

Points of emphasis

For 2020, the Rules Committee wishes coaches, players and officials to take particular note of the following points.

Officiating mechanics

IFAF has adopted, on the recommendation of the Rules Committee, a change to Rule 11-2-2 regarding officiating mechanics. Officiating responsibilities and mechanics are specified in the current edition of the *Manual of Football Officiating*, published by IAFOA. Officials are responsible for knowing and applying the material in the Manual.

The purpose of the rule change is to standardise officiating mechanics, especially across different size crews. The IAFOA manual is the only one that covers crew sizes from 3 to 8.

The Rules Committee felt that it was best for officials working international games to do the same things that they do regularly in their domestic games (as far as possible). Since domestic games are frequently officiated by 4 or 5-man crews, or in some countries using larger crews is limited to special occasions, it is important that the responsibilities and tasks associated with the officiating positions change as little as possible. The one exception to this principle is obviously that on larger crews, the responsibilities of the crew can be spread out over more people and each individual official can therefore have less to do.

It is a recipe for disaster for officials who are working in their national competitions for most weeks of the year to have to switch to a somewhat arbitrarily different set of mechanics for the one or two weeks of the year when they work international competition.

We hope that in due course all national federations and/or officiating organisations will choose to standardise their mechanics and so facilitate the effectiveness of their officials in international competitions. We recognise that this will be difficult for organisations in USA, Canada and Japan to adopt.

The IAFOA manual is the one previously known as the "BAFRA" manual. An IAFOA Mechanics Committee has been established, based on the existing international advisory committee that has determined recent versions.

What IFAF is doing here is simply standardising the way that games are officiated. No other major international sport has different positioning requirements for its officials. American football outside the USA (and Canada and Japan for historic reasons) should be no different.

Sideline control

The Rules Committee requires competitions and teams to enforce strictly the rules regarding the team area and coaching box (Rule 1-2-4-a, back of the limit lines between the 25-yard lines), and the space between the limit lines (Rules 1-2-3-a and 1-2-3-c, up to 18 feet outside the sidelines and the end line) and the sidelines. These field-level locations must be kept clear of persons who have no game responsibilities.

The field level is not for spectators. It must be reserved for those who are performing a service associated with action on the field of play and for administration of the game. Simply put, no job means no sideline pass.

Each team is limited to 25 persons in its team area, not including squad members in full uniform, who shall be wearing a team credential. (Full uniform is defined as equipped in accord with BAFA rules and ready to play.)

Persons who are directly involved in the game include (Rules 1-1-6 and 1-2-4-b): coaches, team managers, medical and athletic training staff members, athletics communications staff members, and game operations staff members (e.g. chain crew, ball persons, official media liaisons, technicians responsible for coach-to-press box communications).

Editorial changes to Rules 9-2-1 and 9-2-5 make it clear that coaches and other team personnel may not come on to the field to protest officiating decisions or to communicate with players or officials without permission of the referee. Coaches and other personnel must be behind the coaching line while the ball is alive and during the immediate action after the ball becomes dead.

Teams are recommended to clearly separate spectator areas from the field. If there is no spectator seating, a rope or similar marker should be used to keep spectators back from the field. This should be no closer to the boundary lines than 24 feet. Game management should ensure that this is enforced.

Protection of defenseless players

In 2009, we introduced a separate rule prohibiting forcible contact with the helmet and targeting a defenseless opponent. These actions are now in two rules: Targeting and Making Forcible Contact With the Crown of the Helmet (Rule 9-1-3) and Targeting and Making Forcible Contact to Head or Neck Area of a Defenseless Player (Rule 9-1-4). Use of the helmet as a weapon and intentional (targeted) contact to the head or neck area are serious safety concerns. The penalties for fouls under both 9-1-3 and 9-1-4 include automatic disqualification. We continue to emphasise that coaches and officials must be diligent to ensure that players understand and abide by these rules.

Rule 2-27-14 defines and lists characteristics of a defenseless player.

Helmets

The helmet is intended to protect the player from head injuries. It must therefore be fitted properly so that it does not come off through play. Coaches, equipment managers and trainers must be diligent in seeing that players wear the helmets properly, and officials must firmly enforce the rules requiring chin straps to be tightly secured. The rules (Rule 3-3-9) now call for the player whose helmet comes off to leave the game for one down, unless this is the direct result of a foul. The player may remain in the game if his team is granted a charged timeout.

