

IFAF rule changes 2024

With "importance to teams" (ITT) and "importance to officials" (ITO) indicated. 5 is high; 1 is low.

A draft of the rulebook incorporating the recommended changes is available at <http://www.myiafoa.org/rules/ifaf2024/index.htm>.

1 Rule changes

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change	ITT	ITO
1.	2-3-6-a and 2-34-1	<p>Re definitions: Amend the definitions of the tackle box and the free blocking zones to be centred on the snapper.</p> <p>2-3-6-a becomes: "The free-blocking zone is a rectangle centred on the <u>snapper</u> and extending five yards laterally and three yards longitudinally in each direction."</p> <p>2-34-1 becomes: "The tackle box is the rectangular area enclosed by the neutral zone, the two lines parallel to the sidelines five yards from the <u>snapper</u>, and Team A's end line."</p>	<p>In NCAA, the tackle box is centred on the snapper and the free blocking zone centred on the middle lineman. In 2020, we simplified things by making both centred on the middle lineman.</p> <p>Given the increasing importance in the rules of the tackle box, and the consequence diminution of importance of the free blocking zone, we made what on reflection seems the wrong choice, which we are now correcting. We are not going back to making them different.</p> <p>Of course, on the vast majority of plays, the snapper is the middle lineman and therefore the distinction is irrelevant.</p> <p>For information, the tackle box features in the following rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 7-3-2-h Intentional grounding * • 9-1-6 Blocking below the waist * • 9-1-11-c Leaping * • 9-1-15 Horse-collar tackle * • 9-1-16-b Roughing the kicker * <p>The free-blocking zone features in the following rules:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • 6-3-14-b Defensive linemen on kick plays • 9-1-5 Clipping • 9-3-5 Blocking in the back <p>* indicates a rule relating to a player (e.g. QB, RB, K) likely to be lined up laterally near the snapper</p>	2	3
2.	2-27-14	<p>Re defenceless players, add:</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • "a player attempting to catch or recover a fumble • a long snapper protected by Rule 9-1-14" 	<p>Adds explicit examples of defenceless players. These were already listed as examples in the Manual of Football Officiating.</p>	3	4

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change	ITT	ITO
3.	3-2-1-c	Re halftime activities, add: "Game management will determine the timing of halftime activities. The field will be available to squad members no later than three minutes prior to the second half kickoff. When any Squad Member enters the playing enclosure during the halftime intermission, a staff member from that team must be present on the field. If kickers or other squad members come onto the playing enclosure before the field is available, their activities must be confined to the team area."	Added halftime intermission warm-up guidelines. Requires team supervision of any players practising or warming up within the playing enclosure. There are rarely any issues during the halftime intermission, but this moves the responsibility onto teams for the poor behaviour of any of their members.	3	1
4.	3-2-3-a	Re extension of periods "A period shall be extended for an untimed down if one or more of the following occurs during a down in which time expires <u>in the 2nd or 4th quarter</u> "	Extension of periods now only applies to the second and fourth quarters. Will very marginally reduce the number of downs in a game.	2	4
5.	3-3-2-g-2	Re running clock sessions: Change the point margin to <i>end</i> a running clock session to 24 points or less. "If during a running clock session, the margin in the score continues to be more than <u>24</u> points, the running clock session will continue. If the margin drops to <u>24</u> or fewer points, the running clock session will end immediately on the relevant score and normal clock rules will apply unless and until the margin becomes more than 34 points again. <u>(Exception: If a competition reduces the score margin to start a running clock session below 34 points, the margin to end it will be 10 points lower.)</u> "	This has the effect of requiring the trailing team to score twice (e.g. 2 TDs, 1 TD + 1 XP + 1 FG) for the clock to go back to normal operation. This addresses the situation where, once a running clock session has started, the trailing team scores against the run of play but they do not sustain their fightback. If a competition or federation wants a lower margin for a running clock session to start, the margin to end it will similarly be reduced.	3	4
6.	3-3-4	Re team timeouts: Add: " <u>Consecutive charged team timeouts are not allowed by the same team in any specific dead ball period.</u> " Change: "a. Each team is entitled to three charged team timeouts during each half, <u>with no more than one charged team timeout available per team, per specific dead ball period.</u> "	Consecutive charged team timeouts no longer allowed in the same dead-ball period. Removes the opportunity for teams to waste time by using multiple timeouts (e.g. to "ice" a kicker). Also discourages teams who are so confused by a play situation that they need to be coached about it twice (or more). Very marginal benefit to speeding up the game.	3	3

