



Introduction



The philosophy and spirit of the Laws

Football is the greatest sport on earth. It is played in every country and at many different levels. The Laws of the Game are the same for all football throughout the world from the FIFA World Cup™ Final through to a game between young children in a remote village.

That the same Laws apply in every match in every confederation, country, town and village throughout the world is a considerable strength which must be preserved. This is also an opportunity which must be harnessed for the good of football everywhere.

Football must have Laws which keep the game 'fair' as a crucial foundation of the beauty of the 'beautiful game' is its fairness – this is a vital feature of the 'spirit' of the game. The best matches are those where the referee is rarely needed as the players play with respect for each other, the match officials and the Laws.

The integrity of the Laws, and the referees who apply them, must always be protected and respected. All those in authority, especially coaches and team captains, have a clear responsibility to the game to respect the match officials and their decisions.

Managing changes to the Laws

The first 'universal' football Laws were drawn up in 1863 and in 1886 The International Football Association Board (The IFAB) was founded by the four British football associations (The FA, Scottish FA, FA of Wales and Irish FA) as the worldwide body with sole responsibility for developing and preserving the Laws of the Game. FIFA joined The IFAB in 1913.

For a Law to be changed, The IFAB must be convinced that the change will benefit the game. This means that the potential change will usually be tested, as with the video assistant referee (VAR) and additional substitute in extra time experiments. For every proposed change, as seen in the significant modernising revision of the Laws of the Game for 2016/17 and 2017/18, the focus must be on: fairness, integrity, respect, safety, the enjoyment of the participants and how technology can benefit the game. The Laws must also encourage participation from everyone, regardless of background or ability.

Although accidents occur, the Laws should make the game as safe as possible. This requires players to show respect for their opponents and referees should create a safe environment by dealing strongly with those whose play is too aggressive and dangerous. The Laws embody the unacceptability of unsafe play in their disciplinary phrases, e.g. 'reckless challenge' (caution = yellow card/YC) and 'endangering the safety of an opponent' or 'using excessive force' (sending-off = red card/RC).

Football must be attractive and enjoyable for players, match officials, coaches, as well as spectators, fans, administrators etc. The Laws must help make the game attractive and enjoyable so people, regardless of age, race, religion, culture, ethnicity, gender, sexual orientation, disability etc. want to take part and enjoy their involvement with football.

Football's Laws are relatively simple, compared to other team sports, but as many situations are 'subjective' and referees are human (and thus make mistakes) some decisions will inevitably cause debate and discussion. For some people, this discussion is part of the game's enjoyment and attraction but, whether decisions are right or wrong, the 'spirit' of the game requires that referees' decisions are always respected.

The Laws cannot deal with every possible situation, so where there is no direct provision in the Laws, The IFAB expects the referee to make a decision within the 'spirit' of the game – this often involves asking the question, "what would football want/expect?"

The IFAB will continue to engage with the global football family so changes to the Laws benefit football at all levels and in every corner of the world, and so the integrity of the game, the Laws and the referees is respected, valued and protected.

Background to the 2018/19 revision of the Laws

The 2016/17 revision of the Laws of the Game was probably the most far-reaching and comprehensive in The IFAB's history. The aim was to make the Laws clearer, more accessible and to ensure they reflect the needs of the modern game.

As with any large-scale revision, there is always a second 'follow up' stage and many of the changes for 2017/18 were clarifications which made the text clearer and/or easier to translate – most are the result of requests from individuals, groups and national FAs from around the world.

In addition to the clarifications, there were some changes which were extensions of principles established in the 2016/17 revision and the 2017 AGM also approved some significant changes to help develop and promote football, including:

- an extension of the flexibility of national FAs (and confederations and FIFA) to modify some of the 'organisational' Laws (e.g. increasing the maximum number of substitutes to five, except for the highest level) to help promote and develop the football for which they are responsible as The IFAB believes that national FAs know best what will benefit football in their country
- the introduction of temporary dismissals (sin bins) as a potential alternative sanction to a caution (YC) in youth, veterans, disability and grassroots (lowest levels) football
- extension of the use of return substitutes to youth, veterans and disability football (they are already permitted in grassroots football).

The Law changes for 2018/19 are mainly further refinements to the major revision and the inclusion, after rigorous testing, of 2 major options for competitions:

- the use of an additional substitute in extra time
- the use of video assistant referees (VARs), subject to permission from The IFAB and FIFA

The future

The IFAB's '*play fair!*' strategy for 2017-22 was established to examine and consider proposed changes to see if they will benefit the game. It has been well-received throughout the football world and there has been strong approval of its focus on three important areas:

- **Fairness and integrity**
 - will the proposed change strengthen the game's fairness and integrity on the field of play?
- **Universality and inclusion**
 - will the proposed change benefit football at all levels throughout the world?
 - will the proposed change encourage more people from all backgrounds and abilities to take part in and enjoy football?
- **The growth of technology**
 - will the proposed change have a positive impact on the game?

During 2018/19, The IFAB, working with its expert panels, will continue to consult widely on a number of important Law-related topics, including:

- Player behaviour, with special focus on:
 - the role of the captain
 - measures to tackle time-wasting
- A potentially fairer system of taking kicks from the penalty mark
- Potential use of red and yellow cards for non-playing members in the technical area
- Handball
- Offside

By focussing on fairness, universality and inclusion, and technology, The IFAB will continue to develop the Laws to promote a better game on every football field in every part of the world.

The IFAB has enjoyed engaging with people throughout the world and is always pleased and interested to receive suggestions or questions relating to the Laws of the Game. Indeed, many of the recent Law changes and topics in the '*play fair!*' strategy have come from suggestions from people from many different parts of the world. Please send your suggestions or questions to: lawenquiries@theifab.com