

BAFA rule changes 2023

1 Rule changes

Changes for adoption in 2023.

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

The rulebook incorporating the changes is available at <https://rules.bafra.info/rulebook/bafa2023/index.htm>.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change	ITT	ITO
1.	1-2-1	Raise minimum length of field to 90 yards. From 2024: NL Premier Division From 2025: NL Division 1 and Division 2 From 2026: all including BUCS Allow applications for exemption to the competition/Rules Committee. Referee can permit play to proceed where there has been a late change of venue or error in field marking.	Improve standards. We know of several teams that have played on 80-yard fields in the past 2 years. We will therefore phase this in over 3 years starting in 2024 to allow teams to find new or alter existing venues. The change would make this a "Game may not commence" rule from those dates.	5	2
2.	1-2-5-e	Goal post padding exception if the goal post itself is more than 12 feet from the end line or there is a non-hazardous barrier preventing players from running into the goal post.	Refinements to ensure sensible interpretation.	3	1
3.	1-4-5-c	For 2023 - Change penalty to "REPORT" rather than 15-yard penalty per half and timeout per quarter. For 2024 – Restore penalty and timeouts for non-compliance.	This was the rule change regarding the penalty for illegal jersey colours that affected one team in the BAFA senior season in 2022. It was therefore decided to give an amnesty to all teams for that year. The proposal is to extend this amnesty for one further season but to re-impose the rule from 2024. Offending teams can choose whether to replace their jerseys by then or accept the penalties.	3	2
4.	1-4-6-b-1	Delete the words: "and that completely covers each finger and thumb"	Permit fingerless gloves to be worn. We don't believe this is unfair.	3	3
5.	1-4-6-c	Add: "Eyewear is not clear if it obscures a player's eyes at any time from any angle or in any light condition. 'Mirrored' eyewear is expressly prohibited."	Prohibit mirrored eye shields and clarify the intent of the rule. Many manufacturers are producing visors that are opaque from different angles according to the light. This is often due to a layer of mirroring. The standard is that a player's eyes must be visible at all times from all angles. Preventing this gives a player an unfair competitive advantage, as well as it being a safety issue if medical personnel can't see the player's eyes.	5	3

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change	ITT	ITO
6.	3-2-4-c-8	Use a 25-second play clock after a Team B touchdown.	It is not appropriate to use the 40-second play clock when Team B has scored a touchdown. Team B is not on the same level of readiness for a try as Team A should be. If you think that a 25-second clock is shorter than a 40-second clock, remember that a 25-second clock only starts when the referee declares the ball ready for play, while a 40-second clock starts immediately on the end of the previous play.	2	3
7.	3-2-5	Introduce NCAA minimum time for a play after spiking the ball. Add: "a. If the game clock is stopped and will start on the referee's signal with three or more seconds remaining in the quarter, the offense may reasonably expect to throw the ball directly to the ground (Rule 7-3-2-e) and have enough time for another play. b. With two seconds or one second on the game clock there is enough time for only one play."	This was an NCAA change in 2013. We didn't adopt it then because we felt it unnecessary, but now games can be timed more accurately so it is appropriate to introduce it.	2	3
8.	3-5-3-c	Add "(or at :05 or less and Team A calls a timeout)" to the wording about Team B keeping more than 11 players on the field when the play clock is running out.	AR 3-5-3:VII stipulates that Team B should be penalised if it has more than 11 players on the field and Team A struggles to read the defense. This change provides rule support for scenario (a) in the approved ruling.	2	2
9.	4-1-3-r	Ball declared dead when a ball carrier simulates or fakes a feet-first slide.	Happened once in an NCAA game and was felt to be unfair to allow a player to fake a slide to avoid being tackled.	3	3
10.	6-5-4	Illegal block or contact by a player after a fair catch signal is now a 10-yard penalty.	Recognition that contact that does not reach the level of a personal foul should not carry the same penalty as a personal foul.	2	4
11.	7-3-11 penalty	Illegal touching penalty is five yards; now includes a loss of down.	To make the penalty the same as for an illegal pass.	2	4
12.	7-3-12 & 9-2-1 penalty	Enhanced penalty options for Team B unsportsmanlike conduct fouls during pass plays added. Make enforcement similar to that for a personal foul.	Avoid situation where the penalty might be declined if Team A completed a long pass.	3	5
13.	9-1-6	Blocking below the waist now restricted to inside the tackle box.	Considerably simplifies the blocking below the waist rule and restricts it to one area of the field. We have been waiting for NCAA to make a major change like this for some time.	5	5
14.	9-3-4 penalty	Defensive holding penalties include a first down when accepted (this change eliminates previous 9-3-5 and 10-2-2-e-2).	Simplifies penalty enforcement and removes an inequity where the foul meant that no pass was thrown.	2	4

