

AFL/USAFL RULE CHANGES AND INTERPRETATIONS – SUMMARY CHART

Year	AFL Rule/Interpretation	USAFL	Explanation and Rationale
2024	Smothering	Yes	Where a player elects to leave the ground in an attempt to smother the ball, any reasonably foreseeable high contact with an opponent that is at least Low Impact will be deemed to be Careless at a minimum, unless the player has taken all reasonable steps to avoid that high contact and/or minimize its (e.g., by adopting a body position that minimizes the force of the high contact).
2024	Run Down Tackles	Yes	This interpretation reflects concern about run-down tackles where the tackling player significantly contributed to the force with which the tackled player is driven to ground. The AFL has amended the Guidelines to state that there may be types of run-down tackles that are dangerous and which constitute a Reportable Offence (i.e. run down tackles where the tackled player is driven into the ground with excessive force).
2024	Striking	Yes	The AFL seeks to increase the onus on players to not commit a strike even when seeking to fend and push their opponent. Where a player intends to forcefully push or fend an opposition player off the ball (including to gain separation for the purpose of contesting the ball) and the effect is that the player “strikes” their opponent, the strike will usually be graded as Intentional rather than Careless.
2024	Ruck Contests	Yes	The AFL has changed the interpretation of Law 18.4 to permit straight arm blocks in a ruck contest, provided the player still contests the ball.
2023	Set Shot for Goal	Yes	Umpires will alert players at the 15-second mark of a set shot. Players are allowed 30 seconds to start their set shot approach. There is no reason for the USAFL not to adopt this interpretation.
2023	Entering Protected Area	Yes	The AFL requires that a player losing a marking contest or giving away a free kick must stand the mark or immediately leave the protected area. This interpretation should also be adopted.
2023	Move to Handball	Yes	The AFL interprets the Standing the Mark rule (see below) so that a 50m penalty will not be paid where a player fakes a handball to make the player on the mark move before play on is called. As the USAFL is adopting the Standing the Mark rule, this interpretation should also be adopted.
2022	Player “Dissent”	No	The AFL has, as a point of emphasis used a 50m penalty for demonstrative player dissent, including pointing towards scoreboard replays. Umpires in the USAFL can use existing rules and interpretations to penalize player behavior that is abusive, delays the game, or otherwise contravenes existing rules.
2021	Limit of 75 Total Player Interchanges per Match	No	This rule does not apply to USAFL games where interchanges are not limited.

2021	Mark set at 15m from center of the top of the goal square at Kick-Ins	Yes	The USAFL adopted the previous rule change moving the Mark to 10m from the center of the top of the goal square and there is no reason not to adopt this change.
2021	Three Players to be Stationed Inside 50 Meters at Each Stoppage	No	This rule addresses specific AFL considerations and is currently experimental. As such, there is no reason for the USAFL to adopt it.
2021	Standing the Mark	Yes	The AFL is interpreting this rule to require the opponent on the mark to remain stationary until the umpire calls “play on.” This interpretation addresses a specific AFL concern with the pace of the game, scoring, and defensive tactics and has been viewed as difficult to administer in the USAFL where players and umpires are often inexperienced. However, this rule will be adopted in the interests of uniformity and consistency. Therefore, players will be penalized by a 50m penalty if they move after the umpire calls on them to “stand” and before the umpire calls play on.
2020	Team Officials and Team Runners	No	This rule specifies when team officials may enter the playing surface. USAFL games are played in summer and at the community level, so Water Runners are allowed on the field provided they do not interfere with the game or carry messages. Team Runners may enter at any time to deliver a message and return to the boundary, provided they do not interfere with the game. They may not be in the 50m arc at a Kick-In.
2020	Starting Positions	No	This rule implements a “traditional” set up at center bounces requiring each team to have six players inside the 50m arcs, including one in the goal square. This rule is viewed as impractical to implement in the USAFL where games are often played with fewer than 18 players on each team and/or with one field umpire.
2020	Kicking for Goal Post-Siren	No	This interpretation allowed a player awarded a Mark or Free Kick before the siren to use a Snap or Check-side kick for goal. This interpretation is viewed as to difficult to administer in the USAFL.
2020	Procedure After a Behind Has Been Scored	Yes	The Mark at a Kick-In is set 10m from the center of the top of the goal square, though for USAFL metro games, the distance may still be set at 5m. A player need not kick to himself to play on out of the goal square. A player who plays on from the goal square and kicks out of bounds without the ball being touched is not penalized for “out on the full” but may be penalized for “deliberate out of bounds” if appropriate.
2020	50m Penalty	No	This interpretation allows the player with the ball to play on during the advancement of the mark. This interpretation is viewed as impractical to implement in the USAFL.

2019	Marks/Free Kicks	Yes	For all Defenders who take a Mark or are awarded a Free Kick within 9m of the goal line or reasonably close to the behind post, the Mark is set in line with the top of the goal square. There is no reason for the USAFL not to adopt this rule.
2019	Umpire Contact	Yes	Players are prohibited from setting up behind the Umpire at each Center Bounce. This rule is desirable in the interests of umpire safety.
2019	Marking Contest	Yes	The “hands in the back” interpretation is repealed, allowing a Player to place his hands on an opponent’s back to protect his position in a Marking contest, but not to push the opponent in the back. There is no reason for the USAFL not to adopt this interpretation.
2019	Ruck Contests/Prior Opportunity	Yes	A Ruck Player who takes possession of the ball while contesting a bounce, throw up, or boundary throw in will not be regarded as having had Prior Opportunity. Where there is uncertainty as to who is the designated Ruck, the Ruck for each team will continue to nominate to the field umpire. There is no reason for the USAFL not to adopt this interpretation.
2018	Kick-In After Goal Umpire Signal	No	This rule permits an immediate Kick-In after the Goal Umpire signals a behind (one raised index finger). This rule is viewed as impractical in the USAFL where games are often played with non-accredited Goal Umpires. Players must wait for the flags to be waved.
2018	Advantage Rule	No	The AFL allows a Player’s choice to be considered in applying the rule. This is viewed as difficult to administer in the USAFL where players and umpires are often inexperienced. The field umpire will continue to have sole discretion to award advantage.
2018	Deliberate Rushed Behind	No	The AFL interpretation allows a Free Kick to be awarded when a Player, not under pressure or close to goal deliberately knock or take the ball over the goal line. This is viewed as difficult to administer in the USAFL where players and umpires are often inexperienced.