

To all national football associations
and confederations

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131st Annual General Meeting: amendments to the Laws of the Game 2017/18 and other important decisions

The 131st Annual General Meeting (AGM) of The International Football Association Board (The IFAB) took place in London on 3 March 2017. The amendments to the Laws of the Game approved at this meeting, as well as all other important decisions taken, are outlined below. Detailed minutes of the meeting will be available on www.theifab.com shortly.

1. Revision of the Laws of the Game – 2017/18

The AGM approved a further set of changes for the Laws of the Game for 2017/18. These changes result primarily from requests from national football associations (FAs) and referees for clarifications and with a view to facilitating translation.

This year's changes represent the final stage of the major revision of the Laws of the Game. The clarity of the Laws should benefit football and refereeing at all levels of the game and in all national FAs. If you have any questions about the latest changes, or the Laws in general, please contact lawenquiries@theifab.com.

In order to ensure that referees can prepare without delay, as well as to assist with the translation of the Laws of the Game, all the changes for this year's edition are now available in English on <http://www.theifab.com/document/for-football-bodies>. The full Laws of the Game 2017/18 will be available on www.theifab.com for download in English, French, German and Spanish shortly before the printed copies are distributed.

As usual, in May you will be sent five printed copies of the Laws of the Game 2017/18 for your association/confederation as well as one copy for each of your FIFA referees and assistant referees.

For the first time, orders for additional copies of the Laws of the Game can be made via the new web shop at <http://theifab.com/shop> from 4 April 2017.

To ensure the correct number of copies is produced, and at the reasonable price of CHF 3.00 per copy, we kindly ask you to place your order by **25 April 2017 at the latest**. Once your order is confirmed, you will receive an invoice with payment instructions.

Late orders will incur greater production costs and thus the price per copy will be higher.

2. Modifications of the Laws of the Game by national football associations

The IFAB strongly believes that national FAs should have more freedom to modify the Laws for their domestic football below the highest level, in this way benefiting the development of football in their countries. Consequently, national FAs (and confederations and FIFA in their competitions) will now have the option to modify any or all of the following organisational areas of the Laws of the Game for the football for which they are responsible:

For youth, veterans, disability and grassroots (lowest levels) football:

- size of the field of play,
- size, weight and material of the ball,
- width between the goalposts and height of the crossbar from the ground,
- duration of the two (equal) halves of the game (and two equal halves of extra time),
- the use of return substitutes,
- the use of temporary dismissals (sin bins) for some/all cautions.

For all football except Men and Women competitions involving the 1st teams of clubs in the top division and senior 'A' international teams:

- number of substitutions each team is permitted to use, **up to a maximum of 5.**

The definition of youth as 'U-16' and veterans as '35+' years has been removed so national FAs can determine youth and veteran age limits for domestic competitions.

National FAs can use different modifications for different competitions - there is no requirement to apply them all universally. **No other modifications are allowed.**

3. The IFAB's strategy for the future

Following the significant changes to the Laws of the Game in recent years and, in particular, the major revisions in 2016 and 2017, The IFAB AGM approved a strategy which will focus on: improving the image of the game through the Laws; addressing "what football wants"; and enabling proposed Law changes, which will benefit the game, to be tested within a defined structure. This will be achieved while ensuring that football does not have to adapt to too many changes too quickly. This strategy for the period 2017 to 2022 has three central pillars against which all proposals and developments will be assessed:

- Fairness and integrity:** promoting greater fairness and integrity through a '*play fair!*' initiative, especially on the field of play.
- Universality and inclusion:** safeguarding the Laws of the Game, which apply to every match from grassroots all the way through to the FIFA World Cup™ Final, and ensuring the game is accessible to everyone, regardless of age, race, religion, culture, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability or, perhaps most fundamental of all, playing ability.

iii. Technology: the development of technology cannot be ignored and football must be prepared to embrace technical advances, e.g. goal-line technology (GLT), video assistant referees (VAR) etc., while guarding against technology-related threats to the game e.g. match manipulation.