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change	ITT	ITO
7.	4-1-2-b-3 Exception 4	Re inadvertent whistles: "If a scrimmage kick crosses the neutral zone and is untouched by Team B beyond the neutral zone, if the other exceptions here do not apply <u>and the spot where the kick ends (2-25-9) is known</u> , the ball is dead and belongs to Team B at the spot where the kick ends. If this spot is beyond the neutral zone, the kick has crossed the neutral zone, and postscrimmage kick enforcement will apply if the provisions of Rule 10-2-3 hold. On a field goal attempt, a field goal will be scored if the requirements of Rule 8-4-1 are met."	The current rule is slightly more complicated than the NCAA rule, resulting in awarding the ball to Team B in certain situations and replaying the down in others. While the principle of awarding the ball to Team B is sound, situations where the ball should be awarded to Team B in the event of an IW on a punt play have proved difficult to officiate if the spot the kick ends is not known. This change gives the officials the power to repeat the down at the previous spot in that eventuality. This proposal is therefore easier for the officials to apply than the current rule.	1	3
8.	12-3-1-d (NCAA 12-2-1-c)	Re replay, add: "If there is no video judge, but there is the capability to use video equipment near the field of play, the referee shall assume the duties of the video judge provided the following conditions apply: (a) The equipment to be used in the review is located outside the limit lines on the sideline or end zone and must be completely outside the team area. This is a separate secure location away from spectators and sideline personnel. Ideally, it will be in a tent or other shelter to protect it from rain and also direct sunlight on the display equipment. (b) The referee agrees that the quality of the video obtainable from camera sources as well as the size and resolution of the display equipment to be used at the sideline is adequate for replay to be used effectively."	To enable review of video by the referee in situations where this is possible at the sideline. Added rules for optional use of instant replay in games without a booth replay official. Only applies where the referee is content with the equipment provided and its location. NCAA sideline replay is limited to targeting or coach's challenge. However, IFAF sideline replay has the same scope as with a video judge.	3	3

1.1 Notes

1. IFAF has NOT adopted the NCAA change that, when awarding a first down, the game clock only stops with less than two minutes in each half.

2 Editorial changes

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
1.	1-2-1-g-2	Re decorative field markings: "No such markings may touch or enclose the hash marks, <u>short yard-line extensions</u> or numbers.	Makes clear that decorative markings or advertising must not obscure yard-line extensions.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
2.	1-2-3	Re limit lines: "... except in stadiums where the total field surface does not permit. In these stadiums, the limit lines shall <u>be as far back as possible</u> and not be less than six feet from the sidelines and end lines."	Emphasises for safety reasons that the limit lines should be as far from the sidelines and end lines as possible.
3.	1-2-4	Re team area markings: "a. On each side of the field, a team area behind <u>a solid line 12 feet outside the sideline</u> and between the 20-yard lines shall be marked for the exclusive use of substitutes, athletics trainers and other persons affiliated with the team. The front of the coaching box shall be marked with a solid line six feet outside the sideline between the 20-yard lines. The area between the coaching line and the <u>12-foot line</u> between the 20-yard lines shall contain white diagonal lines or be marked distinctly for use of coaches (Rule 9-2-5)." "c. Coaches are permitted in the coaching box (see Appendix D), which is the area bounded by the <u>12-foot line</u> and coaching line between the 20-yard lines."	A 2016 rule change moved the limit lines back from 12 to 18 feet (normally) from the sidelines. We never intended that this should also move the team areas further back, but the old rules defined the team area in terms of the limit lines. This change rectifies this by basing the team area explicitly on a line 12 feet outside the sideline.
4.	1-3-2-g	Re ball administration: "The referee, <u>centre judge</u> or umpire shall determine the legality of each ball before it is put in play."	For completeness, since it is often the centre judge who spots the ball on a crew of 6 or 8.
5.	1-3-3	Re marking balls: "Marking a ball indicating a preference for any player or any situation is <u>unsportsmanlike conduct</u> ." NOTE: If the person(s) subject to the rules who marked the ball cannot be immediately identified, charge the foul to the player(s) most likely to take advantage (e.g. the intended forward passer or kicker).	Clarifies that marking a ball illegally is one of the actions that could lead to disqualification for two unsportsmanlike fouls. This was already a 15-yard penalty with signal S27, but it was not clear whether it was specifically an unsportsmanlike conduct foul. It also clarifies who should be penalised if the culprit cannot quickly be identified. This brings this in line with Rule 1-4-2-d which makes it unsportsmanlike conduct to enter the game with a changed jersey number without reporting to the referee.
6.	1-4-5-b-3	Re colour of jerseys: "If the home team wears coloured jerseys, the visiting team may also wear coloured jerseys, if and only if the following <u>two</u> conditions have been satisfied"	Clarity

