

The background is a dark teal color with a repeating pattern of small, light-colored icons related to football, such as soccer balls, jerseys, trophies, and hands shaking.

# PLAY FAIR!

<sup>®</sup>

The IFAB strategy to develop  
the Laws of the Game to improve football 2017-2022



# Introduction

Emboldened by football's positive reaction to the radical decisions taken at the 130th IFAB AGM in 2016, when approval was given for an experiment with video assistant referees (VARs), a change in the 'denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity' (DOGSO) philosophy and the historic revision of the Laws of the Game, The IFAB, in close partnership with FIFA, aims to expand the football debate with a **'PLAY FAIR!'** strategy which complements and enhances FIFA's 'fair play' programme so that ideas to develop the game through its Laws reflect "what football wants".

The underlying philosophy of **'PLAY FAIR!'** is a 'call to the conscience' of everyone involved in football, from individual players, coaches, referees, administrators and fans through to competition organisers and governing bodies. It is a call for a **'PLAY FAIR!'** attitude and approach to underpin every action and every decision taken in relation to the Laws of the Game and how they are applied at all levels. Fundamental to **'PLAY FAIR!'** is respect for the Laws, match officials, other participants and the game itself.

The three central pillars of **'PLAY FAIR!'** are to develop and use the Laws to:

-  **Fairness and integrity:** create, promote and protect integrity and fairness
-  **Universality and inclusion:** make the game accessible to everyone, regardless of age, race, religion, culture, gender, sexual orientation, physical or mental disability or, perhaps most fundamental of all, playing ability
-  **Technology:** use technology to benefit the game.

**'PLAY FAIR!'** must aim to make the game fairer, more attractive and more enjoyable by using the Laws to change football's ethos so the game and the players are positive role models for society and especially for young people.

The **'PLAY FAIR!'** strategy for 2017–2022 consists of potential changes to three crucial areas which affect football at every level and in every part of the world (details on following pages):

- 1 Improving player behaviour and increasing respect**
- 2 Increasing playing time**
- 3 Increasing fairness and attractiveness**

Each proposal is at one of three stages:

-  No Law change needed – could be implemented immediately\*
-  Ready for testing/experiments\*
-  For discussion

The aim of this document is to generate discussion and take a 'fresh' look at how the Laws could make the game better.

# 1 Improving player behaviour and increasing respect

The behaviour of players and team officials (especially coaches) must improve and more respect must be shown for the 'spirit' and letter of the Laws and for the referees who apply them. There are many ways in which behaviour can be improved and respect increased:

## No Law change needed – could be implemented immediately

- 📁 **Increased responsibility for the captain:**
  - 📁 the main point of communication with/for the referee
  - 📁 only player allowed to approach the referee in a controversial situation
  - 📁 help the referee to calm flashpoint situation/player(s)

In addition, The IFAB & FIFA will consider producing a Captains' Code of Responsibilities and establish ways to consult national team captains about **'PLAY FAIR!'** initiatives and ideas.

## Ready for testing/experiments

- 📁 **'Mobbing/surrounding' match officials:**

Possible sanctions

  - 📁 referees to deal more strongly with players who 'mob' the referee/assistant referee i.e. more use of cautions (YCs)
  - 📁 only the captain can approach the referee (or other match officials) to when a decision is 'controversial'
  - 📁 fines or points deduction for a team guilty of 'mobbing'
- 📁 **Red and yellow card for coaches/team officials** – red card (RC) or yellow card (YC) for poor behaviour by a coach or other team official so it is clear when the referee has taken disciplinary action, rather than having warned the official.

## For discussion

- 📁 **Pre-match handshake** – referee goes to the technical areas just before kick-off and the two coaches and referee shake hands together as a sign of respect.
- 📁 **Red card for substitute** – if a substitute receives a red card then the maximum number of substitutes the team can use for the remainder of the match is reduced by one (if the team has already used all substitutes then potentially one less substitution in next game).



# 2 Increasing playing time

Many people are very frustrated that a typical 90-minute match has fewer than 60 minutes of effective (actual) playing time (EPT) i.e. when the ball is in play. The **'PLAY FAIR!'** strategy proposes measures to reduce time-wasting and 'speed up' the game:

## No Law change needed – could be implemented immediately

 **Stricter calculation of 'additional time'** – when additional time is indicated, the 4th official most commonly shows '1' minute at the end of the 1st half and '3' minutes at the end of the 2nd half, but the amount of time 'lost' through stoppages is often much more. Referees should be required to be much stricter in calculating additional time, by stopping their watch as follows:

-  **penalty kick** – from the penalty award until the kick has been taken
-  **goal** – from the goal being scored until the kick-off
-  **injury** – from the referee asking the player if attention is required until play restarts
-  **red and yellow cards** – from the referee showing the card until play restarts
-  **substitution** – from the referee's signal for a substitution until play restarts
-  **9.15 m** – from the moment the referee starts to pace 9.15m (or uses the spray for the position of the ball) until the signal is given to take the free kick

 **Goalkeeper holding the ball** – referees to apply the 6 seconds Law strictly.

## Ready for testing/experiments

 **Substitutions** – much time is 'lost' – often deliberately – by a player who is being substituted slowly walking towards the halfway line. As an injured player must leave the field at the nearest boundary line, this could apply to a player being substituted (unless there are security issues identified by the referee) as the Law does not require the player to leave at the halfway line.

