

Simplified Laws of the Game

THE RULES OF SOCCER

The rules of soccer are organized into 17 Laws of the Game that are published annually in a small booklet of less than 50 pages. Their brevity suggests simplicity, but a thorough understanding only comes with years of experience and shared interpretation. This document is an even simpler presentation of the laws that everyone involved in the game should know to appreciate the game. It is important to note that some laws may be modified for youth games to encourage player development.

LAW #1: THE FIELD OF PLAY

The soccer field, also known as the "pitch," must be rectangular with a length of 100 to 130 yards, and a width of 50 to 100 yards. The field must be longer than it is wide. With the proportions correct, junior fields can be significantly smaller depending on the age level and number of players. The longer boundary lines are called touch lines, and the shorter ones are called goal lines. A goal is centered on each goal line. The field is lined with goal areas, penalty areas, penalty spots, corner arcs, and a midline.

LAW #2: THE BALL

The ball must be round with a circumference of 27"-28" and a weight of 14-16 oz for regulation adult play. This is a "Size 5" ball. For medium-sized children (ages 7-12), "Size 4" balls are often used. The circumference is 25"-26" and the weight is 12-14 oz. For very small children (ages 4-7) a "Size 3" ball is often used. The circumference is 23"-25" and the weight is 10-12 oz.

LAW #3: THE NUMBER OF PLAYERS

In a regulation match, each side fields 11 players, one of whom must be designated as a goalkeeper, plus a limited number of eligible substitutes off the field. A limited number of substitutions are allowed, and a substituted player may take no further part in the match. Youth matches are often modified to allow fewer players on the field with unlimited substitutions where substituted players remain eligible to play. A complete roster of players and subs must be presented to the referee before the game starts (player passes are sometimes used instead). The referee must be notified and must indicate his permission to enter before a substitute can step onto the pitch. Players must leave the field before the substitute can enter. Any player sent off for misconduct (red carded) may not be replaced, and the team must play "short" for the remainder of the match.

LAW #4: THE PLAYERS' EQUIPMENT

The usual uniform of the soccer player is a jersey, shorts, socks, shin guards and shoes. Nothing potentially injurious

to another player may be worn. All jewelry is considered dangerous. No jewelry should be allowed, period, in any youth or amateur play. Cleats are normally rubber, plastic, aluminum or leather. The goalkeeper must wear a different color than the other members of the team. Shin guards must give a reasonable degree of protection and be entirely covered by socks.

LAW #5: THE REFEREE

The referee is in charge of all game activity and is to make sure each team abides by the Laws of the Game. He is to stop, suspend, or terminate a match as appropriate. The referee may change his initial decision on any matter, so long as play has not restarted. His decisions are final. It is the referee's responsibility to keep the game clock, and enforce proper game conduct by players, substitutes and team officials. He can send off players or others who commit an act of misconduct. His authority extends from the time he arrives in the area to the time he leaves.

LAW #6: THE ASSISTANT REFEREES

There are usually two Assistant Referees (ARs), one for each touch line. Their main responsibility is to assist the referee by indicating ball out of bounds, offside, corner kicks, and goal kicks; and to assist in enforcing the laws by indicating fouls the referee cannot see. ARs assist the referee by indicating their opinion, but the decision is still the referee's, if he saw the event or incident. ARs do not have whistles and cannot stop play. When no registered referees are available for this function, club linesmen may be used. The referee can only use club linesmen for out of bounds indications.

LAW #7: THE DURATION OF THE MATCH

Game duration is determined by the competition authority. As a recommendation, U8 games have four 10 minute quarters. U10 games have 25 minute halves, U12 games 30 minute halves, U14 games 35 minute halves, U16 games 40 minute halves, and all higher level games 45 minute halves. The referee is to add time for time wasting, injuries, substitutions, and any other cause.