Safety and medical considerations

BAFA strongly encourages coaches and officials to be diligent in ensuring that players wear mandatory equipment. It is especially important that equipment and pads cover body parts for which they were designed. Particular attention is drawn to wearing uniform pants that cover the knees, which are easily abraded when exposed. With the change made in 2018, players, coaches and athletic equipment managers should ensure that the player's pants are fitted properly. Since 2018, pants and knee pads must cover the knee to be legal. If an official discovers illegal equipment, or a player failing to wear mandatory equipment properly, that official should inform the player that he must leave the game for at least one down and is not allowed to return until the equipment is made legal. The player may be allowed to return without missing a down if his team takes a charged team timeout, but only if he corrects the equipment issue as well.

Football players are especially susceptible to methicillin-resistant staphylococcus aureus (MRSA), which is resistant to commonly used antibiotics. MRSA results in lost playing time. More seriously, it has caused the deaths of several football players in recent years. MRSA is typically transmitted through body-to-body contact from an infected wound or via an object (e.g. towel) that has come in contact with the infected area. It is not transmitted through the air, is not found on mud or grass, and cannot live on artificial turf.

BAFA recommends observing common medical precautions to reduce the incidence of MRSA infections, including:

- Proper wearing of all required padding and uniform equipment.
- Keep hands clean by washing thoroughly with soap and water, or by using an alcohol-based hand sanitizer routinely.
- Immediate showering after all physical activity.
- Avoid whirlpools or common tubs when having an open wound.
- Proper washing of athletics gear and towels after each use.
- Referring all active skin lesions to the athletic trainer.
- Covering all skin lesions appropriately before participation.

Concussions

Coaches and medical personnel should exercise caution in the treatment of a participant who exhibits signs of a concussion. See Appendix C for detailed information.

Game management

The Rules Committee remains concerned that while the quantity of American football being played in Britain is on the increase, the quality of it in terms of facilities for games is often not. The Committee is particularly concerned that an increasing number of teams:

- do not have balls, ball boys, chains and chain crew available at the appointed time prior to kickoff (Rules 1-3-2-e and 13-4-1)
- provide the equipment and personnel listed above, but that they are of questionable quality;
- provide the personnel but they are too young to do the job properly;
- provide the personnel but change them during the game;
- do not mark all the field and team area markings required by rule (Rules 1-2-1, 1-2-3-a and 1-2-4-a), or the lines are faint or crooked.

We have taken three steps to address the situation:

- 1 BAFRA officials will continue to do game management and/or field audits to identify both the problem teams and those taking the most effective action.
- 2 We have formalised in the rules the provision for competitions to take action against teams for game management breaches - such action is termed "sanctions" (Rule 13-7).
- 3 We have changed Rule 13-4-1-c to make it mandatory that officials' assistants under the age of 14 are not used, and that those under 18 must be supervised by a responsible member of game management.

We appreciate that some teams find it difficult to recruit gameday personnel, and sometimes have to balance the desire for a prestigious venue with lack of total control over field markings. However, any team can take steps to improve its facilities and performance, and we encourage them to do so.

We are also concerned that some teams wish to run the chains on the side of the field opposite to that specified by rule (Rule 1-2-7). This is not such a trivial change as some people may think. It is very disruptive to the positioning mechanics of the game officials, much of whose positioning is dictated by the position of the chains and the expectation that this will be on the opposite side of the field to that designated as the press box for penalty signalling and other purposes. Unless the total playing enclosure does not permit, the chains **MUST** be run on the side of the field opposite the designated press box.

Sportsmanship

After reviewing a number of plays involving unsportsmanlike conduct, we are firm in our support of the unsportsmanlike conduct rules as they are currently written and officiated. Many of these fouls deal with players who inappropriately draw attention to themselves in a premeditated, excessive or prolonged manner. Players should be taught the discipline that reinforces football as a team game.

BAFA reminds head coaches of their responsibility for the behaviour of their players before and after, as well as during, the game. Players must be cautioned against pre-game unsportsmanlike conduct on the field that can lead to confrontation between the teams. Such action can lead to penalties enforced on the opening kickoff, possibly including disqualification of players. Repeated occurrence of such unsportsmanlike behaviour by a team may result in punitive action by BAFA against the head coach and his team.