## For discussion

 **Effective playing time – clock stops every time the ball is out of play** – one potential method of increasing playing time is to stop the watch/clock every time play stops and re-start it when play begins i.e. effective playing time (EPT). This could be applied in a variety of ways with the clock/watch being stopped every time play stops for:

 **the last 5 minutes of the 1st half and the last 10 minutes of the 2nd half (same during extra time)** – these are the periods of the match when the players are most likely to 'waste time'

 **the whole game** – this would involve determining that a match would consist of two periods of (for example) 30 minutes EPT. Such a radical change would not only mean that there would be less point in players wasting time but would also mean that in a competition every club would play exactly the same amount of EPT.

 **Stadium clocks** – where a stadium has a clock visible to the spectators, the time could be shown on the clock and whenever the referee 'stops the watch' the stadium clock also stops by a direct link to the referee's watch or by an official who controls the clock and is in contact with the referee. In addition, the stadium clock could show the additional time being played and not be stopped at 45 and 90 minutes.

 **'Self-passing' at a free kick, corner kick and goal kick** – why is a player not allowed to touch the ball a second time after a free kick, goal kick, corner kick (or penalty?) until someone else has touched it? Football already enjoys/encourages the 'quick' free kick but this could be even better if the 'fouled' player could play the ball more than once – it would encourage attacking play as the player who is fouled can, for example, stop the ball and then immediately continue their dribble/attacking move and could 'speed up' the game. Historically, in the ancient game of Harrow Football, the fouled player could carry on dribbling and this was allowed in the original 1863 Laws of the Game.

 **Moving ball at goal kick** – remove the requirement for ball to be stationary at goal kick as there is no major advantage if it is moving but referee ordering a re-take for a ball which is slightly moving annoys people and wastes more time.

 **Goal kick position** – the goal kick must be taken at the same side of goal area that the ball left the field; this would stop time-wasting e.g. where ball goes out on one side of the goal and goalkeeper walks slowly to take the kick on the other side of the goal area.

# 3 Increasing fairness & attractiveness

The 'PLAY FAIR!' strategy should develop the Laws to make the game fairer and more enjoyable to watch, play, coach and referee. This may involve challenging aspects of football which have been traditionally accepted but which cause irritation and 'spoil' the game:

## Ready for testing/experiments

 **A different order of kickers for kicks from the penalty mark (penalties)** – some studies suggest that the team that takes the 'first' kick in kicks from the penalty mark has a built-in advantage primarily because there is greater mental pressure on the second kicker (in each round) who often faces instant elimination if they miss their kick (especially once the first four kicks for each team have been completed).

A "tennis tie-break" system where the 'first kicker' alternates could be fairer:

|           |        |           |                      |
|-----------|--------|-----------|----------------------|
| 1st kick  | Team A | 2nd kick  | Team B               |
| 3rd kick  | Team B | 4th kick  | Team A               |
| 5th kick  | Team A | 6th kick  | Team B               |
| 7th kick  | Team B | 8th kick  | Team A               |
| 9th kick  | Team A | 10th kick | Team B               |
| 11th kick | Team B | 12th kick | Team A and so on ... |

(other systems/orders may be permitted during the experiments)

 **Goal kicks and defending free kicks in the penalty area: defenders can play ball before it leaves the penalty area** – opponents must be 9.15 m at a free kick but the ball does not have to travel 9.15 m before it is in play. However, for goal kicks and defensive free kicks in the penalty area the ball must leave the penalty area before it is in play; if anyone plays the ball before this there is no sanction: the free kick/goal kick is retaken so it can become a time-wasting tactic.

Allowing defending players (including the goalkeeper) to play the ball inside the penalty area once the free kick/goal kick has been taken (the opponents must remain outside the penalty area until the kick is taken) can speed up the game, stop time-wasting and may lead to a more constructive/controlled restart rather than the current 'long kick'.

## For discussion

 **Handball** – one of the most 'difficult' areas of football is handball and the game would benefit from a clearer and more consistent definition and interpretation of handball.

**In addition, there are aspects of handball where changes could make the game fairer:**

-  a player who deliberately scores a goal with the hands should be punished with a sending-off (red card) in the same way that a player who stops a goal with the hands is sent off
-  a goalkeeper who handles a deliberate pass or throw-in from a team mate should be penalised with a penalty and not an indirect free kick (and the appropriate disciplinary sanction)
-  the referee should be able to award a goal if a defender stops a goal being scored by handling the ball on (or very close to) the goal line

 **Half-time and full-time whistle: only blown when ball out of play** – sometimes the referee blows the whistle for the end of the 1st or 2nd half just as a shot is going into the goal or a team has a promising attack/scoring opportunity. To remove this controversy and create more excitement, the Law could be changed so that the referee can only end the 1st or 2nd half when the ball is out of play.

This could give an attacking team the incentive to keep the ball in play and try to create a goal-scoring opportunity and should save referees from the error/embarrassment of blowing for 'time' as a shot is going into the goal.

 **Penalty kick – same restrictions as a kick from the penalty mark so the only outcomes are a goal or no goal (to stop encroachment etc.)** – at most penalty kicks, players from both teams enter the penalty area before the kick which annoys people as referees rarely punish them, often because their focus is on the kicker and goalkeeper.

This problem could be removed by making every penalty kick a 'kick from the penalty mark' i.e. the kicker either scores or it is missed/saved. If the kick is not successful, the referee would stop play and award a goal kick.

There would thus be no need for players to crowd on the edge of the penalty area ready to run in early. To discourage them further, if an attacking player enters the penalty area before the penalty kick is taken the kick is 'missed'; if a defending player does the same and the kick is missed/saved it is retaken.

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