

# Points of emphasis

For 2022, 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 20-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.

Coaches that need to have conversations with officials about specific rulings within the game must do so from the Team Area. Coaches are encouraged not to enter the field of play or leave the Team Area to debate officiating decisions, and those that do so will have committed an automatic Unsportsmanlike Conduct Foul.

Coaches will be allowed to only step to the sideline to call offensive and defensive signals after all action has ceased. That working space (six-foot white border) is intended to allow officials to adequately perform their duties; to protect the safety of officials, players and coaches; and to allow teams to demonstrate good sportsmanship within the team area.

Special attention should be given to the rule stating that if a coach receives two unsportsmanlike fouls in a single game, they are ejected.

The Rules Committee recommends officials to be more diligent in their observations of these actions and they are instructed to flag violations of the rule when it occurs in an area they can observe. Coaches are expected to set an appropriate, professional example for their players, fans and the many others who watch the game and to intervene when they see members of their team exhibit behavior that is not acceptable under the Sportsmanship guidelines of the Football Code.

### **Protection of defenseless players / targeting**

The Rules Committee continues to embrace the targeting rule in order to promote player safety, reduce head contact and eliminate specific targeting actions from the game. The language in 9-1-3 and 9-1-4 stipulates that no player shall target and make forcible contact to the head or neck area of a defenseless player or contact an opponent with the crown (top) of their helmet. The term "forcible contact" has replaced the word "initiate" to ensure the intent of the rule is clear.

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 emphasize 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/her team is granted a charged timeout.

## Uniform and equipment compliance

There is a growing trend in the game with players choosing not to wear their uniform and/or required equipment properly. It is the responsibility of the team to ensure that the equipment uniform rules are understood and followed by players. The responsibility of officials is to enforce the rule when any player is clearly non-compliant.

For 2022, all officials will be alert to players that wear their pants and knee pads significantly above the knee and be prepared to take action. In addition, compliance to the jersey rule is important and officials noticing players out of scope with the rule should get this corrected or send the player out of the game. This also includes a tee shirt that is untucked and hanging down below the top of the pants.

The intent with this point of emphasis is not to distract officials or make them overly involved in equipment monitoring, but to encourage officials to act when players are blatantly disregarding the rules involving the uniform. Pregame warmups and dead-ball periods are a good time to be proactive with players concerning the uniforms and equipment.

## 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/she 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/her team takes a charged team timeout, but only if he/she 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 sanitiser 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.

### **Illegal contact against a quarterback/passer**

Because of the position he/she plays, the passer is often in a vulnerable position, with little or no opportunity to protect himself/herself from, or to prepare for, forcible contact. In recognition of this, there is an explicit rule (Rule 9-1-9) which addresses this unique situation: "No defensive player shall unnecessarily rough a passer when it is obvious the ball has been thrown."

The rule then lists several specific acts which are illegal when they occur against a passer or potential passer. The Rules Committee over time has given options for the quarterback to protect himself, such as sliding feet first and to legally throw the ball away outside the tackle box. Because of the extremely vulnerable situation the quarterback position presents, it is important for all officials, and the Referee and the Centre Judge in particular, to be a presence and recognise when a passer is threatened or is in a defenseless position. The crew must make it a priority to afford the quarterback all the protection the rules provide.

### **Feigning an injury**

With the advent of the up-tempo offences, there is a growing trend of defensive players feigning an injury in an attempt to slow down or break the rhythm of the offense and try to gain an unwarranted time out. Full protection under the rules should go to a player that indeed suffers an injury; however, on occasion some potential injuries are suspect, happen in unusual windows between plays and appear to be staged. The Rules Committee had serious discussions on potential options on how to best take away incentive for players to feign an injury including adding additional time before a player could return from injury.

Head Coaches are expected to set a culture within their team to ensure that this type dishonest action will not be tolerated. Feigning an injury is not ethical and is completely against the spirit of fair competition. It is a bad look for our great game.

### **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.

### **Unsportsmanlike conduct / taunting**

Currently the Rules Committee is satisfied with the solid judgement that officials are demonstrating evaluating celebration issues and this focus will continue. For the 2022 season, it will be a point of emphasis for officials to penalise any taunting action that is directed at an opponent. These actions are a bad look for the game and can lead to unnecessary confrontations between the teams and must be eliminated. The pregame warm-up rules have been modified recently to ensure proper sportsmanship before our contests. Officials should be vigilant during the pregame whenever players are on the field.

Unsportsmanlike acts before the game are detrimental to the sport and must be cleaned up.

### **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. ×