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
7.	1-4-5-c-1	Re jerseys, add: "The jersey must have clearly visible, permanent Arabic numerals measuring at least 8 and 10 inches in height front and back, respectively. <u>In addition, it is recommended that the jersey has a number on the outside of each shoulder measuring at least 3 inches in height.</u> "	Shoulder numbers make it easier for spectators, both in the stadium and on TV, and officials to identify players.
8.	AR 1-4-8:IV	Re illegal equipment enforcement: "An official discovers a player wearing illegal equipment or not wearing mandatory equipment (<u>other than a helmet coming completely off through play - Rule 3-3-9</u>)."	Amends the AR to make it clear that it does not apply if the clock is stopped under the provisions of Rule 3-3-9-a. Avoids ambiguity relating to equipment rules.
9.	1-4-11-b	Re coaching communication: "Coaches' booth space and location must be approximately equivalent for both teams and should be located in the traditional press box area."	Related to Rule 1-2-7, since there is no definition of a <i>traditional</i> press box, the word is useless. Note that the Manual of Football Officiating guidance is: "If there is not a formal press box, the side deemed to be the press box is determined solely by the position of (in usual order of priority) the primary TV camera, the announcer/commentator or the majority of spectators, not by which side of the field the home team chooses to use."
10	1-4-11-d (was IFAF 1-4-11-g)	Re prohibition on drone use: "... during the period of the officials' jurisdiction <u>or otherwise when squad members are present within the playing enclosure.</u> "	Extends the period during which the prohibition on drones applies. Control of drone use is a participant and spectator safety issue.
11	1-4-11-c Exception 3	Re media equipment: "A camera, with no audio component, may be attached to the <u>uniform or equipment</u> of any official with prior approval of the official and the participating teams."	Previously this just said "cap of any official", but body-worn cameras may be equally suitable.
12	2-2-4-a	Re when ball is ready for play: "A dead ball is ready for play when: a. With the 40-second play clock running, an official places the ball at a hash mark or between the inbounds marks and <u>is in position to officiate.</u> "	Modifies conditions for the ball being ready for play. Previously the rule said, "steps away to their position". The change means the ball now becomes ready slightly later and should make it safer for the officials and marginally improve their ability to officiate the game.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
13	AR 2-10-3:I	<p>Re flagrant personal fouls, add:</p> <p>"What is a "catastrophic" injury? RULING: The National Center for Catastrophic Sport Injury Research in the USA defines a catastrophic injury as: "fatalities, injuries that result in permanent functional disability, and serious injuries that result in temporary functional disability with full recovery. Examples include spinal cord injuries, brain bleeds, skull fractures, heat stroke, sudden cardiac arrest, internal organ injuries, exertional sickling [exercise collapse associated with sickle cell disease], rhabdomyolysis [rapid dissolution of damaged or injured skeletal muscle], and commotio cordis [ventricular fibrillation precipitated by blunt trauma to the heart]." Note that the flagrant personal foul does not have to cause such an injury - it is sufficient for the foul to place the recipient in danger of such an injury."</p>	<p>Clarifies what is meant by "danger of a catastrophic injury" in the definition of a flagrant personal foul.</p> <p>Should lead to more consistent enforcement.</p>
14	AR 7-1-4:VIII	<p>Re scrimmage kick formation, add a new approved ruling:</p> <p>"Team A lines up with A11 ten yards directly behind the snapper. The other three backs are split wide, all outside the tackle box. Only four Team A linemen have uniform numbers between 50 and 79. A11 receives the backward pass from the snapper with Team A in this formation. RULING: <u>Legal formation and a scrimmage kick formation. Team A can put all its backs to the side of the field where the kicker intends to kick the ball, if it wishes.</u>"</p>	<p>Previously this A.R. was a foul for illegal formation on the basis that it is not obvious that a kick will be attempted. We are now of the view that there should not be a restriction on Team A putting all its backs on the side of the field to which the kicker intends to kick the ball.</p> <p>Clarifies interpretation of a scrimmage kick formation (Rule 2-16-10).</p>
15	AR 3-1-3:XV	<p>Re scores in extra periods, add a new approved ruling:</p> <p>"In the third or subsequent extra period, Team B intercepts a pass and returns it for a 2-point touchdown. RULING: The game is over. Team B has won. There is no need for Team B to have its possession series (Rule 3-1-3-f)."</p>	<p>Provides example that shows that (from third extra period onwards), if Team B scores a TD, then the extra period is over.</p> <p>Clarifies the phrase "unless Team B scores other than on a try" in Rule 3-1-3-f.</p>

