



The Laws of Association Football – A Brief Guide

The following brief guide focuses on those aspects of the game that seem to generate most discussion and debate during matches. It is designed to generate a common understanding and greater enjoyment of the game as a result.

For those keen to understand the finer points, please refer to The International Football Association Board (IFAB) Laws of the Game which is updated every year.

Throw-ins

Procedure

At the moment of delivering the ball, the thrower must:



- stand facing the field of play; and
- have part of each foot on the touchline or on the ground outside the touchline; and
- throw the ball with both hands from behind and over the head from the point where it left the field of play.

If the throw-in is not taken correctly it is retaken by the opposing team.

Note: The referee will generally allow mini-soccer players (U7s to U10s) to retake a throw-in in order to improve the player's understanding of the procedure.

All opponents must stand at least 2yds from the point on the touchline where the throw-in is to be taken and must not seek to impede the throw-in, or the referee may award an indirect free kick in favour of the thrower.

The ball is in play when it enters the field of play. If the ball touches the ground before entering, the throw-in is retaken by the same team from the same position.

The thrower must not touch the ball again until it has touched another player.

If a player, while correctly taking a throw-in, deliberately throws the ball at an opponent in order to play the ball again but not in a careless or a reckless manner or using excessive force, the referee will allow play to continue.

Goal Kicks

Procedure



- The ball must be stationary and is kicked from any point within the goal area by a player of the defending team; and
- opponents must be outside the penalty area until the ball is in play; and
- the ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.

If, after the ball is in play, the kicker touches the ball again before it has been touched by another player an indirect free kick is awarded.

If the kicker commits a handball offence:

- a direct free kick is awarded;
- a penalty kick is awarded if the offence occurred inside the kicker's penalty area unless the kicker was the goalkeeper, in which case an indirect free kick is awarded.

If an opponent who is in the penalty area when the goal kick is taken, or enters the penalty area before the ball is in play, touches or challenges for the ball before it is in play, the goal kick is retaken.

A goal may be scored directly from a goal kick, but only against the opposing team. If the ball directly enters the kicker's goal a corner kick is awarded to the opponents.

Notes:

- 1. The old rule that the ball must exit the penalty area before coming into play no longer applies.**
- 2. In mini-soccer (U7s to U10s), opposing players will be asked to retreat to the half way line whilst a goal kick is taken.**

Free Kicks

Types of free kick

Free kicks awarded during a match are either direct or indirect.

Direct and indirect free kicks are awarded to the opposing team of a player, substitute, substituted or sent-off player, or team official guilty of an offence.

For a list of offences and types of resultant kicks awarded see IFAB Laws of the Game Law 12.



The referee will announce to the players immediately whether a free kick is direct or indirect and, for the benefit of those not within earshot, indicate an indirect free kick by raising the arm above the head. This signal is maintained until the kick has been taken and the ball either touches another player, goes out of play or it is clear that a goal cannot be scored directly.

An indirect free kick must be retaken if the referee fails to signal that the kick is indirect and the ball is kicked directly into the goal.

If a direct free kick is kicked directly into the opponents' goal, a goal is awarded.

If an indirect free kick is kicked directly into the opponents' goal, a goal kick is awarded.

If a direct or indirect free kick is kicked directly into the team's own goal, a corner kick is awarded to the opposing team.

Note: All free kicks awarded in mini-soccer (U7s to U10s) are direct.

Players and Substitutions

The number of players in a team and the number of permitted substitutions varies based on the age category of the team.

As a general rule in youth football, a system of 'rolling' substitutions is allowed whereby a player may be substituted but then allowed to re-enter the match at a later stage. The maximum number of substitutes per team is normally 5, but this can be increased for younger age categories and development teams.

Offside

The law that probably provokes the most debate amongst parents and supporters.....

Note: The offside law does not apply in mini-soccer (U7s to U10s).

Offside position

A player is in an offside position if:

- any part of the head, body or feet is in the opponents' half (excluding the halfway line) and
- any part of the head, body or feet is nearer to the opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second-last opponent.

The hands and arms of all players, including the goalkeepers, are not considered.

Note: A player might be in an offside position, but the referee will allow play to continue until that or another player commits an offside offence (see below).

A player is not in an offside position if level with the:

- second-last opponent; or
- last two opponents.

Offside offence

A player in an offside position at the moment the ball is played or touched by a team-mate is only penalised on becoming involved in active play by:

- interfering with play by playing or touching a ball passed or touched by a team-mate or
- interfering with an opponent by:
 - preventing an opponent from playing or being able to play the ball by clearly obstructing the opponent's line of vision or
 - challenging an opponent for the ball or
 - clearly attempting to play a ball which is close when this action impacts on an opponent or
 - making an obvious action which clearly impacts on the ability of an opponent to play the ball

or

- gaining an advantage by playing the ball or interfering with an opponent when it has:
 - rebounded or been deflected off the goalpost, crossbar or an opponent
 - been deliberately saved by any opponent.



A player in an offside position receiving the ball from an opponent who deliberately played the ball, including by deliberate handball, is not considered to have gained an advantage, unless it was a deliberate save by any opponent (as above).

No offside offence



There is no offside offence if a player receives the ball directly from:

- a goal kick; or
- a throw-in; or
- a corner kick.

Key points:

1. ***It is OK for a player to be in an offside position if that player does not commit an offside offence.***
2. ***The decision that a player has committed an offside offence depends on whether that player is in an offside position at the moment when the ball is passed or touched by a team-mate.***
3. ***The offside law does not apply in mini-soccer (U7s to U10s).***

For those interested in further detail regarding offside, please refer to IFAB Laws of the Game Law 11.

New Heading Rules in Youth Football from Season 24/25

Following trials lasting two years, The FA has now introduced new rules effective from season 24/25 to phase out deliberate heading in matches in all affiliated grassroots youth football between U7s and U11s level over the next three seasons. Click here for more details:

<https://www.sussexfa.com/news/2024/may/17/new-heading-rules-for-youth-football>

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