



February 24, 2026

Re: Changes to the Laws of the Game 2026: 8-Second Goalkeeper Rule and "Captain Only" Protocol

As you and your teams prepare for the 2026 outdoor season, SOSA would like to advise our member clubs of significant updates to the IFAB Laws of the Game coming into effect for our upcoming 2026 season.

Please ensure your competitive and development coaching staffs and players are briefed on the following two major changes to ensure a smooth transition and avoid unnecessary sanctions. We ask that you share this information with your membership immediately.

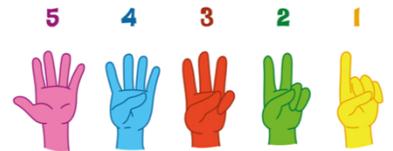
1. The "8-Second" Goalkeeper Rule (Law 12)

To reduce time-wasting and improve game flow, the time a goalkeeper is permitted to hold the ball has been extended from 6 to 8 seconds, but with stricter enforcement and a changed restart.

Application & Enforcement:

The Count: The 8-second count begins once the goalkeeper has clear control of the ball with their hands.

Visual Signal: Referees will now provide a clear visual countdown using their hand for the final 5 seconds of the count. This allows the keeper, players, and spectators to see exactly how much time remains.



The Restart: If the goalkeeper exceeds 8 seconds, the restart will be a Corner Kick awarded to the opposing team, to be taken from the nearest corner.

Exceptions: If an opponent unfairly prevents the goalkeeper from releasing the ball, the referee will stop the count and award an indirect free kick (IFK) to the goalkeeper's team. (options – pause and move the player then continue the count; or stop and award an IFK)

2. "Only the Captain" Protocol (Law 5)

To eliminate the "mobbing" of match officials, a new protocol has been established regarding who can approach a referee to discuss a major decision or incident.

Application & Enforcement:

The "Captain-Only Zone": Following a major decision or incident, the referee may initiate this protocol by blowing the whistle and using a signal (crossing arms at the wrists and then pushing outward with open palms).





The 4-Metre Rule: Once signaled, a 4-metre "zone" is created around the referee. Only the captain from each team is permitted to enter this zone to discuss the decision.

Sanctions: Any player other than the captain who enters this zone or approaches the referee in a confrontational manner will be automatically cautioned (yellow card) for dissent. Any player (including the captain) who shows dissent by word or action at any time will be cautioned.

Goalkeeper Captains: Where the goalkeeper is the captain, the referee must be told, no later than at the coin toss before kick-off, which player is nominated to approach the referee instead of the goalkeeper. Only that designated player (or the goalkeeper) may approach, not both.

Note to Coaches: We recognize that at younger age divisions, it is common practice to send multiple players to the center circle for the coin toss. However, for the purposes of enforcement of this new Law:

- **One Designated Leader:** Only one (1) player wearing the captain's armband will be recognized as the official spokesperson for the duration of the match.
- **Identification:** This individual must be clearly identified to the referee during the pre-game check-in.
- **No Exceptions:** Even if three players attend the coin toss, only the player with the armband is permitted to enter the "Captain-Only Zone" when the protocol is signaled. All other "co-captains" must remain 4 metres away or face a caution.

Club technical leads can feel free to contact SOSA with any questions or if further explanation on the nuances of these changes is required.

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Alex Fletcher', is written over a light blue horizontal line.

Alex Fletcher

SOSA President

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