

IFAF tackle rule changes 2026

With "importance to teams" (ITT) and "importance to officials" (ITO) indicated. 5 is high; 1 is low and reflects the likelihood of the change affecting a game.

The complete rulebook incorporating the changes is available at <http://www.myiafoa.org/rules/ifaf2026/index.htm>.

Those who find it necessary to write to the editor for interpretations of rules or play situations will receive prompt replies if they number their questions and send them to jim.briggs@americanfootball.sport by email.

1 Rule changes

Rule changes typically mean that the outcome of a play would be different compared to last season.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change	ITT	ITO
1.	2-8-3-b	"T" signal defined as an invalid fair catch signal.	Make clear that a player giving a signal with their arms outstretched is regarded as an (invalid) fair catch signal.	3	3
2.	2-16-10-a	Scrimmage kick formation redefined as: " A scrimmage kick formation is a formation with <u>no player other than the potential kicker (or holder) aligned within the frame of the body of the snapper and no player aligned in the clear path from the snapper to the potential kicker (or holder), and with either (1) at least one potential kicker seven or more yards behind the neutral zone; ...</u> "	Require that there be no player be in the quarterback position for a formation to count as a scrimmage kick formation.	2	3
3.	3-1-3-h	Extra period timeouts modified: "Each team shall be allowed <u>one timeout for the first extra period and one timeout for the second extra period. Each team will be allowed one timeout beginning with the third extra period until the game is ended</u> (Rule 3-3-8)."	Only one timeout per team is now permitted from the third extra period onwards. Radio and television timeouts are not permitted after the end of the second period. No mandatory break after the end of the fourth extra period. This will slightly shorten games that go further than the second extra period. Since each subsequent extra period is usually one play per team, this should not unduly affect players' endurance.	3	3
4.	3-3-6-a-1	Charge a timeout if a player presents as injured AFTER the ball has been spotted for the next down. Add: "If a player presents as injured after the ball is spotted by officials, that team will be charged a Team Timeout or a delay penalty if all timeouts have been used."	Resists time-wasting tactics.	5	5

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change	ITT	ITO
5.	3-5-3-b	Penalty adjusted for defensive substitution fouls after the two-minute warning. Add to penalty: "After the two-minute warning in either half, if Team B commits a substitution foul and 12 or more players are on the field and participate in a down, officials will penalize Team B for the foul and, at the option of Team A, reset the game clock back to the time displayed at the snap. The game clock will then restart on the next snap. If the 12th defender was attempting to exit but was still on the field at the snap and had no influence on the play, then the normal substitution penalty would be enforced with no clock adjustment."	Option to reset the clock to the time of the snap if Team B commits a substitution foul during the last two minutes of either half. This counters misuse of substitution as a time-wasting tactic.	3	3
6.	6-3-14-a, 9-1-14	6-3-14-a becomes: "If Team A is in a scrimmage kick formation at the snap <u>and the snapper is not on the end of the line of scrimmage</u> , any Team B player within one yard of the line of scrimmage must be aligned completely outside the frame of the body of the snapper at the snap." 9-1-14 becomes: "When a team is in scrimmage kick formation <u>and the snapper is not on the end of the line of scrimmage</u> , a defensive player may not initiate contact with the snapper until one second has elapsed after the snap."	If the snapper is also an eligible receiver, it is unfair to require the defence not to line up over them. Similarly modifies snapper protection after the snap.	2	3
7.	7-1-5-a-4	"No player within one yard of the line of scrimmage (stationary or not) <u>may make quick and abrupt or exaggerated actions that simulate action at the snap, and</u> are not part of normal defensive player movement <u>in an obvious attempt to make the offense foul (false start).</u> "	Further defined defensive team pre-snap movements that are illegal.	3	3
8.	7-1-5-a-5	"No person subject to the rules shall use words or signals that disconcert opponents when they are preparing to put the ball in play. No person subject to the rules may call defensive signals that simulate the sound or cadence of, or otherwise interfere with, offensive starting signals. <u>The terms "move" and "stem" are reserved for defensive cadence and may not be used by the offense. The offense may use a "clap" as a starting signal and this signal may not be used by the defense.</u> "	Identifies protected starting signals for defense and offense.	5	5
9.	9-1-9-a	Roughing the passer now includes contact to an offensive player in a passing posture.	Gives extra protection to passers <i>before</i> they have thrown the pass.	4	4
10	10-2-2-b	Adds unsportsmanlike conduct to the list of live ball fouls penalized from the previous spot.	Makes unsportsmanlike conduct consistent with other fouls that can occur in Team A's backfield.	3	3