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change	ITT	ITO
15.	13-1-2-a	Extend the minimum medical requirements upgrade to the 2025 season by making an immediate care practitioner and team first-aider mandatory in all adult and college games from that season.	By 2024, an immediate care practitioner per game plus an emergency first-aider per team will be mandatory in all BAFA Premier and Division 1, and BUCS Premier games. This extension would add remaining adult/college games to this rule for 2025 (BAFA) and 2025-26 (BUCS). This change has been reviewed favourably by the BAFA Sports Science and Medicine Committee.	3	1
16.	13-1-4-b	For participants who are concussed but return to play, the penalty is now the same as for unsportsmanlike conduct, but still includes automatic disqualification.	There was an anomaly in the previous rule that allowed a concussed player to participate in a play without penalty. Now, this would result in a 15-yard penalty. This rule is designed to penalise players who have been concussed in the current game, but it would also in principle cover players who had been concussed in prior games but not cleared to return to play. The rule is deliberately non-specific on how the officials would know whether this was the case.	2	4
17.	13-5-5	Revise so that teams don't get sanctioned if the reason the game does not start is because of BAFRA. Also give a Competition Authority the power to require game management to arrange alternative officials. This is in the event that BAFRA notifies that it cannot assign officials to the game. The Competition Authority decides how much notice applies.	Fairness. The "Stop, report and sanction" clause covered all situations. It will still cover situations where game management is responsible for appointing the officials (i.e. where BAFRA has given notice that it can't provide officials), but not when BAFRA is responsible for the officials not turning up (e.g. car breakdown, sudden illness).	2	1
18.	13-5-9	Referee must also report forfeits. Give competition authority the ability to define a process for revising the score if it is 1-0.	Fill a gap that previously forfeits were not automatically reported as such.	1	3
19.	13-8-6 (formerly 13-9-6)	Add that competitions may set a minimum number of squad members who must be present at the field and in legal uniform at kickoff time. Add that competitions may set a minimum number and minimum qualification of coaches who must be present at the field at kickoff time. Add wording to define that the requirements must be met at the designated kickoff time. Minimum numbers drop to 11 for squad members and 1 for coaches once the game starts.	Gives rule support to enforce such BAFA competition regulations. The game cannot commence if the minimum numbers are not met. Once the game has started, it cannot continue if a team drops below 11 squad members and 1 Level 1 coach. Each small-sided football format will have its own variant of this rule.	5	5
20.	13-8-7 (formerly 13-8-1)	Extend the rule about being on the roster to cover coaches and other persons in the team area.	Consistency and plugging a loophole. Previously there was no game penalty for a coach or other sideline personnel who did not appear on the roster.	4	2

