacking player	Penalty is retaken	Indirect free kick
Encroachment by defending player	Goal	Penalty is retaken
<u>Encroachment by defending and attacking player</u>	<u>Penalty is retaken</u>	<u>Penalty is retaken</u>
Offence by goalkeeper	Goal	<u>Not saved: penalty is not retaken (unless kicker is impacted)</u> <u>Saved: penalty is retaken and warning for goalkeeper; caution for any further offence(s)</u>
<u>Goalkeeper and kicker offend at the same time</u>	<u>Indirect free kick and caution for kicker</u>	<u>Indirect free kick and caution for kicker</u>
Ball kicked backwards	Indirect free kick	Indirect free kick
Illegal' feinting	Indirect free kick and caution for kicker	Indirect free kick and caution for kicker
Wrong kicker	Indirect free kick and caution for wrong kicker	Indirect free kick and caution for wrong kicker

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.

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.

