

Points of Emphasis

The BAFA Rules Committee wishes to draw the following rules issues to everyone's attention in 2005.

BAFA and NCAA Rules

The Committee has decided that British American Football will now have the same playing rules as college football in the USA. As long as football has been played in Britain, we have based our rules on those of the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA), the parent body for most college football. However, we have historically retained a number of changes, most to make British football more like the NFL games that people see on television. In recent years, changes have been made that reduced the number of differences to only a few. This year we have resolved to remove the remaining differences. There are four exceptions to this:

1. Rule 1 – The Game, Field, Players and Equipment. The detailed provisions of NCAA rules with respect to field markings, balls and players' uniforms set a higher standard than the entirely amateur British game can reasonably attain. We are therefore keeping our own Rule 1 that tolerates 90-yard fields of play, players in different coloured helmets and a variety of similar issues. BAFA Rule 1 also lays down strict provisions for the medical facilities to be provided at a game. If a team can attain the NCAA's higher standard, then all well and good, and the rules encourage that. Perhaps in the not too distant future, British American Football will be able to match that across the board, but the time for that is yet.
2. Rule 11 – The Officials: Jurisdiction and Duties. NCAA uses Rule 11 to lay down some minimum standards for the number and roles of game officials. These are supplemented by a Football Officials Manual produced by the Collegiate Commissioners Association (CCA). However, since 1985 the British American Football Referees' Association (BAFRA) has produced an official's manual that is much more detailed than the corresponding CCA publications. The BAFRA Manual of Football Officiating has been adopted by EFAF for all international games in Europe, and is also used in many other countries around the world. The book has even been published successfully in the USA. Because of this, BAFA Rule 11 simply refers to that Manual as the definitive guide for the officiating of British games.
3. Rule 12 – Football Variants. NCAA football is for a single age-group; British rules have to encompass Youth football as well. BAFA Rule 12 is where the small number of differences (mainly safety related) adopted for youth games are listed.
4. Rule 13 – Game Management. Unlike the USA where there is a long tradition of experienced game management, in Britain we need to have minimum standards laid down in print. BAFA Rule 13 is where this is done, so this is the place to look for information on standards for changing facilities, stadium clocks (where provided), officials' assistants (chain crew and ball persons), suspending and abandoning games and other similar matters. This year we have added a section that enshrines the BAFA Disciplinary Code into rule, and allows games to be shortened and tiebreakers to be dispensed with, if leagues wish to do so.

Two unsportsmanlike conduct fouls lead to automatic disqualification

One consequence of BAFA's move to NCAA rules is that from this year a player who is penalised for a second unsportsmanlike conduct foul during a game will be disqualified. It is important to stress that this rule does not apply to players who commit two personal fouls, nor to those who commit two other "major" fouls (usually defined as any carrying a 15-yard penalty). Nor does it prevent the officials from ejecting a player for a single *flagrant* foul.

The list of fouls that are termed "unsportsmanlike acts" is quite short and is defined in Rule 9-2-1-a:

- using abusive, threatening or obscene language or gestures, or anything that provokes ill will or demeans an opponent, the officials or the image of the game (e.g. pointing at or taunting an opponent, inciting spectators, acts that focus attention on a player, altering stride or diving across the goal line when unopposed, removing the helmet inappropriately)
- at the end of a play, failing to return the ball to an official or leaving it near the dead-ball spot (e.g. throwing it away, spiking it or otherwise delaying the game)

The Rules Committee anticipates that this rule change will result in only a few ejections each season, but coaches and players must be prepared to rein in their over-excited colleagues and prevent them from repeating their indiscretions.

Players removing their helmets illegally

One of the unsportsmanlike acts listed above is a new foul under BAFA rules. Previously, it was perfectly legal for a player to remove his helmet before being in the team area. Now to remove your helmet on the field of play will be considered an unsportsmanlike conduct foul unless it occurs:

- during a team timeout
- for reasons of equipment adjustment
- through play
- between periods, or
- during a measurement

BAFRA officials have been advised to implement this rule sensibly. Guidelines issued to them advise that players who inadvertently (unthinkingly) remove their helmets on the field of play should not be penalised unless they are (i) directing anger or criticism at an opponent or official; or (ii) celebrating. Players should be reminded to keep their helmets on. Cases where a player removes his helmet in the vicinity of the sideline just prior to entering the team area should be ignored. Nevertheless, coaches and players should be vigilant in reminding their teammates of this rule and encouraging them to observe it.

Blocking below the waist rules in youth kitted football

For several years now, youth kitted football in Britain has restricted the situations in which a player can legally block an opponent below the waist. It is generally held that inexperienced players are very vulnerable to knee and similar injuries unless they are properly trained how to counter this tactic. Until this year, the restriction applied to all players except those on the line of

scrimmage immediately after the snap. Now, even those players must make their blocks above the waist. The only exception is that a block below the waist can still be used as a means of tackling the runner.

Youth kitted coaches and players are asked to pay particular attention to this rule this year. The safety of players at this level will continue to be a subject monitored by the Rules Committee.