LAW #8: THE START AND RESTART OF PLAY

To start play there is a kick off. This happens at the start of the game, halftime and after a goal has been scored. A player standing near the halfway line kicks the ball forward. Opposing players must stay outside the center circle until the ball has been kicked. After the ball is touched and moves forward the game is officially started. The kicker may not touch the ball again until it has been touched by another player. Such second touch violations are penalized with an indirect free kick where the infraction occurred.

LAW #9: THE BALL IN AND OUT OF PLAY

After the whole ball completely crosses the touch line or goal line, either on the ground or in the air, it is out of play. Any ball striking a referee, goal post, or corner post and remaining on the field is in play. The line itself is in bounds, and the ball is out of play (or a goal is scored) only when the entire ball is completely past the outer edge of the line. If any part of the ball is still touching any part of the line (extended from the ground up into the sky), it is still in play.

LAW #10: THE METHOD OF SCORING

A goal is scored when the whole ball completely crosses the goal line, between the goal posts and under the cross bar, provided that no infringement of the Laws of the Game has been committed by the team scoring the goal (e.g. offside infraction). The winner of the game is determined by the most goals scored.

LAW #11: OFFSIDE

A player is in an offside position if he is nearer to his opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second-to-last opponent (counting the keeper, if he is one of the two defenders closest to the goal line). A player is not offside when in his own half of the field of play. It is not an offense to be in an offside position. The referee is to call an offside infraction only if, in his judgment, the player in an offside position, when the ball is played or touched by a teammate, interferes with play, interferes with another player, or gains an advantage by being in that position. There is no offside offense if a player receives the ball directly from a goal kick, a throw-in or a corner kick. When offside is called, the defending team is awarded an indirect free kick from where the infringement occurred.

LAW #12: FOULS AND MISCONDUCT

Fouls can only be committed on the field of play (i.e. inside the boundary lines) and while the ball is in play. There are two categories of foul, direct free kick fouls and indirect free kick fouls. Except for handling, direct free kick fouls can only be committed against an opponent. Fouls are dealt with by awarding a free kick to the opposing team. Misconduct can be an included part of some fouls, or can be unrelated to a foul. Misconduct is dealt with separately by issuing a caution (yellow card) or sending the player off (red card).

A. For direct free kick fouls, the referee awards a direct free kick to the other team from where the infraction occurred:

1. Kicking opponent
2. Tripping opponent
3. Jumping at opponent
4. Charging opponent
5. Striking opponent
6. Pushing opponent

7. Making contact with the opponent before the ball when tackling.
8. Holding opponent
9. Spitting at an opponent
10. Deliberately handling ball (touching ball with hands or arms from below shoulder to fingertips)

The first seven are to be called only if the referee considers that they were done carelessly, recklessly, or with excessive force. If reckless or excessive, then misconduct has occurred. A penalty kick is awarded if any of these 10 penal fouls are committed in the offending team's own penalty area, irrespective of the position of the ball.

B. An indirect free kick shall be awarded when a player commits these technical fouls. The first three can only be committed against an opponent.

1. Dangerous play adversely affecting opponent's play
2. Preventing opposing goalkeeper from releasing ball
3. Impeding an opponent
4. A goalkeeper taking more than 6 seconds to release the ball while controlling it with his hands
5. A goalkeeper handling a ball that has been intentionally kicked by a teammate's foot, or thrown in by a teammate, or that he touches again with his hands after having released it from his possession and before it has touched another player
6. Any offense not mentioned above for which play is stopped for misconduct (yellow or red card)

C. Cautionable Offenses: A player is cautioned and shown the yellow card if he commits any of the following seven offenses:

1. Is guilty of unsporting behavior
2. Shows dissent by word or action
3. Persistently infringes the Laws of the Game
4. Delays the restart of play
5. Fails to respect the required distance when play is restarted with a kick off, corner kick or free kick
6. Enters or re-enters the field of play without the referee's permission
7. Deliberately leaves the field of play without the referee's permission

D. Sending-Off Offenses: A player is sent off and shown the red card if he commits any of the following seven offenses:

1. Is guilty of serious foul play
2. Is guilty of violent conduct
3. Spits at an opponent or any other person

4. Denies an opponent a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity by deliberately handling the ball (does not apply to goalkeeper in his own penalty area)
5. Denies an obvious goal-scoring opportunity to an opponent moving towards the player's goal by an offense punishable by a free kick or a penalty kick
6. Uses offensive, insulting or abusive language or gestures
7. Receives a second caution (card) in the same match

The referee is to refrain from calling fouls that are trifling or doubtful, or when stopping play for the foul would give an advantage to the offending team or take one away from the fouled team.

