

History of The IFAB

The IFAB is the universal decision-making body for the Laws of the Game of association football. Its objectives are to safeguard, compile and amend the Laws as they apply within the scope of world football as organised by FIFA, which includes ensuring that the Laws are uniformly applied worldwide and monitored accordingly, and that organised football is practised consistently.

The IFAB was formed when two representatives from each of the football associations of England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland met on 2 June 1886. The brainchild of the English FA, the new body was created to draw up a uniform set of Laws at a time when each country applied different rules. Once established as the guardians of the Laws of the Game, The IFAB's role was and remains to preserve, monitor, study and where appropriate improve the Laws.

The game of football spread rapidly and in 1904 seven nations met in Paris to form FIFA, Fédération Internationale de Football Associations, which joined The IFAB in 1913.

The IFAB has overseen many Law changes since the creation of the first set of official Laws in 1863. For example, offside is probably the most amended Law e.g. originally a player in front of the ball was offside. The goal area first appeared in 1869, followed by corner kicks in 1872, and the first penalty kick was awarded in 1891 - until 1902 it could be taken from any point along a line 12 yards from the goal. The 1912 decision to prohibit goalkeepers from handling the ball outside the penalty area led to an increase in the number of goals and from 1920 players could not be offside from throw-ins.

Steadily, The IFAB changed the game and the mind-set of those who played and watched it. The change prohibiting goalkeepers from handling deliberate 'back-passes', introduced after the 1990 FIFA World Cup Italy™, and the 1998 ruling that red cards be awarded for serious tackles from behind are good examples of that shift in attitude.

In October 2010 The IFAB reconsidered the introduction of goal line technology (GLT) and agreed to a two-year period of comprehensive testing. In July 2012 The IFAB made the historic decisions to approve GLT and the use of Additional Assistant Referees.

March 2016 was also an historic AGM when a testing phase for Video Assistant Referees was approved along with the most comprehensive revision of the Laws of the Game in The IFAB's history.

Structure and working of The IFAB

In 2012 The IFAB started a reform process which concluded on 13 January 2014 when The IFAB became an autonomous association under Swiss Law and approved the statutes that define the purpose, structure and responsibilities of The IFAB and its bodies. To ensure the work of The IFAB is transparent, democratic and modern, an executive secretariat, led by the Secretary of The IFAB, was introduced.

Whilst The IFAB composition remained unchanged, the reform saw the formation of the Football Advisory Panel and Technical Advisory Panel consisting of experts from across the world of football. These panels aim to improve the consultation process and foster a more proactive approach to the development of the Laws.

Annual General Meeting (AGM)

The AGM takes place in February or March in England, Scotland, Wales and Northern Ireland in strict rotation, as well as a location decided by FIFA in FIFA World Cup™ years. AGM decisions on the Laws of the Game are binding on confederations and national football associations as from 1 June. However, confederations and national football associations whose current season or competition has not ended by 1 June may delay the change(s) until the beginning of their next season or end of the competition; those which start before 1 June may apply them once The IFAB has issued the official circular announcing any changes.

No alteration to the Laws of the Game can be made by any confederation or national football association (including competitions) unless it has been passed by The IFAB.

Annual Business Meeting (ABM)

The ABM is the preparatory meeting for the AGM and is held in November. The ABM can consider items submitted by any confederation or national football association and may approved experiments and trials. However, changes to the Laws must be approved at the AGM.

Technical Subcommittee (TSC)

The IFAB TSC consists of experts from the four British FAs, FIFA and The IFAB and is responsible for considering potential Law changes and overseeing trials approved by the ABM and AGM.

Advisory Panels

The Football Advisory Panel (FAP) and Technical Advisory Panel (TAP) consist of experts from across the world of football, who support The IFAB's work on the Laws of the Game. They include former players, coaches and referees from different confederations and football bodies . FAP provides perspectives from players and coaches while TAP assesses technical details and possible impacts on refereeing of any Law changes.

Background to the current Law revision

The authority for the current revision of the Laws of the Game is found in the minutes of the 127th, 128th and 129th AGMs. The TSC started work in autumn 2014 and the minutes of the 129th AGM on 28th February 2015 record that:

“...the aim of the revision is to make the Laws of the Game more accessible and more easily understood by everyone in football and increase consistency of understanding, interpretation and application.”

The revision has focussed on making the Laws appropriate for the modern game at all levels. The major areas of change are:

- **More simple structure** – Law and Law Interpretation have been combined so all the information for each Law is in the same place
- **Updated titles** – some Laws have been renamed to reflect their content and allow inclusion of text not previously assigned to a Law e.g. Law 6: ‘The Assistant Referees’ has become ‘The Other Match Officials’ to allow inclusion of Fourth Officials, Additional Assistant Referees etc.
- **English and phraseology** – unnecessary words have been removed and a more consistent use of words and phrases makes the Laws more readable, helps translation and reduces confusion and misunderstandings. Contradictions and unnecessary repetitions have been removed. The Laws are now ‘gender neutral’, reflecting the importance of women in football today
- **Updated content** – some changes bring the Laws up to date with modern football e.g. the increased number of substitutes

Two important ‘new’ sections have been introduced:

- **Law changes explained** – this section gives the ‘old’ text, the ‘new’ text and an explanation for each Law change
- **Glossary** – this is a list of definitions of important words/phrases which are sometimes misunderstood and/or difficult to translate

The IFAB believes that this revision makes the Laws of the Game more accessible and more easily understood by everyone involved or interested in football. This should lead to increased consistency of understanding, interpretation and application so there are fewer disputes and controversies resulting from conflicting interpretations.

The IFAB acknowledges with grateful thanks the work on this revision by the Technical Subcommittee:

- David Elleray (Project lead, The IFAB)
- Neale Barry (The FA)
- Jean-Paul Brigger (FIFA)
- Massimo Busacca (FIFA)
- William Campbell (Irish FA)
- Ray Ellingham (FA of Wales)
- John Fleming (Scottish FA)
- Fernando Tresaco Gracia (FIFA)

Notes on the Laws of the Game

Modifications

Subject to the agreement of the national football association concerned and provided the principles of these Laws are maintained, the Laws may be modified in their application for matches for players of under 16 years of age, for women footballers, for veteran footballers (over 35 years of age) and for players with disabilities, in any or all of the following ways:

- size of the field of play
- size, weight and material of the ball
- width between the goalposts and height of the crossbar from the ground
- duration of the periods of play
- substitutions

Further modifications are only allowed with the consent of The IFAB.

Official languages

The IFAB publishes the Laws of the Game in English, French, German and Spanish. If there is any divergence in the wording, the English text is authoritative.

Key

The main Law changes are underlined and highlighted in the margin.