2 Editorial changes

Editorial changes typically mean a clarification of a rule but would not change the outcome on the field compared to last season.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
1.	1-2-3	<p>Limit lines</p> <p>Add:</p> <p>"d. The <i>safety zone</i> is defined as the area within 18 feet of the playing surface (field of play plus end zones), excluding areas located behind a safety fence. This area applies even if the limit lines are marked closer to the playing surface.</p> <p>e. No spectator, photographer, videographer or other media person may be located within the safety zone at any time during the game. Exceptions:</p> <ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. During the coin toss ceremony and the period between halves. 2. Television camera operators when the ball is dead and the game clock has been stopped (Rule 1-2-3-b Exception). 3. Team videographers (Rule 1-4-11-c Exception 5). 4. Media personnel and other authorised personnel transiting purposefully through the safety zone when it is safe to do so. <p>f. No object (e.g. furniture, equipment) may be placed on the ground within the safety zone at any time during the game except the period between halves (Exceptions: Rules 1-2-5, 1-2-6, 1-2-7, 1-2-8-e).</p> <p>g. Any person legally allowed to be within the safety zone (e.g. coaches, substitutes, team personnel, officials' assistants) must always remain upright and on their feet during play. Persons with mobility limitations are prohibited in this area. A mobility limitation is anything that would prevent a person moving quickly out of the way should a participant approach them. (Persons sitting, crouching, kneeling or lying on the ground, or requiring walking aids, may be unable to get out of the way of rapidly approaching players.)"</p>	<p>Clarifies where media personnel and (in some venues) spectators can be. This makes it clear that they are not allowed within the normal limit lines.</p> <p>Having media or spectators too close to the field is a safety issue for them and for all participants.</p> <p>Note</p> <p>Existing rules on limit lines are NOT sufficient.</p> <p>Consider a scenario where because of stadium shape, the limit lines have been brought in to be as little as 6 feet from the boundary lines. Why would we want to allow anyone not part of the game, anyone not able to move quickly out of the way, or any equipment or furniture, to be that close to the field? They would be a danger to themselves, as well as players and officials.</p> <p>We have added an exception that allows media and other authorised persons to <i>transit through</i> the safety zone at times when it is safe to do so.</p>
2.	1-4-12	<p>Add:</p> <p>"Coaches' phones, headsets <u>and communication devices</u> ...".</p>	Amended to cover coaches' communication devices generically.
3.	2-25-11	<p>Add:</p> <p>"c. When the kick ends in Team A's end zone, the postscrimmage kick spot is Team A's goal line."</p>	2-25-11 a and b between them cover all points of the field except Team A's end zone. This fills the gap.
4.	2-27-14-k	Defines a player (catching or) recovering a loose ball as defenseless.	The IFAF rule already protects a player catching or recovering a fumble, so we merge the two rules.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
5.	3-2-2-g	Revise to: "The game clock should not be stopped if the play clock is/is not started in conflict with paragraph f above."	Tidy up wording because of the 2025 change to 3-2-2-f.
6.	3-2-4-c, 3-2-4-c-5, 3-3-6-e & 3-3-10-b-1	If a player injury or helmet off occurs when the clock has also stopped for another reason where a 25-second clock shall be used, use a 25-second play clock regardless of which team has the injury or helmet off.	Rationalise the rule.
7.	3-3-6-b	Makes clear participating team or official may appeal.	Under the previous wording, it was open to a non-participating team or official to report a questionable injury.
8.	3-3-6-f	Exception allowing a 10-second runoff.	Provide a 10-second runoff option if a team has an injured player in the last 10 seconds of a half, and it coincides with a first down.
9.	3-3-10-b-2 minor	"Ten-Second Runoff. Any time after the two-minute warning in the 2nd or 4th quarters, <u>if</u> the clock was stopped for player(s) on one team only...."	Clarify wording of rule.
10	4-1-2-b-2 Exception 3	Make explicit that Rule 7-2-2 is an exception to the rule that the ball is awarded to the recovering team after an inadvertent whistle.	If an inadvertent whistle occurs during a loose ball after a fumble by Team A on 4 th down or a try, this rule does not overrule the 4 th down/try fumble rule.
11	4-1-2-c	Add: "Any foul that occurs after the inadvertent whistle but during immediate continuing action is treated as a live-ball foul."	Fill a gap in the rules.
12	4-1-2-d	Add: "Continuing action provisions cease if the ball not in player possession (i) touches anything inbounds other than a player, a player's equipment, an official, an official's equipment or the ground; (ii) becomes illegal during play; or (iii) comes into possession of an official."	It was not the intention of the continuing action provisions for them to apply in situations where the ball is interfered with or becomes illegal.
13	4-1-3-b	The exception to the "touching the ground" rule adds "handed" to actions a holder with a knee down may take.	Fill a gap in the rules.
14	7-1-6	Handing the Ball Forward Add: "No player may hand the ball forward except during a scrimmage down <u>prior to a change in team possession</u> as follows:"	Make clear that a forward handoff is only legal if there has not been a change of team possession.
15	9-2-1-a-1-c	Adds "brandishing a weapon" as a specifically prohibited act.	Covers a previously unforeseen eventuality.
16	9-2-5-b	Penalty clarifies that if an individual can be readily identified, it is not a team unsportsmanlike conduct foul.	Ensure that responsibility for an unsportsmanlike act is properly and fairly applied.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
17	11-2-2	<p>Officials' responsibilities</p> <p>Add:</p> <p>"From 2028, only officials who regularly use the latest approved mechanics will be considered for international tournaments. "Latest mechanics" will be the newest edition of the Manual of Football Officiating, or the previous edition for up to 12 months after its replacement."</p> <p>Exceptions: USA, Canada, <u>Mexico</u> and Japan.</p>	<p>Raise standards of officiating by ensuring that international tournaments are only officiated by people familiar with the mechanics used.</p> <p>This will encourage national federations and officiating bodies to adopt standard mechanics, if they don't already do so.</p> <p>Note</p> <p>This addresses the issue that a minority of federations are not playing to IFAF rules and/or not using our standard mechanics. This poses serious quality issues at tournaments and needs to be addressed.</p>
18	12-1-2-a-12	<p>List of reviewable aspects of a play.</p> <p>Add: "and time remaining in a quarter"</p>	Clarify that timing (e.g. the end of a quarter) is reviewable.
19	12-1-5-a, 12-2-3-a, 12-2-3-b	Replace "indisputable" with "clear and obvious".	Clarify meaning.
20	Officiating Standards	Add a new section on the interpretation of fouls by officials, adapted from existing IFAF officiating resources.	Makes officiating standards more open to players, coaches, media personnel and spectators.