

Laws of the Game in Brief

Introduction

Students at English boarding schools played widely varying forms of football in the 19th century. Rules were unwritten and differed greatly from place to place. This wasn't a problem as long as matches remained strictly local affairs. By the mid-1800s, however, alums of different schools sought to organize games against one another and the lack of common rules became a serious obstacle.

Things began to change in 1863, when delegates from several London teams formed the Football Association (FA) and adopted the first version of the *Laws of the Game*. Association football gradually spread around the world and the FA's laws became the universal rules of soccer.

The original laws have grown and changed during the past century and a half. Each year, the International Football Association Board (IFAB) considers proposed modifications and adopts those which meet the evolving needs of the game.

Today soccer has 17 laws that promote three fundamental principles: safety, fair play, and enjoyment of the game. Referees and others who study the laws may find it helpful to consider them in three broad categories:

Components of the Game

Law 1	The Field of Play
Law 2	The Ball
Law 3	The Players
Law 4	The Players' Equipment
Law 5	The Referee
Law 6	The Other Match Officials

Mechanics of Play

Law 7	The Duration of the Match
Law 8	The Start and Restart of Play
Law 9	The Ball In and Out of Play
Law 10	Determining the Outcome of a Match
Law 13	Free Kicks
Law 14	The Penalty Kick
Law 15	The Throw-in
Law 16	The Goal Kick
Law 17	The Corner Kick

Encouraging Fair Play

Law 11	Offside
Law 12	Fouls and Misconduct

The following pages contain abbreviated versions of the laws that provide a quick overview of their main concepts. For full details, see the complete text of the *Laws of the Game*.

Law 1 – The Field of Play

The field must be rectangular in shape. The touch lines (side boundaries) must be longer than the goal lines (end boundaries).

Markings include a halfway line, center mark, and center circle in midfield; a goal area, penalty area, and penalty arc at each end; and an arc in each corner of the field.

The dimensions of the field, its markings, and the size of the goals vary depending on the age of the players.

The field, goals, and corner flags must be safe. If they are not safe, the referee does not allow the game to begin. If they become unsafe during the match, the referee stops play until the problem is corrected.

Many professional stadiums use goal line technology to confirm whether goals have been scored.

Law 2 – The Ball

The ball must be spherical in shape, properly inflated, and safe for the players.

The size of the ball varies depending on the age of the players.

If the ball becomes defective or unsafe during the match, the referee stops play, obtains suitable replacement ball, and restarts the game with a dropped ball.

Law 3 – The Players

At any given point during a match, the *players* are those team members who are allowed to participate on the field. *Substitutes* are those team members who are not allowed on the field at that time.

The number of players varies depending on their age.

One player on each team must be a goalkeeper. A player already on the field may change places with his or her team's goalkeeper only when play has stopped and with the permission of the referee.

Substitutes must obey the rules just like players. They may replace players only when play has stopped and with the permission of the referee.

Substitution rules vary.

- Professional games allow a limited number of substitutes who may enter the game during any stoppage of play. Once replaced, professional players may not re-enter the game.
- Most adult amateur and youth matches permit unlimited substitutions. Subs may enter and re-enter the game repeatedly, but only during specified stoppages of play.

Substitutes must wait at the halfway line until the referee gives permission for them to enter the field.

Law 4 – The Players’ Equipment

The basic compulsory equipment for each player consists of a shirt, shorts, socks, shinguards, and shoes.

Goalkeepers must wear shirts that distinguish them from the other players and the match officials.

Players must not wear anything that is dangerous to anyone on the field.

- Shinguards and shoes must be safe in the opinion of the referee.
- Shinguards must be worn under the socks.
- Jewelry is forbidden and covering it with tape is not permitted.

Some leagues allow medical alert jewelry or clothing required for religious reasons, provided that the items can be worn safely.

Law 5 – The Referee

The referee has full authority to manage the game.

- The referee’s authority begins when he or she arrives at the field and continues while play is stopped for any reason and during any tie-breaking procedures.
- The referee’s authority ends when the game is completely over and the teams have left the field.