LAW #13: FREE KICKS

The types of free kick awarded by the referee are the:

- Direct Free Kick - a goal can be scored by kicking the ball directly into the goal
- Indirect Free Kick - the ball must touch another player before a goal can be scored; if the ball goes into the goal without being touched by another player, it is just out-of-bounds, and the restart is a goal kick or corner kick

In either case, the kicker is free to simply pass the ball to a teammate. The kicker may not touch the ball again until it has been touched by another player. When a free kick is taken, the opposing team must stay at least 10 yards away from the ball until it is kicked (or be on their own goal line between the goalposts). A team cannot score against itself directly (i.e. without another player besides the original kicker touching the ball) on any free kick. Any free kick taken from inside the kicker's own penalty area cannot be touched by any other player until it has passed outside the penalty area into the playing field, or else it must be re-kicked. No opposing player can enter the penalty area until the ball has passed out of it.

LAW #14: THE PENALTY KICK

A penalty kick is awarded whenever a direct-kick foul takes place in the offending team's penalty area. It is a direct kick taken 12 yards from the goal line. All players except the goalkeeper and kicker must remain outside of the penalty area, behind the penalty mark, at least 10 yards from the ball until it is kicked. The goalkeeper must stay on the goal line and may not move forward off of it (sideways movement is ok) until the ball is kicked. The kicker must kick the ball forward and may not touch the ball again until it has been touched by another player.

LAW #15: THE THROW-IN

When the ball completely crosses the touch line, a throw-in is awarded to the opponents of the player who last touched the ball, from the point where the ball crossed the line. The ball must be thrown by both hands from behind and over the head. At the moment the thrower releases the ball:

- A. The thrower must be facing the playing field.
- B. Both feet must be outside or on the touch line. Any part of the foot touching the line makes it legal.
- C. Both feet must be touching the ground.
- D. Opponents must be at least two yards away

On incorrect throws, a throw-in is awarded to the opposite team. The thrower may not touch the ball a second time until it has been touched by another player. If the thrown ball does not enter the field, that is, the ball never breaks the plane of the outside edge of the line before hitting the ground, then the thrower must throw again from the same spot. If the referee believes this is intended to waste time, he may caution the player and must add on time.

LAW #16: THE GOAL KICK

A goal kick is awarded when the ball crosses the goal line but a goal is not scored, and it was last touched by an attacking player. The ball may be kicked from anywhere in the goal area. The ball must travel outside the penalty area into the field of play before it is in play. If it is touched before it leaves the penalty area, the kick is retaken. The attacking team must stay out of the penalty area until the ball is in play. The kicker may not touch the ball a second time until it has been touched by another player.

LAW #17: THE CORNER KICK

A corner kick is awarded when the ball crosses the goal line, but a goal is not scored, and it was last touched by a defensive player. One member of the attacking team takes the kick from the quarter circle at the nearest corner flag post. The opposing team must remain at least 10 yards from the arc as the ball is kicked. A goal may be scored directly from this kick. The kicker may not touch the ball a second time until it has been touched by another player.

MORE ON REFEREES

There are many other details a referee must know and apply in making decisions on the field. Knowing this simplified version of the "Laws of The Game" is just a starting point on the path to fully understanding the Laws of the Game. A good referee knows exactly when and how to whistle and also where and how to restart play. A great referee arrives at the field fully prepared and sets the tone for proper conduct by all participants.