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
16	3-2-4-a	<p>Re location of game clock operator:</p> <p><u>"The type of game clock and the location of the game clock operator shall be determined by the game management. The game clock operator may be located on the sideline or in the traditional press box area. If the clock operator is in the traditional press box, it is recommended the location is between the goal lines. This location shall be shielded from public interference and shall afford a direct and unobstructed view of the playing field."</u></p>	<p>Update game clock operator particulars.</p> <p>Clarifies requirements for their location and view, which should reduce the risk of inaccuracy.</p>
17	3-3-1-b	<p>Re timeout requests:</p> <p><u>"When a team's charged timeouts are exhausted or are not available and it requests a timeout, the officials shall not acknowledge the request."</u></p>	<p>Officials' guidelines on timeout requests.</p> <p>As a result of changes to Rule 3-3-4, a team that has timeouts remaining does not have them <i>available</i> once they have already taken one during a dead-ball period.</p>
18	3-4-3-b	<p>Re unfair clock tactics:</p> <p><u>"If the game clock is stopped to complete a penalty for a foul by the team ahead in the score (or either team if the score is tied) inside the last two minutes of a half and the clock would start by rule on the referee's signal,"</u></p>	<p>Further clarifies clock status inside of two minutes in the half after completing a penalty. The option of the offended team to start the clock on the snap is only available if the clock would otherwise start on the ready for play.</p>
19	3-4-4-a	<p>Re 10-second runoff after a foul:</p> <p><u>"With the game clock running and less than one minute remaining in either half, before a change of team possession if either team commits a foul that causes the clock to stop immediately and the penalty for that foul is accepted, the referee will subtract 10 seconds from the game clock at the option of the offended team."</u></p>	<p>Clarification for 10-second runoff - foul.</p> <p>Confirms what is already specified in the last part of Rule 3-4-4-a.</p>
20	AR 4-1-2:VI	<p>Re inadvertent whistles:</p> <p><u>"What is meant by "otherwise signals the ball dead" in Rule 4-1-2-b? RULING: It means an official giving one of the following signals: stop the clock (S3); touchdown/field goal (S5); safety (S6); dead ball (S7); incomplete pass (S10). Such a signal interrupted before the official's arms are held or moved in the correct position is not regarded as a signal. Any verbal statement (e.g. saying "the ball is dead" or similar) is also not regarded as a signal unless preceded by a whistle."</u></p>	<p>Makes clear that a verbal statement by an official is not sufficient to make the ball dead. This would be very hard to confirm (e.g. by replay) so it is simplest (and most consistent) to ignore.</p> <p>Players are now used to playing "continuing action" after an inadvertent whistle so this should not have a negative impact.</p>