The referee:

- Enforces the Laws of the Game.
- Controls the game in cooperation with the other match officials.
- Ensures that the field, ball, and players’ equipment are safe and legal.
- Serves as timekeeper and keeps a record of the match.
- Allows no unauthorized persons to enter the field of play.
- Stops play if there is a serious injury.
- Allows play to continue if an injury is not serious.
- Requires that players who are bleeding or have blood on their uniforms leave the field.
- Stops play if players are guilty of fouls or misconduct.
- Refrains from penalizing dubious or trifling offenses.
- Allows play to continue after an offense if the non-offending team will benefit from the advantage.
- Penalizes the offense if the anticipated advantage does not occur within a few seconds.
- Cautions players, substitutes, or team officials who are guilty of misconduct and shows a yellow card.
- Sends off players, substitutes, or team officials who are guilty of misconduct and shows a red card.
- Acts on the advice of other match officials regarding incidents that the referee did not see.
- Supervises and/or indicates the restart of play.
- Stops, suspends, or terminates the game if necessary due to darkness, unsafe field conditions, interference by spectators, or other causes.
- Provides the official report of the game.

Referee decisions are final and cannot be changed after the game has been restarted.

Law 6 – The Other Match Officials

Other officials may assist the referee to control the match in accordance with the Laws of the Game. The referee always has the final decision.

Two assistant referees (ARs) are standard for all professional games and most adult amateur and older youth matches. They patrol opposite touch lines and use flags to indicate:

- When the ball leaves the field.
- Which team is entitled to the throw-in, goal kick, or corner kick.
- When a player in an offside position may be penalized.
- When a team requests a substitution.
- When a foul or misconduct occurs and the AR has a clearer view than the referee.

Club lines are volunteers who help the referee in adult amateur and youth games if no trained ARs are available. Their duties are limited to indicating when the ball leaves the field.

Some matches have a fourth official who is available to replace another member of the crew if the referee or an AR cannot start or continue the game. The fourth official also:

- Supervises the substitution procedure.
- Indicates the minimum amount of time that the referee intends to add at the end of each period.
- Manages the behavior of substitutes, coaches, and other bench personnel.
- Advises the referee when a foul or misconduct occurs and the fourth official has a clearer view.

Professional matches also may include a video assistant referee (VAR) who notifies the referee of “clear and obvious errors” and “serious missed incidents”.

Law 7 – The Duration of the Match

A match consists of two equal periods separated by a halftime break.

The lengths of the periods and the halftime interval vary depending on the age of the players.

The referee adds time to each period to compensate for time lost due to injuries, deliberate time-wasting, and other causes. The amount of added time is left to the discretion of the referee.

A penalty kick awarded before time runs out must be completed, even if this requires extending the period.

Law 8 – The Start and Restart of Play

A coin toss determines which direction each team will attack and which team kicks off to start the first half. After halftime, teams change ends and the opposing team kicks off.

A kick-off starts each period and restarts play after a goal has been scored.

- Opposing players must remain at least 10 yards from the ball. (This distance varies for younger players.)
- The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.
- If the kicker touches the ball again before another player has touched it, the referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposing team.
- The kicker may score directly from a kick-off.

Direct and indirect free kicks, penalty kicks, throw-ins, goal kicks, and corner kicks are other restarts. (See Laws 13-17.)

A dropped ball is the restart when the referee stops play and the Laws do not require one of the above restarts.

- The referee drops the ball for the goalkeeper if, when play was stopped, the ball was in the penalty area or the last touch of the ball was in the penalty area. Otherwise the referee drops the ball for one player of the team that last touched the ball.
- All other players must remain at least 4 meters from the ball until it is in play.
- The ball is in play when it touches the ground.
- A player may not score directly from a dropped ball.

If an offense occurs when the ball is out of play, this does not change how play is restarted.

Law 9 – The Ball In and Out of Play

The ball is out of play when:

- It passes completely over the goal line or touch line, on the ground or in the air.
- Play has been stopped by the referee.
- It touches a match official and enters the goal, possession changes, or a promising attack starts.