2 Editorial changes

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
1.	1-2-7-a	Add the words: "The chain shall be made from material that does not stretch or break in normal use."	Some teams use plastic chain that stretches when pulled. This is particularly a problem when it does not return to its normal length when the stretching force is removed.
2.	1-2-8-e	Yardage markers on the goal lines must be placed at least 18 feet outside the sideline. If this is not possible, they shall be removed.	Safety of officials covering goal line plays.
3.	1-4-6-d	Area allowed for insignia expanded to 16 square inches.	Allow memorial insignia to be significantly bigger than the previous 2.5 square inches.
4.	1-4-11-b	Coaches' booth space further clarified and codifying remote coaching prohibition.	Clarifies that booth space and location must be approximately equivalent for both teams. Prohibits coaching from outside the playing enclosure by any communications technology.
5.	1-4-11-g	Emphasise that unmanned aircraft systems (drones) of any type cannot be used to film a game. Defines 150m as the safety distance for drones not associated with the game.	Revise this rule to (i) ensure participant and spectator safety, and (ii) avoid competitive advantage. Although, regulations (e.g. CAA in the UK) have changed since last review, they still make it difficult to legally fly a drone with a camera near a sports venue. While there are exceptions in UK law that could make this legal, this would be difficult to police. It is therefore safer and more pragmatic to impose a blanket ban. This will also make application of the rule consistent across countries that do not have similar drone regulation.
6.	2-27-14-a	Defenseless player: Passer further defined as including an offensive player in a passing posture with focus downfield.	Expand definition of passer.
7.	3-2-3 or 3-3-2	Make it clear that you don't extend a period for a foul during a running clock session.	Clarify that the aim is to get the game over with.
8.	3-2-4-c, 3-3-5-e and 3-3-9-b	Merge 3-2-4-c-4 and 13. Reword 3-3-5-e and 3-3-9-b to clarify intent of the rules.	Align play clock rules for injuries and players losing their helmet. In either case, this should result in a 25-second play clock for a Team A event and a 40-second play clock for a Team B (or both teams) event. However, if the game clock is also stopped for another reason (e.g. to administer a penalty), a 25-second clock will always be applied unless unfair clock tactics rules apply.
9.	3-2-4-c-6	Free kick play clock exception.	Clarify that a 40-second play clock applies after a free kick down.
10	6-3-2	Add the words "if accepted" to the second and third sentences.	Clarify that these statements only apply if the receiving team accepts the privilege of taking the ball at the spot of the violation.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
11	6-3-13 / 10-2-4	Clarifying the basic spot on fouls by kicking team.	Clearer wording.
12	6-5-1-b	Clarifying possession after a fair catch signal.	Better wording.
13	AR 7-2-4:III	Delete	Made obsolete by AR 8-5-1:XI. Remove duplication.
14	8-3-2-a	Add text: "If a touchdown is scored during a down in which time in the fourth period expires <u>or in the second possession series of an overtime period</u> , the try shall not be attempted unless the point(s) would affect the outcome of the game."	Make it clear that the principle of not playing unnecessary tries applies in extra periods as well as in the fourth quarter.
15	9-1 penalty	Added illegal blind-side block signal.	Need signal for this.
16	9-1-3	Crown of the helmet redefined as top segment of the helmet; namely, the circular area defined by a 6-inch radius from the apex (top) of the helmet.	More technical and therefore more precise definition.
17	AR 9-1-4:IX	Delete this AR.	This AR refers to the ability to reverse a targeting disqualification during the half-time interval. This process does not exist in IFAF rules, so the AR is inaccurate.
18	9-1-15	Add the word "abruptly".	Enhanced description of horse-collar tackle.
19	9-1-16 Pen.	Including holder in penalty description.	Holders were implicitly covered by this rule (like kickers) but this makes it explicit.
20	9-1-16-a-4	Expanded definition of when a kicker's protection ends.	Now explicitly states that having possession of the ball outside the tackle box ends the kicker's protection.
21	9-2-2-d	Add "Team A may not advance the ball nor consume more than 3 seconds having indicated to their opponents that they do not intend to advance the ball (a "take-a-knee play")."	Give clarity about what penalty should be enforced if Team A advances the ball (or consumes time unduly) having informed the opposition that they are "taking a knee". Without this, some referees might choose to implement a more severe penalty under Rule 9-2-3.
22	12-1	Revisions to remove reference to the "newness" of review and also to references to NCAA review.	No longer needed or appropriate.

#	Rule	Change	Rationale for change
23	12-2-1-b and AR 12-2-1:l	Add: "5. A team may not challenge a ruling in which the game was stopped and a decision has already been made by the video judge. However, until the ball is ready for play, a team may challenge an aspect of the same play if that component of the play was not considered by the video judge as part of the initial review. 6. If a team challenges a specific ruling, but a different ruling is changed, the team is not charged with a timeout and does not lose its privilege to challenge."	Emphasise that a team cannot re-review something that has already been reviewed by the video judge. However, other aspects of the same play can be reviewed up to the point where the ball is declared ready for play. Also, clarify that if the team challenges a specific ruling, but a different ruling is changed, the team does not lose its privilege to challenge. A new approved ruling provides an example of this.
24	12-2-2-a-2	Position of the ball in relation to the goal line reviewable.	Touchdowns and safeties were already reviewable because they are scores, but this means that a goal line decision regarding a touchback could also be reviewed.
25	AR 12-2-2:II	Add: "During a review, the Video Judge sees clear evidence that the ball carrier was held and their forward progress stopped before the ball was fumbled. RULING: The play will be changed with the ball dead at the spot where the ball carrier's progress was stopped. <i>Unlike other codes of American football, a forward progress ruling (or absence of) is reviewable.</i> "	Clarify that forward progress can be reviewed in IFAF and BAFA rules.
26	12-2-3-h	Add: "A Team A player going out of bounds during a kick play and returning inbounds during the down, and whether such a player was blocked out of bounds."	Clarify that illegal return of an out of bounds player is reviewable.
27	AR 12-2-3:l	Add: "During the last two minutes of the game or during an extra period, the Video Judge reviews a play and sees clear evidence of a false start prior to the snap. (a) A Team A player advanced the ball for 3 yards. (b) A Team A player fumbled the ball and it was recovered by Team B. RULING: In both (a) and (b), after the review the play will be changed. A 5-yard penalty will be enforced and Team A will have possession of the ball."	Clarify that a review can cancel a play by finding a false start before the ball was snapped.
28	12-3-4-c-5	Restoring time at end of game clarified.	Only restore time in the fourth quarter if the result of the game is still in doubt.
29	Appendix F	Addition of signal 28: Illegal blind-side block	Provides an explicit signal for what was a new foul a few years ago.
30	Penalty codes	Use TGC and TGD (and TGB) to distinguish types of TGT	TGC for a 9-1-3 (crown of helmet) infraction. TGD for a 9-1-4 (defenceless player) infraction. TGB when both apply. This will enable us to track targeting penalties more effectively.