

BAFA contact rule changes 2026

With "importance to teams" (ITT) and "importance to officials" (ITO) indicated. 5 is high; 1 is low and reflects the likelihood of the change affecting a game.

The complete rulebook incorporating the changes is available at <https://rules.bafra.info/rulebook/bafa2026/index.htm>.

Those who find it necessary to write to the editor for interpretations of rules or play situations will receive prompt replies if they number their questions and send them to rules@britishamericanfootball.org by email.

1 Rule changes

Rule changes typically mean that the outcome of a play would be different compared to last season.

| # | Rule | Change | Rationale for change | ITT | ITO |
|----|-----------|--|---|-----|-----|
| 1. | 1-2-7 | Line-to-Gain and Down Indicators Add: "STOP, REPORT & SANCTION: Under no circumstances may the game commence, nor proceed if suspended. BAFA may apply sanctions for the following breaches: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> No line-to-gain or down indicators provided. Down box not capable of displaying all 4 downs clearly. Length of yardage chain does not conform to the distance between 10-yard lines." | Make clear that the game cannot start or continue without effective line-to-gain and down indicators. | 5 | 2 |
| 2. | 1-4-4-a-4 | Mandatory equipment (helmets) Amend: "So called "youth" helmets are designed for very young players. It is strongly recommended that players should be wearing "adult" helmets from the age of 12-14 upwards." to: "It is illegal for a player to wear a helmet that only meets the NOCSAE Youth Standard." | Make mandatory our previous recommendation on players not wearing youth helmets. So called "youth" helmets are intended for 7-11 year olds. | 5 | 2 |
| 3. | 1-4-4-a-5 | Mandatory equipment (helmets) Add new: "It is strongly recommended that helmets over 10 years old should not be worn. From 2027, helmets over 10 years old are illegal." | Tighten the rules about "old" helmets to reflect BAFA guidance. | 5 | 2 |
| 4. | 2-8-3-b | Fair catch "T" signal defined as an invalid fair catch signal. | Make clear that a player giving a signal during a kick with their arms outstretched is regarded as an (invalid) fair catch signal. | 3 | 3 |
| 5. | 2-16-10-a | Scrimmage kick formation redefined as: "A scrimmage kick formation is a formation with <u>no player other than the potential kicker (or holder) aligned within the frame of the body of the snapper and no player aligned in the clear path from the snapper to the potential kicker (or holder), and with either (1) at least one potential kicker seven or more yards behind the neutral zone; ...</u> " | Require that there be no player be in the quarterback position for a formation to count as a scrimmage kick formation. | 2 | 3 |

| # | Rule | Change | Rationale for change | ITT | ITO |
|----|---------------------|---|---|-----|-----|
| 6. | 3-1-3-h | Extra period timeouts modified: "Each team shall be allowed <u>one timeout for the first extra period and one timeout for the second extra period. Each team will be allowed one timeout beginning with the third extra period until the game is ended</u> (Rule 3-3-8)." | Only one timeout per team is now permitted from the third extra period onwards. Radio and television timeouts are not permitted after the end of the second period. No mandatory break after the end of the fourth extra period. This will slightly shorten games that go further than the second extra period. Since each subsequent extra period is usually one play per team, this should not unduly affect players' endurance. | 3 | 3 |
| 7. | 3-3-6-a-1 | Injury timeout Charge a team timeout if a player presents as injured AFTER the ball has been spotted for the next down. Add: "If a player presents as injured after the ball is spotted by officials, that team will be charged a Team Timeout or a delay penalty if all timeouts have been used." | Resists time-wasting tactics. | 5 | 5 |
| 8. | 3-5-3-b | More than 11 players on the field Penalty adjusted for defensive substitution fouls after the two-minute warning. Add to penalty: "After the two-minute warning in either half, if Team B commits a substitution foul and 12 or more players are on the field and participate in a down, officials will penalize Team B for the foul and, at the option of Team A, reset the game clock back to the time displayed at the snap. The game clock will then restart on the next snap. If the 12th defender was attempting to exit but was still on the field at the snap and had no influence on the play, then the normal substitution penalty would be enforced with no clock adjustment." | Option to reset the clock to the time of the snap if Team B commits a substitution foul during the last two minutes of either half. This counters misuse of substitution as a time-wasting tactic. | 3 | 3 |
| 9. | 6-3-14-a, 9-1-14 | Scrimmage kick formation – snapper positioned on end of line 6-3-14-a becomes: "If Team A is in a scrimmage kick formation at the snap <u>and the snapper is not on the end of the line of scrimmage</u> , any Team B player within one yard of the line of scrimmage must be aligned completely outside the frame of the body of the snapper at the snap." 9-1-14 becomes: "When a team is in scrimmage kick formation <u>and the snapper is not on the end of the line of scrimmage</u> , a defensive player may not initiate contact with the snapper until one second has elapsed after the snap." | If the snapper is also an eligible receiver, it is unfair to require the defence not to line up over them. Similarly modifies snapper protection after the snap. | 2 | 3 |