The ball is in play at all other times when it touches a match official and when it rebounds off a goal post, crossbar, or corner flag post and remains on the field of play.

Law 10 – Determining the Outcome of a Match

A goal is scored when the ball passes completely over the goal line, between the goal posts and under the crossbar, provided that the scoring team has committed no offense.

The team scoring the greater number of goals is the winner. If both teams score an equal number of goals, or if neither team scores, the match is considered a draw or tie.

Competitions may use the following procedures to determine the winners of tied games:

- Away goals rule (for tournaments in which teams play each other at home and away).
- Two equal periods of extra time.
- Kicks from the penalty mark.

A combination of the above procedures may be used.

Law 11 – Offside

A player is in an offside position if:

- He or she is in the opposing team's half of the field
and
- He or she is nearer to the opposing team's goal line than both the ball and the second-to-last opponent.

A player is not in an offside position if:

- He or she is level with the second-to-last opponent
or
- He or she is level with the last two opponents.

It is not an offense to be in an offside position. A player in an offside position is penalized only if, at the moment when a teammate plays or touches the ball, he or she becomes involved in active play by:

- Interfering with play (touching the ball)
or
- Interfering with an opponent (challenging an opponent for the ball or obstructing an opponent's movement or line of vision)
or
- Gaining an advantage by being in that position (playing the ball after it has rebounded or deflected off a goal post, crossbar, opponent, or match official).

There is no offside offense if a player receives the ball directly from a throw-in, goal kick, or corner kick.

Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct

Direct and indirect free kicks and penalty kicks can be awarded only for offenses that occur while the ball is in play.

Direct Free Kick Offenses

The referee awards a direct free kick to the opposing team if a player commits one of the following offenses:

- Kicks or attempts to kick an opponent.
- Trips or attempts to trip an opponent.
- Tackles or challenges an opponent.
- Jumps at an opponent.
- Charges an opponent.
- Impedes an opponent with contact.
- Holds an opponent.
- Pushes an opponent.
- Strikes an opponent.
- Handles the ball (except for goalkeepers in their own penalty areas).
- Throws an object at an opponent, a match official, or the ball.
- Bites or spits at someone.

The referee awards a penalty kick to the opposing team if a player commits a direct free kick offense in his or her own penalty area.

Indirect Free Kick Offenses

The referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposing team if a player commits one of the following offenses:

- Plays in a dangerous manner.
- Impedes the progress of an opponent without contact.
- Prevents the opposing goalkeeper from releasing the ball.
- Shows dissent or uses offensive, insulting, or abusive language and/or gestures.

The referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposing team if a goalkeeper commits one of the following offenses:

- Controls the ball with the hand/arm for more than six seconds before releasing it.
- Touches the ball with the hand/arm after releasing it and before it has touched another player.
- Touches the ball with the hand/arm after a teammate deliberately kicks it to the goalkeeper.
- Touches the ball with the hand/arm after receiving it directly from a throw-in taken by a teammate.

Misconduct can occur separately or together with a foul, on or off the field, when the ball is in or out of play.

Cautionable Offenses

The referee cautions and shows a yellow card to a player who is guilty of one of the following offenses:

- Delays the restart of play.
- Shows dissent by word or action.
- Enters, re-enters, or deliberately leaves the field without the referee's permission.
- Fails to respect the required distance when play is restarted with a free kick, throw-in, or corner kick.
- Commits persistent offenses.
- Engages in unsporting behavior.

The referee cautions and shows a yellow card to a substitute who is guilty of one of the following offenses:

- Delays the restart of play.
- Shows dissent by word or action.
- Enters, re-enters, or deliberately leaves the field without the referee's permission.
- Engages in unsporting behavior.