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
21	6-3-10-c	Re illegal kicks: "A scrimmage kick made when <u>the ball carrier's entire body and the ball are or have been</u> beyond the neutral zone is an illegal kick"	Aligning neutral zone requirements on illegal kicks with illegal forward pass.
22	7-1-5-a-5	Re disconcerting signals: "No <u>person subject to the rules</u> shall use words or signals that disconcert opponents when they are preparing to put the ball in play. No <u>person subject to the rules</u> may call defensive signals that simulate the sound or cadence of, or otherwise interfere with, offensive starting signals."	The existing rule refers to "No player" but a 2023 NCAA quiz noted that the spirit of this rule should include coaches and other squad members too. This change confirms this into IFAF rules.
23	7-3-3-d and 7-3-4	Re eligibility to touch a forward pass: "An eligible <u>Team A</u> player loses their eligibility when they go out of bounds." "No eligible <u>Team A</u> receiver who goes out of bounds and returns in bounds during a down shall touch a legal forward pass while in the field of play or end zones or while airborne until it has been touched by an opponent or official." "[Exception: This does not apply to an originally eligible <u>Team A</u> player who ..."	Clarifies that eligibility rules on forward passes only apply to Team A.
24	AR 7-3-8:VI	Re pass interference: "If B1's initial contact was below the waist and beyond the neutral zone, ..."	Updates to bring in line with 2023 rule change to blocking below the waist (9-1-6).
25	8-3-2	Re tries: "A try is an opportunity for either team to score one or two points while the game clock is stopped after a touchdown <u>or in the third or subsequent extra period(s).</u> "	Clarifies language to reflect a try in extra periods.
26	AR 8-5-1:XII	Re safeties, add a new approved ruling: "After a safety, Team A free kick the ball by punting it from their own 20-yard line into a very strong wind. The wind blows the punt back over the kicker's head and it bounces at Team A's 15-yard line. The kick rolls into Team A's end zone where it comes to rest. In the confusion, no player attempts to recover the ball and it is declared dead. RULING: Safety. Rule 8-5-1-a prevails over any attempt to apply Rule 8-2-1-c."	Clarifies what could be an ambiguous outcome of this play. One interpretation could be that it is a touchdown because the ball is awarded to Team B (6-1-5) in Team A's end zone (8-2-1-c). However, we want the alternative interpretation that this is a ball dead in Team A's end zone (8-5-1-a) to prevail.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
27	9-1-6-a-2	Re blocking below the waist: "Stationary Backs lined up <u>with any part of their body inside</u> the tackle box ..."	Clarifies definition of a back lined up in the tackle box.
28	9-1-16-a-4-c	Re when a kicker's protection ends, add: " <u>or (c) when the kicker carries or possesses the ball more than five yards behind the kicker's initial position at the snap from scrimmage kick formation.</u> "	Modifies when kicker's protection ends. Note this only applies if the kicker moves <i>back</i> at least 5 yards; it does not apply to moves in other directions. Means that the kicker loses protection if the snap goes significantly over their head.
29	AR 9-2-6:II	Re disqualification for two unsportsmanlike fouls: "During the first half, player A18 is penalised for (a) illegally marking the ball; (b) entering the game without reporting to the referee after changing his jersey number; or (c) simulating being roughed. In the second half, A18 is again penalised, this time for taunting an opponent. RULING: In each case, A18 is disqualified for committing two unsportsmanlike conduct fouls in the same game. The set of fouls that count towards this includes all the individual 15-yard penalty unsportsmanlike fouls in Rules 1-3-3, 1-4-2-d, 9-1-16-b and 9-2. It does not include team unsportsmanlike conduct fouls specified in Rules 1-4-5-b-3, 1-4-5-c-2, 3-5-2-e and 9-2. Note that Rules 1-4-10 and 1-4-13 disqualify someone for a first offence."	Clarifies what fouls count towards the "two unsportsmanlike conduct fouls" rule (9-2-6-a). Most of these are contained in Rule 9-2, but there are three other fouls that count too. Team unsportsmanlike conduct fouls do NOT count.
30	10-1-7	Re interval fouls in extra periods: Change "from the 25-yard line" to "from the appropriate yard line".	The previous wording did not reflect that (since 2022) some extra periods do not start from the 25-yard line.
31	11-2-1	Re officials' responsibilities: Change wording from "four, five, six, seven or eight officials" to "four or more officials".	Avoids arguments that a ninth official (video judge) is not permitted.
32	12-2-1-b (NCAA 12-5-1-b-6)	Re coach's challenge: "3. A head coach may not request a review if their <u>team's timeouts are exhausted or not available</u> for that half or in that extra period. 4. A request for a review shall be ignored when the privilege has been revoked or if the <u>team's timeouts are exhausted or not available.</u> "	Clarifies when a head coach may challenge. If a team has already used a timeout during a dead ball period, they cannot request a review after the timeout has ended.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
33	12-3-1	Re video judge procedures: Add mention of body-worn cameras as a source of video.	Makes explicit that body-worn cameras worn by any participant <i>could</i> be used as a source of video. Under current rules (1-4-11), this is most likely to be carried by one or more officials.
34	Appendix C	Concussion guidance revised.	Align with NCAA updates.