| # | Rule | Change | Rationale for change | ITT | ITO |
|----|-----------|---|--|-----|-----|
| 10 | 7-1-5-a-4 | Defensive team requirements "No player within one yard of the line of scrimmage (stationary or not) <u>may make quick and abrupt or exaggerated actions that simulate action at the snap, and are not part of normal defensive player movement in an obvious attempt to make the offense foul (false start).</u> " | Further defined defensive team pre-snap movements that are illegal. | 3 | 3 |
| 11 | 7-1-5-a-5 | Team signals (offense and defense) "No person subject to the rules shall use words or signals that disconcert opponents when they are preparing to put the ball in play. No person subject to the rules may call defensive signals that simulate the sound or cadence of, or otherwise interfere with, offensive starting signals. <u>The terms "move" and "stem" are reserved for defensive cadence and may not be used by the offense. The offense may use a "clap" as a starting signal and this signal may not be used by the defense.</u> " | Identifies protected starting signals for defense and offense. | 5 | 5 |
| 12 | 9-1-9-a | Roughing the passer now includes contact to an offensive player in a passing posture. | Gives extra protection to passers <i>before</i> they have thrown the pass. | 4 | 4 |
| 13 | 10-2-2-b | Adds unsportsmanlike conduct to the list of live ball fouls penalized from the previous spot. | Makes unsportsmanlike conduct consistent with other fouls that can occur in Team A's backfield. | 3 | 3 |
| 14 | 13-2-1-c | Changing facilities Amend to "Washing (preferably shower) and toilet facilities are desirable <u>mandatory within the changing rooms or within close proximity.</u> " Add to "Report & Sanction": <ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lack of washing or toilet facilities | Improve changing room standards. BAFA contact competition regulations threaten clubs with a fine for non-compliance. | 5 | 2 |
| 15 | 13-8-6-e | Game requirements (officiating) Amend to: "or (c) a BAFCA Level 1 or higher qualification AND (from 2028) a BAFA Coach Officiating certificate of competency." | A minority of games are officiated by coaches, but typically they do so with no officiating training at all. This is a safety concern. BAFRA and BAFCA will be asked to develop and deliver a suitable certification over the next 2 years, which will be required from 2028 onwards. | 2 | 1 |

2 Editorial changes

Editorial changes typically mean a clarification of a rule but would not change the outcome on the field compared to last season.

| # | Rule | Change | Rationale for change |
|----|--------|---|--|
| 1. | 1-4-12 | "Coaches' phones, headsets <u>and communication devices</u> ...". | Amended to cover coaches' communication devices generically. |

| # | Rule | Change | Rationale for change |
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| 2. | 2-25-11 | Definition of spots Add: "c. When the kick ends in Team A's end zone, the postscrimmage kick spot is Team A's goal line." | 2-25-11 a and b between them cover all points of the field except Team A's end zone. This fills the gap. |
| 3. | 2-27-14-k | Defines a player (catching or) recovering a loose ball as defenseless. | The IFAF rule already protects a player catching or recovering a fumble, so we merge the two rules. |
| 4. | 3-2-2-g | Timing adjustments Revise to: "The game clock should not be stopped if the play clock <u>is/is not</u> started in conflict with paragraph f above." | Tidy up wording because of the 2025 change to 3-2-2-f. |
| 5. | 3-2-4-c, 3-2-4-c-5, 3-3-6-e & 3-3-10-b-1 | 25-second/40-second clock If a player injury or helmet off occurs when the clock has also stopped for another reason where a 25-second clock shall be used, use a 25-second play clock regardless of which team has the injury or helmet off. | Rationalise the rule. |
| 6. | 3-3-6-b | Feigning an injury Makes clear only a participating team or official may appeal. | Under the previous wording, it was open to a non-participating team or official to report a questionable injury. |
| 7. | 3-3-6-f | Player injury in last 10 seconds of a half Exception allowing a 10-second runoff. | Provide a 10-second runoff option if a team has an injured player in the last 10 seconds of a half, and it coincides with a first down. |
| 8. | 3-3-10-b-2 minor | "Ten-Second Runoff. Any time after the two-minute warning in the 2nd or 4th quarters, if the clock was stopped for player(s) on one team only...." | Clarify wording of rule. |
| 9. | 4-1-2-b-2 Exception 3 | Inadvertent whistle Make explicit that Rule 7-2-2 is an exception to the rule that the ball is awarded to the recovering team after an inadvertent whistle. | If an inadvertent whistle occurs during a loose ball after a fumble by Team A on 4 th down or a try, this rule does not overrule the 4 th down/try fumble rule. |
| 10 | 4-1-2-c | Inadvertent whistle Add: "Any foul that occurs after the inadvertent whistle but during immediate continuing action is treated as a live-ball foul." | Fill a gap in the rules. |
| 11 | 4-1-2-d | Inadvertent whistle Add: "Continuing action provisions cease if the ball not in player possession (i) touches anything inbounds other than a player, a player's equipment, an official, an official's equipment or the ground; (ii) becomes illegal during play; or (iii) comes into possession of an official." | It was not the intention of the continuing action provisions for them to apply in situations where the ball is interfered with or becomes illegal. |