The referee cautions and shows a yellow card to a team official who is guilty of one of the following offenses:

- Clearly/persistently fails to respect the confines of his or her team's technical area.
- Deliberately enters the technical area of the opposing team.
- Delays the restart of play by his or her team.
- Shows dissent by word or action.
- Excessively/persistently gestures for a yellow or red card.
- Gestures or acts in a provocative or inflammatory manner.
- Engages in persistent unacceptable behavior.
- Shows a lack of respect for the game.

Sending Off Offenses

The referee sends off and shows a red card to a player or substitute who commits any of the following offenses:

- Engages in serious foul play.
- Engages in violent conduct.
- Uses offensive, insulting, or abusive language and/or gestures.
- Denies a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity to the opposing team by handling or another offense punishable by a free kick.
- Bites or spits at someone.
- Receives a second caution in the same match.

The referee sends off and shows a red card to a team official who commits any of the following offenses:

- Delays the start of play by the opposing team.
- Deliberately leaves the technical area to show dissent or act in a provocative or inflammatory manner.
- Enters the opposing team's technical area in an aggressive or confrontational manner.
- Deliberately throws or kicks an object onto the field of play.
- Enters the field of play to confront a match official or interfere with play, an opposing player, or a match official.
- Engages in violent conduct.
- Displays aggressive behavior towards another person.
- Uses offensive, insulting, or abusive language and/or gestures.
- Uses unauthorized electronic or communication equipment.
- Receives a second caution in the same match.

Law 13 – Free Kicks

The referee awards free kicks for fouls and for technical offenses such as offside and second touch violations.

- Opposing players must remain at least 10 yards from the ball. (This distance varies for younger players.)
- The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.
- If the kicker touches the ball again before another player has touched it, the referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposing team.
- The kicker may score directly from a direct free kick (i.e., no other player needs to touch or play the ball) but only against the opposing team.
- The kicker may not score directly from an indirect free kick. A goal counts only if another player touches or plays the ball before it enters the net.

The referee indicates an indirect free kick by raising an arm straight overhead. The referee maintains this signal until another player touches the ball or it leaves the field of play.

Law 14 – The Penalty Kick

The referee awards a penalty kick to the opposing team if a player commits a direct free kick offense in his or her own penalty area.

- The opposing goalkeeper must remain on the goal line between the goal posts.
- All other players except the kicker must remain outside the penalty area, outside the penalty arc, and behind the ball.
- The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.
- If the kicker touches the ball again before another player has touched it, the referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposing team.
- The kicker may score directly from a penalty kick.

If an attacking player commits an offense and a goal is scored, the penalty kick is retaken. If an attacking player commits an offense and a goal is not scored, the referee awards an indirect free kick to the defending team.

If a defending player commits an offense and a goal is scored, the goal counts. If a defending player commits an offense and a goal is not scored, the penalty kick is retaken.

If players from both teams commit offenses, the penalty kick is retaken.

Law 15 – The Throw-in

The referee awards a throw-in to the opponents of the player who last touched the ball before it passed completely over the touch line, on the ground or in the air.

- The thrower must stand with at least part of each foot on the ground, either on the touch line or outside the field, and deliver the ball from behind and over the head.
- Opposing players must remain at least 2 meters away and must not distract or interfere with the thrower.
- The ball is in play when it enters the field.
- If the thrower touches the ball again before another player touches it, the referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposing team.
- The thrower may not score directly from a throw-in. A goal counts only if another player touches or plays the ball before it enters the net.

Law 16 – The Goal Kick

The referee awards a goal kick to the defending team when the ball passes completely over the goal line, on the ground or in the air, having last touched a player of the attacking team.

- Opposing players must remain outside the penalty area.
- The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.
- If the kicker touches the ball again before another player touches it, the referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposing team.
- The kicker may score directly from a goal kick.

Law 17 – The Corner Kick

The referee awards a corner kick to the attacking team when the ball passes completely over the goal line, on the ground or in the air, having last touched a player of the defending team.

- Opposing players must remain at least 10 yards from the ball. (This distance varies for younger players)
- The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.
- If the kicker touches the ball again before another player touches it, the referee awards an indirect free kick to the opposing team.
- The kicker may score directly from a corner kick.