

2019/2020 Law Changes Explained

With the new season fast approaching and pre-season fixtures coming thick and fast, here is a simplified version of this year's key law changes to help prepare clubs, managers, players, referees and spectators for the new season.

Law 3 (The Players)

A player who is being substituted must leave the field at the nearest point on the boundary line, unless otherwise directed by the referee.

What does this mean? This means that you no longer have to leave the field of play on the half way line when making a substitute – you can now leave anywhere, for example behind the goal, unless the referee instructs otherwise. However, the new player coming on must still come on from the half way line as per previous seasons.

Law 5 (The Referee)

Team officials guilty of misconduct can be shown a Yellow or a Red Card; if an offender cannot be identified, the senior coach in the technical area receives the Yellow/Red Card.

What does this mean? This means that anyone can now receive a Yellow or Red Card. Team officials can be warned, cautioned or sent off for committing any of the below offences:

Warning

The following offences should usually result in a warning; repeated or blatant offences should result in a caution or sending-off:

- entering the field of play in a respectful/non-confrontational manner
- failing to cooperate with a match official e.g. ignoring an instruction/request from an assistant referee or the fourth official
- minor/low-level disagreement (by word or action) with a decision
- occasionally leaving the confines of the technical area without committing another offence

Caution

Caution offences include (but are not limited to):

- clearly/persistently not respecting the confines of their team's technical area
- delaying the restart of play by their team
- deliberately entering the technical area of the opposing team (non-confrontational)
- dissent by word or action including:
- throwing/kicking drinks bottles or other objects
- gestures which show a clear lack of respect for the match official(s) e.g. sarcastic clapping
- entering the referee review area (RRA)
- excessively/persistently gesturing for a red or yellow card
- excessively showing the TV signal for a VAR 'review'
- gesturing or acting in a provocative or inflammatory manner
- persistent unacceptable behaviour (including repeated warning offences)
- showing a lack of respect for the game

Sending-off

Sending-off offences include (but are not limited to):

- delaying the restart of play by the opposing team e.g. holding onto the ball, kicking the ball away, obstructing the movement of a player
- deliberately leaving the technical area to:
- show dissent towards, or remonstrate with, a match official

- act in a provocative or inflammatory manner
- enter the opposing technical area in an aggressive or confrontational manner
- deliberately throwing/kicking an object onto the field of play
- entering the field of play to:
- confront a match official (including at half-time and full-time)
- interfere with play, an opposing player or a match official
- entering the video operation room (VOR)
- physical or aggressive behaviour (including spitting or biting) towards an opposing player, substitute, team official, match official, spectator or any other person (e.g. ball boy/girl, security or competition official etc.)
- receiving a second caution in the same match
- using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or gestures
- using unauthorised electronic or communication equipment and/or behaving in an inappropriate manner as the result of using electronic or communication equipment
- violent conduct

Offences where an object (or the ball) is thrown

In all cases, the referee takes the appropriate disciplinary action:

- reckless – caution the offender for unsporting behaviour
- using excessive force – send off the offender for violent conduct

Law 8 (The Start and Restart of Play)

1. The team that wins the toss may choose to take kick off

What does this mean? This means that at the start of the game, if you win the coin toss, you can choose to take kick-off or which goal to attack in the first half.

2. Dropped ball for the goal keeper (if play is stopped in the penalty area) or for one player of the team that last touched the ball at the location of the last touch; all other players (both teams) must be 4m (4.5 yards) away.

What does this mean? This means that if there is a drop ball in the penalty area, the ball is dropped for the goal keeper to collect or it is dropped for a player from the team that touched the ball last. This is non-contested and all other players (from both teams) must be 4 metres away from the drop ball.

Law 9 (The Ball In and Out of Play)

Dropped ball if the ball touches the referee (or other match officials) and goes into the goal, possession changes or an attacking move starts.

What does this mean? This means that if the ball touches the referee, or any other match official, and has a direct impact on the game – such as it goes in the goal or the possession changes – as a result of the ball hitting the referee, then a dropped ball is awarded.

Law 12 (Fouls and Misconduct)

Handling the Ball

It is an offence if a player:

- deliberately touches the ball with their hand/arm, including moving the hand/arm towards the ball
- gains possession/control of the ball after it has touched their hand/arm and then:
 - scores in the opponents' goal

- creates a goal-scoring opportunity
- scores in the opponents' goal directly from their hand/arm, even if accidental, including by the goalkeeper

It is usually an offence if a player:

- touches the ball with their hand/arm when:
 - the hand/arm has made their body unnaturally bigger
 - the hand/arm is above/beyond their shoulder level (unless the player deliberately plays the ball which then touches their hand/arm)

The above offences apply even if the ball touches a player's hand/arm directly from the head or body (including the foot) of another player who is close.

Except for the above offences, it is not usually an offence if the ball touches a player's hand/arm:

- directly from the player's own head or body (including the foot)
- directly from the head or body (including the foot) of another player who is close
- if the hand/arm is close to the body and does not make the body unnaturally bigger
- when a player falls and the hand/arm is between the body and the ground to support the body, but not extended laterally or vertically away from the body

The goalkeeper has the same restrictions on handling the ball as any other player outside the penalty area. If the goalkeeper handles the ball inside their penalty area when not permitted to do so, an indirect free kick is awarded but there is no disciplinary sanction.

What does this mean? The key thing to take away from this change is that if the body is made unnaturally bigger (even if not on purpose) the player can be penalised with a handball. This is similar if the player's hand/arms are above or beyond shoulder level i.e. above their head or out in front of them. The body must be in a natural position, as per last season. The easiest way to avoid a hand ball is to keep your arms down at all times unless it is to aid with balance or running – provided it is a natural body position.

Law 13 (Freekicks)

1. When there is a defensive 'wall' of at least 3 players, all attacking team players must be at least 1m from the 'wall'; IDFK if they encroach.

What does this mean? This means that if you have a defensive wall during a game for a freekick and there are 3 or more players in that wall, all of the attacking players cannot be in that wall and must be at least 1 metre away from the wall. If an attacker encroaches or is closer than 1 metre, then an Indirect Freekick will be awarded to the defending team.

2. For defending team free kicks in their penalty area, the ball is in play once it is kicked and clearly moves; it does not have to leave the penalty area

What does this mean? This means that as soon as the ball is kicked at a freekick in the penalty area the ball is in play and doesn't need to leave the penalty area; the opposition must be 10 yards (9.15 metres) from the ball until the ball is played before touching the ball – as anywhere else on the field of play.

Law 14 (The Penalty Kick)

Goal keepers must have at least part of one foot on, or in line with, the goal line when a penalty kick is taken; cannot stand behind the line.

What does this mean? This means that the goal keeper must stay on their line at a penalty kick. If they come off their goal line before the ball is kicked, then the kick may be retaken and the goal keeper cautioned (as per previous law last season)

Law 16 (The Goal Kick)

At goal kicks, the ball is in play once it is kicked and clearly moves; it does not have to leave the penalty area

What does this mean? This means that as soon as the ball is kicked at a goal kick, you can come into the penalty area to collect the ball – no matter if you are an attacker or a defender. Defenders can remain in the penalty area and receive the ball in the area as soon as the ball has been kicked and clearly moves.

If you wish to read all of the law changes for this season, they can be found here: (will send a PDF to go on the website).

If you have any questions regarding the new law changes, please contact the Referees' Department at Essex FA.