



United States Australian Football League
A 501(C)3 Not-For-Profit Organization
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2021 Laws of the USAFL

February 2021

This document is how the USAFL modifies the 2021 Laws of Australian Football (as published by the AFL) for all games sanctioned by the USAFL in 2021. Any questions on the rules or interpretations to the rules are to be submitted to the USAFL Umpires Association Rules Committee.

USAFL Laws Variations to AFL Laws - 2021

A Maximum of 75 Total Player Interchanges per Match

Rotations will decrease from 90 per match in 2020 to 75 per match in 2021. Each team will continue to be permitted four interchange players.

USAFL: The USAFL does NOT adopt this rule.

Location of the Mark at Kick-Ins

The Mark shall be set at 15 meters from the center of the top of the goal square towards the center of the ground at Kick Ins. This was previously set at 10 meters.

USAFL: Adopts this rule.

Three Players to be Stationed Inside 50 Meters at Each Stoppage

A minimum of three Players from each team to be stationed inside 50 meters – including one pair in the Goal Square – at all Kick Ins and Boundary Throw Ins. The officiating Umpire will not recommence play until all players are in position. Where a team fails to comply at a Boundary Throw In, a Free Kick shall be awarded to the Player of the opposing Team at the point of the stoppage. Where the attacking team fails to comply at a Kick In, a 50-metre Penalty shall be awarded to the defending team.

The rule to be implemented in the VFL and East Coast Second-Tier Competition will be closely monitored prior to consideration as to whether it is implemented in the 2022 Toyota AFL Premiership Season.

USAFL: The USAFL does NOT adopt this rule.

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USAFL Laws Variations to AFL Laws - 2020

Clause 5.2 Variation of Number

In all USAFL sanctioned games the participating teams shall agree before the match on the number of players on the field, taking into consideration the size of the field, length of game, and other conditions.

50/50 Participation Rule

All USAFL sanctioned games are subject to the 50/50 rule: a team must have a minimum of 50% Nationals, i.e. Americans/Canadians. All others are considered Non-Nationals and are counted toward the 50%.

Clause 5.5.3(c) Counting of Players – Players Exceeding Permitted Number

The USAFL adopted this change in 2019: The Penalty regarding loss of points for this offence has been changed from loss of points in the Match to “Loss of all points scored in that quarter up to the time of the count”. The other penalties for a player count (whether Exceeding or Not Exceeding) are unchanged.

The USAFL continues to apply this Law to both total players on the and total Non-National players on the field.

Clause 6 Team Officials and Team Runners

The new AFL Law regarding Team Officials allows the Controlling Body (the USAFL) to specify when team officials may enter the playing surface. Because the USAFL plays matches primarily in summer and at the community level, a team may have Water Runners on the field at any time provided they don’t interfere with the playing of the match and do not carry messages (that is the duty of the Team Runner). Team Runners may enter at any time provided they do not interfere with the match, deliver their message and return the sideline. Per Clause 17.13 these team officials must not be in the 50-Meter Arc during a Kick Out after a Behind.

USAFL: The USAFL does NOT adopt the AFL rule and continues with the rule as described above.

Clause 10.5 Stopping and Recommencing Time

USAFL Clubs do not have the capacity to add time on for stoppages and USAFL tournaments are on tight schedules; therefore, games will continue to be played without "time on". Should a serious injury (e.g., a stretcher or ambulance is required to enter the field) occur during any USAFL sanctioned game the controlling umpire must signal to the timekeeper to stop the clock. The Controlling Umpire will signal the timekeeper to re-start the clock and signal “time on” to the players once the Controlling Umpire considers it safe to do so.

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Clause 13.1 Starting Positions

Implementation of a traditional set up at center bounces – Clubs must have six Players inside both 50-Meter arcs, with one Player required to be inside the Goal Square. Four Midfield Players are positioned inside the Centre Square with the Wingmen required to be placed somewhere along the Wing.

USAFL: The USAFL does NOT adopt this rule.

Repeal of Clause 15.2.3 (b) Ruck Contests – Prior Opportunity

The USAFL adopted this change in 2019: A Ruck Player who takes possession of the Football while contesting a bounce or throw up by a Field Umpire or a boundary throw in by a Boundary Umpire, will not be regarded as having had Prior Opportunity. Normal rules regarding tackling and disposal still apply. Where there is uncertainty over who is the designated Ruck, the Ruck for each Team will continue to nominate to the field Umpire.

Clause 15.3.3 Changing a decision (formerly Clause 12.1.5 Goal Umpire to Judge Goal or Behind)

Due to the lack of qualified goal umpires and the wide variety of ability of “fill in” goal umpires, the USAFL chooses to retain the language of paragraph (b) which allows the Controlling Field Umpire the right to overrule a decision made by a non-accredited Goal Umpire.

Clause 15.5 Kicking for Goal post-siren – Centre of Goal Line

A Player who has been awarded a Mark or Free Kick once play has ended will now be able to Kick across their body using a Snap or Check-side Kick. The Player shall dispose of the Football directly in line with the man on The Mark and the Goal.

USAFL: The USAFL does NOT adopt this rule.

Clause 16 Procedure After a Behind Has Been Scored – Clause 16.1 Bringing the Football back into Play and Clause 16.2 Protected Area (Replaces Rule 13 Kicking the Football into Play after a Behind Has Been Scored)

Clarification of this rule as adopted in 2019:

The USAFL will continue to require the Defending Team to wait for the flags to be waved. Following a Behind, the man on The Mark will be positioned 10 (5*) yards from the top of the Goal Square. The Protected Area will be the Goal Square extended out to the Mark (at 10 or 5 yards as noted above) and extended to the Behind Posts (7 yards). Formerly the Protected Area extended five (5) yards in all three directions.

