

To all national football associations
and confederations

Circular no. 15

Zurich, 11 March 2019
SEC/2019-C279/bru

133rd Annual General Meeting (AGM) of The International Football Association Board (The IFAB) – decisions

Dear Sir or Madam,

The 133rd AGM of The IFAB took place in Aberdeen, Scotland, on 2 March 2019 and was chaired by the President of the Scottish FA, Mr. Alan McRae. Details of the AGM's main decisions and discussions are outlined below (starting on page 2); the minutes of the meeting will be available in due course on www.theifab.com.

In order to ensure that preparations to implement the changes can begin without delay, and to assist with the translation of the Laws of the Game into other languages, all changes are provided in English in the accompanying document, *Laws of the Game 2019/20 – Changes and clarifications*, which is also available on <http://www.theifab.com/document/for-football-bodies>.

Downloadable English, French, German and Spanish versions of the Laws of the Game 2019/20 book will be available on our website shortly before the printed copies are distributed in May/June.

As usual, each confederation and national FA will receive five printed copies of the Laws of the Game 2019/20; each national FA will also receive one copy for each of their FIFA referees and assistant referees.

Pre-orders for additional copies of the Laws of the Game 2019/20 can be made through The IFAB web shop at <http://theifab.com/shop> as from 12 March. To ensure the correct number of copies is produced, and at the reasonable price of CHF 3.00 per copy, you should place your order by **12 April 2019 at the latest***. Once your order is confirmed, you will receive an invoice with payment instructions.

**N.B.: late orders may incur greater production costs and thus the price per copy may be higher.*

1. Laws of the Game 2018/19

The AGM was pleased to hear that the changes to the Laws of the Game for 2018/19 had been well-received, and it was particularly pleasing to note that the permission to use of electronic and communication equipment in the technical area has not caused any major issues. The IFAB congratulates team officials on their appropriate use of this equipment and the respect shown for the provisions of Law 4.

2. Laws of the Game 2019/20

A number of changes to the Laws of the Game for 2019/20 were approved which follow the principal aims of the 'play fair!' strategy: improving player behaviour and increasing respect, increasing playing time, and making the game fairer and attractive; the exact wording for the changes can be found in the accompanying 'Laws of the Game 2019/20 – Changes and clarifications' document.

All changes are compulsory for friendly matches and competitions starting on or after **1 June 2019**; competitions which start before 1 June 2019 may implement them or delay their implementation until no later than the start of the next competition.

a. Current experiments

The AGM considered the feedback from two years of experiments with Law changes which have the potential to improve the image of the game and/or reduce the time lost for substitutions and goal kicks. Law changes were approved in relation to three of these experiments:

- **Law 3** – a player being substituted must leave the field at the nearest point on the boundary line unless the referee allows the player to leave quickly/immediately at the halfway line
- **Law 5** – referees will now show a yellow card (YC) or red card (RC) to a team official guilty of misconduct – the Laws of the Game will list the main YC/RC offences; if the offender cannot be identified, the senior coach present in the technical area will receive the YC/RC
- **Law 13** and **Law 16** – for free kicks to the defending team in their own penalty area and for goal kicks, the ball will be in play as soon as it is kicked and moves; the requirement that it must leave the penalty area before any player can touch it has been removed

The experiment with the alternative order of 'kicks from the penalty mark', also known as 'AB-BA', has not been successful as football is essentially a simple sport, so there is no change to the traditional 'AB-AB' format.

b. Law 8 – The Start and Restart of Play: The Dropped Ball

The current dropped ball procedure is unsatisfactory as it often leads to confrontation or a 'manufactured' restart which is 'exploited' unfairly, e.g. kicking the ball out for a throw-in deep in the opponents' half.

The new procedure is for the dropped ball to be 'uncontested' – the ball will be dropped for only one player and all other players must remain at least 4m (4.5 yds) away. Play will then continue 'as normal', i.e. the ball is not given back to the opponents.