| # | Rule | Change | Rationale for change |
|----|---------------------------------|---|---|
| 12 | 4-1-3-b | Ball declared dead The exception to the "touching the ground" rule adds "handed" to actions a holder with a knee down may take. | Fill a gap in the rules. |
| 13 | 7-1-6 | Handing the Ball Forward Add: "No player may hand the ball forward except during a scrimmage down <u>prior to a change in team possession</u> as follows:" | Make clear that a forward handoff is only legal if there has not been a change of team possession. |
| 14 | 9-2-1-a-1-c | Unsportsmanlike acts Adds simulating the "brandishing of a weapon" as a specifically prohibited act. | Covers a previously unforeseen eventuality. |
| 15 | 9-2-2-f Penalty | Unfair acts (jersey numbers) Clarify that all instances of players illegally assigned the same jersey number discovered during the same dead-ball interval are regarded as a single foul for the purposes of this rule. | Under the previous rule, there is the potential for the head coach to be disqualified on discovery that two or more pairs of players are wearing the same number. That would be overkill. |
| 16 | 9-2-5-b | Game Administration and Sideline Interference Penalty clarifies that if an individual can be readily identified, it is not a team unsportsmanlike conduct foul. | Ensure that responsibility for an unsportsmanlike act is properly and fairly applied, where possible. |
| 17 | 11-2-2 | Officials' responsibilities Add: "From 2028, only officials who regularly use the latest approved mechanics will be considered for international tournaments. "Latest mechanics" will be the newest edition of the Manual of Football Officiating, or the previous edition for up to 12 months after its replacement." Exceptions: USA, Canada, <u>Mexico</u> and Japan. | Raise standards of officiating by ensuring that international tournaments are only officiated by people familiar with the mechanics used. This will encourage national federations and officiating bodies to adopt standard mechanics, if they don't already do so. Note This addresses the issue that a minority of federations are not playing to IFAF rules and/or not using our standard mechanics. This poses serious quality issues at tournaments and needs to be addressed. |
| 18 | 12-1-2-a-12 | List of reviewable aspects of a play. Add: "and time remaining in a quarter" | Clarify that timing (e.g. the end of a quarter) is reviewable. |
| 19 | 12-1-5-a, 12-2-3-a, 12-2-3-b | Instant replay terminology Replace "indisputable" with "clear and obvious". | Clarify meaning. |
| 20 | 13-3-1-f-2 | Stadium clocks: Minimum Standards for Game Clocks Add: "(Exception: if the stadium game clock can be operated remotely by an official on the field)." | Allow for the possibility that an on-field official can operate the stadium game clock remotely. |

| # | Rule | Change | Rationale for change |
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| 21 | 13-3-2-c | Stadium clocks: Minimum Standards for Play Clocks Replace "A separate operator must be provided to run the play clock." with: "A competent operator shall be provided who has no duties during the game other than to operate the play clocks (Exception: if the stadium play clocks can be operated remotely by an official on the field)." | Make consistent with the similar rule (13-3-1-f-2) for game clocks in respect of: <ul style="list-style-type: none"> • competence • no other duties • on-field operation exception (as above) |
| 22 | 13-4-3-a-3 | Liaison with game personnel (announcers) Revise to: "Public address announcers – to ensure familiarity with officials' signals, to ascertain what announcements are to be made and if and when <u>any ceremonies are scheduled</u> (e.g. <u>playing the National Anthem, observing a minute's silence</u>)." | Generalise officials speaking to announcers about any sort of ceremony. The current rule only mentions national anthems. |
| 23 | 13-5-6-b | Weather Revise to: "The referee must delay the start of the game or suspend a game in progress if, <u>in their judgement</u> , conditions are construed to be hazardous to the safety of the participants or spectators." | Modernise language and emphasise the referee's responsibility. |
| 24 | 13-8-1-a | BAFA game (categories) Replace the words "sanctioned by" with "registered with". | Rule 13-7 uses the word "sanction" with the meaning of penalty. Rule 13-8 used it for "approval". There is scope for confusion, so 13-8 has been revised. |
| 25 | Rules application | Add a new section on the interpretation of fouls by officials, adapted from existing IFAF officiating resources. | Makes officiating standards more open to players, coaches, media personnel and spectators. |

Several other very minor editorial changes are also made to improve the clarity of the rulebook. See the rulebook for a full list.