For Kick-Ins from a Behind, a Player will no longer need to kick to themselves to Play On out of the Goal Square. The player may kick the ball into play or run out of the Goal Square but may not handball from the Goal Square (unless the Field umpire has called Play On).



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USAFL: * The USAFL adopts this rule. However, for smaller fields such as for Metro games the distance may still be set at five (5) yards.

Example – Clause 15.7.1(b) in the 2018 Laws is no longer applicable after the Play On call, meaning if after leaving the Goal Square and the Umpire calls Play On, the Player kicks out of bounds with the ball hitting in the playing surface first (and no other players), it is NOT ‘On The Full’ but will be a Throw In at that spot, unless the Deliberate Out of Bounds rule has been violated (Clause 17.9.2(b)).

Example – Should a Player still within the Goal Square, before the Umpire calls Play On, kick out of bounds with the ball hitting in the playing surface first (and no other players), it is NOT ‘On The Full’ but will be a Throw In at that spot, unless the Deliberate Out of Bounds rule has been violated (Clause 17.9.2(b)).

Clause 17.4.2 Ruck Contests – Number of Rucks (informally referred to as Third Person Up in the Ruck)

The USAFLUA reminds players that the USAFL has not adopted the “third person up” rule for ruck contests other than Centre Bounces. However, all normal ruck infringements will continue to be penalized as detailed in Clause 17.4.3 Free Kicks - Ruck Contests (excepting item (a) regarding a non-nominated ruck contestant).

Clause 17.5 Free Kick - Marking Contest

The USAFL adopted this change in 2019: ‘Hands in the Back’ rule interpretation to be repealed, allowing a Player to place his hands on the back of his opponent to protect his position in a Marking contest but not to push the Player in the back. Note: this “change” means the AFL now has the same interpretation as the USAFL has been enforcing this Law (meaning no change in how USAFL umpires administer the Law).

Clause 17.8.2 Free Kicks - Umpires

The USAFL adopted this change in 2019: Per Section (e) a Free Kick is awarded against a Player or Official who “intentionally or carelessly engages in conduct which affects, interferes with, or prevents an Umpire from performing their duties”. Players will be prohibited from setting up behind the Umpire at each Centre Bounce and each Ball Up.

Clause 17.10 Deliberate Rushed Behinds (formerly Clause 15.8 Free Kicks – Deliberate Rushed Behind)

The USAFL will not adopt the ruling to award a free kick to the attacking team when a defending opponent deliberately knocks the ball over the goal line.

Clause 18 50-Meter Penalty

Stricter on the infringing player, allowing the Player with the ball to advance The Mark by 50 meters without the infringing player delaying the game.

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In addition, the Player with the Football will be able to play on during the advancement of the 50-Meter Penalty.

USAFL: The USAFL does NOT adopt this rule.

Clause 18.5 50-Meter Penalty – Local Conditions (formerly Clause 18.3 50-Meter Penalty – Local Conditions)

This law allows a change to 25 meters for the distance assessed for this penalty. The USAFL has adopted this for all USAFL intrastate games. Certain games at nationals (usually Division1) will use a 50-meter assessment. In addition, with the growth of Metro footy in many clubs, the USAFL recommends the penalty be reduced to 15 meters when matches are played on soccer fields (or with 10 or fewer players per side).

Clause 19.1.1 Standing the Mark and Clause 19.1.2 Protected Area (formerly Clause 16 Disposal from Mark or Free Kick)

All players in the Protected Area (the area ten (10) yards from either side of the mark to the kicker and five (5) yards behind the kicker) after a free kick will be given a chance to immediately clear the Area. A player not clearing the Area and then impacting the opportunity of the kicker to play on or kick shall be penalized with a 50-meter penalty. A player not clearing the Area who does not impact the kicker shall not be penalized.

Clause Section 19.4 Disposal by a Defending Player – Within Nine Meters

The USAFL adopted this 2019 change: For all Defenders who take a Mark or gain a Free Kick within the 9 meter line of their own Goal Line, the man on The Mark for the attacking team will be brought in line with the top of the Goal Square. This can occur before Goal, Before the Behind Area, or in the Pockets outside the Behind Posts – in all cases, the top of the goal square (which is nine meters) is “extended” out to the Boundary Line if necessary.

Clause 20.2 The Advantage Rule (formerly Clause 17.3 The Advantage Rule)

Due to the difficulty of education of players and umpires regarding how to apply the advantage rule, the USAFL will continue its policy that the field umpire has sole discretion to award advantage (this is different from the AFL where the player’s choice to play on to advantage is part of the application of the law. See support video from the AFL for clarity).

Clause 22.2(d) Abusive Language

The USAFL adopted this change in 2019: The USAFLUA reminds clubs that abusive language towards umpires will not be tolerated. A player using abusive language towards an umpire will be disciplined. Umpires also have the right to discipline abusive language towards an opponent, teammate, coach, spectator, or any other person(s) before, during, and after a match.



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Clause 22.4 Order Off Law – Replacing Player and Clause 22.5 Order Off for Specified Period (formerly Clause 20 Order Off Law)

Yellow Card - a player receiving a Yellow Card is sent off for 15 minutes of game time and can be replaced on the field.

Red Card - a player receiving a Red Card is sent off for the remainder of that game and cannot return to the field of play. The player may be replaced on the field, but only after 15 minutes of game time. In addition, the player will also be subjected to an automatic USAFL tribunal appearance.

Note: Every Yellow Card and Red Card issued carries a 50-Meter Penalty against the offending team