Mindful of these three strategic concepts, the AGM agreed that for the next two to three years there would be particular focus on:

- The behaviour of players (including enhancing the role of the captain, ‘mobbing/surrounding’ match officials, red and yellow cards for technical staff),
- Measures to reduce time-wasting, including focus on ‘effective playing time’,
- A fairer method for taking kicks from the penalty mark i.e. the same team does not always take the ‘first’ kick in each round,
- Continuing the VAR experiment, including the potential development of offside technology,
- Handball.

4. Video assistant referees (VARs) experiment for match officials

Since last year’s decision to experiment with video assistant referees, around 20 competitions from all over the world have agreed to participate in VAR trials. The objective is to support research aimed to identify whether the use of VARs will benefit the game, based on the philosophy of **‘minimum interference - maximum benefit’**.

During 2016, FIFA, the USA, The Netherlands and Italy held trial matches which enabled The IFAB to refine technical and referee-related areas of the experiments and to shape the VAR protocol and implementation handbook which will be used in hundreds of matches in 2017.

Competitions may only use VARs if they have the permission of The IFAB, use the full protocol and have satisfied The IFAB’s VAR technology and referee/VAR education criteria.

Given that the preparation period for the use of VARs is at least 6-12 months and a decision on the experiment is due in March 2018, the deadline for joining the experiment is 30 April 2017 (approval of participation is subject to a thorough review by The IFAB and FIFA).

After that date, countries interested in potentially implementing VARs in the future should contact The IFAB for further information and advice.

Detailed information on the experiments, participants, timelines and competitions/matches using VARs is available on: www.theifab.com/projects/video-assistant-referees-vars-experiment.

The VAR Training Centre at the Home of FIFA in Zurich can be visited by appointment until 15 April 2017. Any competition organisers who would like to come to Zurich to see the setup in operation should contact Johannes Holzmüller (johannes.holzmuller@fifa.org), FIFA’s Head of Football Technology Innovation.

5. Other important topics

A number of other topics were discussed during the AGM:

Law 3 – The Players: 4th substitute in extra time

A range of competitions is involved in a two-year experiment where teams can use a 4th substitute in extra time, regardless of whether they have used the maximum number of three substitutes during regular time.

Law 4 – The Players' Equipment

Quality standard for EPTS

The AGM approved a minimum safety standard for wearable electronic performance and tracking system (EPTS) devices which is compulsory from 1 June 2017; systems already in use are subject to a transition period which ends on 31 May 2018.

Use of electronic and communication devices

In terms of the use of electronic and communication equipment by players and technical staff in the technical area, it was agreed that:

- With the exception of electronic performance and tracking systems (EPTS), players and substitutes are not permitted to wear or use any form of electronic or communication equipment, e.g. camera, microphone, earpiece, etc.,
- Technical staff may only use electronic and communication equipment where it directly relates to the welfare and safety of players,
- There will be a wide-ranging consultation about what electronic and communication equipment should be permitted in the technical area with the focus moving from prevention to ensuring that communication does not result in improper behaviour.

Law 5 – The Referee

It was agreed that national FAs will have the option to allow temporary dismissals (sin bins) in domestic youth, veterans, disability and grassroots football for all or some cautions; the Laws of the Game 2017/18 will include implementation guidelines for temporary dismissals.

Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct: Denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity (DOGSO)

The AGM was very pleased with football's reaction to the two-year experiment that, when the referee awards a penalty kick for a DOGSO offence which was an attempt to play the ball, the offender is cautioned and not sent off. The AGM extended the philosophy to 'stopping a promising attack' offences in the penalty area, i.e. if the offence is an attempt to play the ball there will be no caution.

The IFAB believes that the revised and modernised Laws of the Game are a solid foundation for the game throughout the world. With a clear strategy to use the Laws to make the game fairer, more inclusive and more modern, there is a real opportunity for everyone to work together to improve our sport and rekindle football's historic values of playing, coaching and organising the game with fairness and integrity. In this respect, The IFAB, along with FIFA, is committed to encouraging football throughout the world to respect the Laws of the Game and the referees who enforce the Laws.

Thank you for your attention and please do not hesitate to contact us should you have any questions or enquiries. Please note The IFAB's address and contact details:

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Yours sincerely,

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