If play was stopped when the ball or the last touch of the ball was in the penalty area, the ball will be dropped for the defending team goalkeeper. In all other cases, the ball will be dropped for one player of the team that last touched the ball at the place where it was last touched.

c. Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct: Handling the Ball

Handball is probably the most ‘unclear’ area of the Laws of the Game and this lack of clarity causes much confusion, inconsistency and controversy.

The Laws relating to ‘fouls’ and ‘offside’ were improved by moving the focus from ‘intent’ (mental) to ‘outcome’ (physical) and a similar change has been applied to ‘non-deliberate’ handball situations. Therefore, whilst ‘deliberate’ handball remains an offence, the Law now provides greater clarity as to whether an offence has occurred when the ball ‘accidentally’ touches the hand/arm.

Consequently, a player will be penalised when the ball touches their hand/arm if:

- their hand/arm is above shoulder height (except when deliberately playing the ball) as a player is ‘taking a risk’ by having their hand/arm in that usually ‘unnatural’ position
- the player’s body has been made unnaturally bigger, and has thus unfairly created a larger barrier, by their hand/arm being away from their body
- a goal is scored directly from their hand/arm (even if accidental)
- a player gains possession/control of the ball from their hand/arm (even if accidental) and then scores a goal or creates a goal-scoring opportunity

However, except in the situations outlined above, a player will not usually be penalised when the ball touches their hand/arm if:

- the ball came off the player’s own body, or the body of another player (of either team) who was close by, as it is almost impossible to avoid contact with the ball
- a player falls down and their hand/arm is between their body and ground for support

d. Other proposed Law changes

The AGM approved a number of other Law changes, notably:

- If a team’s penalty taker is injured and has treatment, he/she can stay on the field to take the penalty kick (Law 5)
- The team that wins the toss can choose to take the kick-off (Law 8)
- If a YC/RC offence occurs but the non-offending team takes a quick free kick which creates a goal-scoring opportunity, the referee can delay showing the YC/RC until the next stoppage (Law 12)
- If the defending team forms a ‘wall’ of three or more players, attacking team players must be at least 1m away from the ‘wall’ – indirect free kick if they encroach (Law 13)
- The goalkeeper must be on (not in front or behind) the goal line at a penalty kick but only needs to have one foot on the goal line (or in line with it if in the air) when the kick is taken (Law 14)

e. **Additional amendments and clarifications**

Other clarifications to the Laws of the Game were approved, including:

- Multi-coloured/patterned undershirts are permitted if the same as the main shirt sleeve (Law 4)
- Explanation of the difference between 'cooling breaks' and 'drinks breaks' (Law 7)
- If the goalkeeper attempts to 'clear' the ball from a throw-in or deliberate pass from a teammate and the 'clearance' is unsuccessful, the goalkeeper may handle the ball (Law 12)
- A YC for an 'illegal' goal celebration (e.g. removing the shirt, climbing on the fence) remains even if the goal is disallowed (Law 12)

3. **Future developments**

The AGM discussed the next steps in the *play fair!* strategy and received information on a Laws of the Game mobile app (for iOS and Android) as well as the Laws of the Game online 'Challenge', a new e-learning tool for referees and instructors.

4. **Video assistant referees (VARs)**

The AGM received updates on the global use of VARs, including the assistance and approval programme (IAAP), and the successful use of VARs at the 2018 FIFA World Cup™ in Russia.

The AGM was pleased to have taken decisions to make the game more enjoyable to play and watch which conform to the three pillars of The IFAB's '*play fair!*' strategy.

The IFAB is extremely grateful for the many suggestions and support from all areas of the football world which help the Laws of the Game to evolve to make football, from grassroots to international football, even more fair, accessible and enjoyable. We will continue our global consultation so that the Laws of the Game protect the fairness and integrity on the field of play.

Thank you for your attention. Please contact us if you have any questions or enquiries.

Yours sincerely,
The IFAB



Lukas Brud
Secretary

Encl.: as mentioned
cc: FIFA

