

Law changes 2025/26

Outline summary of Law changes

Law 3 – The Players

- Competitions have the option of implementing the ‘Only the captain’ guidelines

Law 5 – The Referee

- Signal to be used by referees to count down the last five seconds of the eight-second restriction on goalkeepers controlling the ball with their hand(s)/arm(s)

Law 8 – The Start and Restart of Play – Dropped ball

- If, when play was stopped, the ball was:
 - inside the penalty area – the ball is dropped for the defending team goalkeeper in their penalty area
 - outside the penalty area – the ball is dropped for a player of the team that has or would have gained possession if this is clear to the referee; otherwise, it is dropped for a player of the team that last touched it. The ball is dropped at its position when play was stopped

Law 9 – The Ball in and out of Play

- Indirect free kick and no disciplinary sanction when a team official, substitute, substituted or sent-off player or player who is temporarily off the field of play touches the ball as it is leaving the field of play and there is no intention to interfere unfairly

Law 11 – Offside

- When the goalkeeper throws the ball, the last point of contact should be used for the purpose of determining an offside position

Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct

- A goalkeeper who controls the ball with their hand(s)/arm(s) for more than eight seconds will be penalised, with a corner kick being awarded to the other team

Law 16 – The Goal Kick and Law 17 – The Corner Kick

- Reference to other Laws detailing situations which result in a goal kick or corner kick

Video assistant referee (VAR) protocol

- Competitions have the option for the referee to make an announcement after a VAR ‘review’ or lengthy VAR ‘check’



Details of all Law changes

The following are the changes to the Laws of the Game for the 2025/26 edition. For each change, the amended or additional wording is provided together with the previous wording, where appropriate, followed by an explanation of the change.

Key

The main Law changes are underlined in yellow and highlighted in the margin. Editorial changes are underlined.

YC = yellow card (caution); RC = red card (sending-off).

Law 3 – The Players

10. Team captain

Additional text

Each team must have a captain on the field of play who wears an identifying armband. The team captain has no special status or privileges but has a degree of responsibility for the behaviour of the team.
Competitions may implement the ‘Only the captain’ guidelines listed under ‘Notes and modifications’.

Explanation

Competitions are encouraged to use the ‘Only the captain’ guidelines to improve on-field behaviour and to enhance cooperation and strengthen the rapport between the players and the referee.

Law 5 – The Referee

6. Referee signals

(...)



Countdown for the last five seconds of the eight-second restriction on goalkeepers controlling the ball with their hand(s)/arm(s)

Law 8 – The Start and Restart of Play

2. Dropped ball

Amended text

Procedure

- ~~The ball is dropped for the defending team goalkeeper in their penalty area if, when play was stopped:~~
 - ~~the ball was in the penalty area or~~
 - ~~the last touch of the ball was in the penalty area~~
- ~~In all other cases, the referee drops the ball for one player of the team that last touched the ball at the position where it last touched a player, an outside agent or, as outlined in Law 9.1, a match official~~
- If, when play was stopped:
 - the ball was inside the penalty area, the referee drops it for the defending team goalkeeper in their penalty area

- the ball was outside the penalty area, the referee drops it for one player of the team that has or would have gained possession if this can be determined by the referee; otherwise, it is dropped for one player of the team that last touched it. The ball is dropped at its position when play was stopped
- (...)

Explanation

There are times when the ball would clearly have gone to an opponent of the team that last touched the ball. In such instances, it is fairer for the ball to be dropped for the team that would have gained possession, as long as this is clear to the referee. Outside the penalty area, the ball will now be dropped at its position when play was stopped.

Law 9 – The Ball in and out of Play

2. Ball in play

Additional text

The ball is in play at all other times (...) and remains on the field of play. If, without intending to interfere with play unfairly, a team official, substitute, substituted or sent-off player or player who is temporarily off the field of play (injury, adjusting equipment etc.) touches the ball while it is still in play but when it is clearly leaving the field of play, this is penalised with an indirect free kick; there is no sanction.

Explanation

There are times when a coach, substitute or player who is temporarily off the field of play (among others) touches the ball as it is going out of play with the intention of helping the game restart quickly. In such cases, an indirect free kick will be awarded but there will be no disciplinary sanction, unless such a sanction is to be issued for persistently leaving the technical area.

