

To all national football associations  
and confederations

**Circular no. 33**

## **Additional changes to the Laws of the Game 2026/27**

1. Players covering their mouth when communicating with an opponent
2. Players leaving the field of play in protest at a decision of the referee

Zurich, 19 May 2026  
SEC/2026-C486/bru

Dear Sir or Madam,

In addition to the Law changes communicated via The IFAB's circular no. 32 on 31 March 2026, the following Law changes were approved at a Special Meeting of The IFAB held in Vancouver, Canada, on 28 April 2026.

**1. Players covering their mouth to prevent the detection of inappropriate comments, insults or other forms of abuse**

This Law change, which is optional for competitions, reflects FIFA's and the wider football world's intention to combat racism and discrimination by introducing meaningful action and a strong deterrent against players covering their mouth (including with their hand, arm or shirt) to prevent the detection of inappropriate comments, insults or other forms of abuse directed at an opponent.

**Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct**

**4. Disciplinary action**

**Additional text**

*Players, substitutes and substituted players*

***Sending-off offences***

*A player, substitute or substituted player who commits any of the following offences is sent off:*

- (...)
  - *violent conduct*
  - *covering their mouth when communicating with an opponent in a provocative, derisory or inflammatory manner or situation (competition option)*
- (...)

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**2. Players leaving the field of play in protest at a decision of the referee**

These Law changes reflect the need for a strong deterrent against players leaving the field of play and/or refusing to continue to play in protest at a decision of the referee, including a decision for play to continue or restart after a video review or other stoppage.

**Law 3 – The Players**

**1. Number of players**

**Additional text**

*A match is played by two teams, each with a maximum of eleven players; one must be the goalkeeper. A match may not start or continue if either team has fewer than seven players (not including temporary dismissals or one-minute periods off the field of play in connection with the 'Time-limited substitution protocol' or the 'Off-field treatment and assessment protocol').*

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*In principle, where a team is responsible for a match not continuing and/or being abandoned because it has fewer than seven players, the match will be forfeited by that team, subject to the relevant competition regulations.*

## **Law 7 – The Duration of the Match**

### **5. Abandoned match**

#### **Additional text**

*An abandoned match is replayed unless the competition rules or organisers determine otherwise. In principle, where a team is responsible for a match being abandoned because it has fewer than seven players, the match will be forfeited by that team.*

## **Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct**

### **4. Disciplinary action**

#### **Additional text**

*Players, substitutes and substituted players*

#### ***Sending-off offences***

*A player, substitute or substituted player who commits any of the following offences is sent off:*

- (...)
- *using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or action(s)*
- *leaving the field of play in protest at a decision of the referee, including a decision for play to continue or restart (competition option)*
- *instructing or encouraging other players to leave the field of play in protest at a decision of the referee, including a decision for play to continue or restart (competition option)*
- (...)

## **Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct**

### **4. Disciplinary action**

#### **Additional text**

*Team officials*

#### ***Sending-off***

*Sending-off offences include (but are not limited to):*

- (...)
- *using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or action(s)*
- *instructing or encouraging players to leave the field of play in protest at a decision of the referee, including a decision for play to continue or restart even if the players do not leave the field of play (competition option)*
- (...)

The changes to Laws 3 and 7 are effective for all competitions starting on or after 1 July 2026. Competitions starting before then may apply all the changes (including the options) as from the date of this circular.

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

Yours faithfully,  
The IFAB



Lukas Brud  
Secretary

cc: FIFA