Law 11 – Offside

2. Offside offence

Additional text

*The first point of contact of the 'play' or 'touch' of the ball should be used; however, when the ball is thrown by the goalkeeper, the last point of contact should be used.

Explanation

The first point of contact with the ball is used when determining whether a player is in an offside position. However, when the ball is thrown by the goalkeeper, the last point of contact should be used, as this provides a clearer and more consistent reference point.

Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct

2. Indirect free kick

Amended text

(...)

An indirect free kick is awarded if a goalkeeper, inside their penalty area, commits any of the following offences:

- 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, unless the goalkeeper has clearly kicked or attempted to kick the ball to release it into play, after:
 - it has been deliberately kicked to the goalkeeper by a team-mate
 - receiving it directly from a throw-in taken by a team-mate

A goalkeeper is considered to be in control of the ball with the hand(s) when:

- the ball is between the hands or between the hand and any surface (e.g. ground, own body) or by touching it with any part of the hands or arms, except if the ball rebounds from the goalkeeper or the goalkeeper has made a save
- holding the ball in the outstretched open hand
- bouncing it on the ground or throwing it in the air

~~A goalkeeper cannot be challenged by an opponent when in control of the ball with the hand(s).~~

(...)

3. Corner kick

A corner kick is awarded if a goalkeeper, inside their penalty area, controls the ball with their hand(s)/arm(s) for more than eight seconds before releasing it. A goalkeeper is considered to be in control of the ball with their hand(s)/arm(s) when:

- the ball is between their hands/arms or between their hand(s)/arm(s) and any surface (e.g. ground, own body)
- holding the ball in their outstretched open hand(s)
- bouncing it on the ground or throwing it in the air

The referee will decide when the goalkeeper has control of the ball and the eight seconds begin and will visually count down the last five seconds with a raised hand.

A goalkeeper cannot be challenged by an opponent when in control of the ball with their hand(s)/arm(s).

Explanation

- If a goalkeeper has control of the ball with their hand(s)/arm(s) for more than eight seconds, the referee will now award a corner kick (rather than an indirect free kick) on the side of the field closest to the goalkeeper's position when penalised. There is no disciplinary action unless the goalkeeper repeatedly commits the offence.
- To assist the goalkeeper, the referee will signal the final five seconds using a raised hand.

Renumbering of the following subsections as follows:

4. Disciplinary action

5. Restart of play after fouls and misconduct

Law 16 – The Goal Kick

Introduction

Additional text

A goal kick is awarded when the whole of the ball passes over the goal line, on the ground or in the air, having last touched a player of the attacking team, and a goal is not scored (see also Laws 8, 10, 13 and 15).

Law 17 – The Corner Kick

Introduction

Additional text

A corner kick is awarded when the whole of the ball passes over the goal line, on the ground or in the air, having last touched a player of the defending team, and a goal is not scored (see also Laws 8, 12, 13, 15 and 16).

Video assistant referee (VAR) protocol

4. Procedures

Additional text

Final decision

- When the review process is completed, the referee must show the 'TV signal' and communicate the final decision; competitions may also implement a system in which the referee publicly explains and announces decisions following a VAR 'review' or lengthy VAR 'check', as outlined in the FIFA guidelines and the VAR Handbook
- (...)

Explanation

Following successful trials, competitions now have the option of the referee announcing and explaining decisions after a VAR 'review' or lengthy VAR 'check'.

Glossary – Football terms

Dropped ball

Amended text

~~A method of restarting play – the referee drops the ball for one player of the team that last touched the ball (except in the penalty area where the ball is dropped for the goalkeeper); the ball is in play when it touches the ground~~
The restart when play has been stopped by the referee without an offence having been committed, e.g. due to injury, a defective ball etc. (see Law 8)

Practical guidelines for match officials – Positioning, movement and teamwork

2. Positioning and teamwork

Additional text

Penalty kick

The AR must be positioned at the intersection of the goal line and the penalty area.
Where the goal line can be checked for goalkeeper encroachment and goal/no goal through the use of technology (e.g. GLT, the VAR system), it is recommended that the assistant referee be positioned on the touchline, in line with the penalty mark (which is the offside line), as being on the goal line creates a risk that they may not be able to get back into a position to judge offside if the kick rebounds.
 Where there are AARs, the AAR must be positioned at the intersection of the goal line and the goal area and the AR is positioned in line with the penalty mark ~~(which is the offside line).~~

