

INTERPRETATION REGARDING LAW 3 and its application to NPHSL and ESL

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BACKGROUND.

FIFA's Law 3 as written is consistent with a game of "Limited Substitutions". The leagues operate with "Unlimited Substitutions".

Some league referees have interpreted Law 3 to mean that at a break in play (as opposed to a stoppage), that substitutions without referee permission should be punished with a yellow card. Some referees have treated goalkeepers differently from outfield players and have ONLY awarded a yellow card to a goalkeeper and NOT to all outfield players both substituted and coming on as substitutes.

This is inconsistent application of the Law.

INTERPRETATION.

a) Substitutions at a Stoppage in Play (throw-in, goal kick, injury, when a goal is scored). As per the published league rules, substitutions may be made only AFTER referee has given permission and in accord with Law 3 (see below), except that the substituted player may come back onto the field later.

b) Substitutions at a Break in Play (half-time or a "water break"). Coaches shall ensure that substitutions result in the correct number of players taking to the field (typically 10 outfielders and one goalkeeper unless a player has been sent off); and that the goalkeeper is wearing a different coloured shirt.

Sanctions exist under Law 3 for incorrect number of players at any time, including such re-starts of play.

REASONING

In our leagues, we allow unlimited substitutions at breaks in play (esp half-time) and the referee customarily does not require his permission to be given for any of those substitutions.

The game sheet should note what player(s) were goalkeepers during the game. It is also a requirement that all players are named on the game sheet.

There should be no sanction against a substitute goalkeeper handling the ball if he is clearly identified as a keeper, ie wearing a uniform that distinguishes him from other players (Law 4), whether or not he had received specific permission from the referee to play that position, provided he took that position at a BREAK in play (typically half-time).

Substitutions MAY NOT be made during active play (i.e. on-the-fly), and if made at stoppages in play must be made with referee permission per Law 3 and consistent with the league rules.

Agreed by
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Ian Watson (Discipline Chair, both leagues)

With advice from referees who were asked for their opinion.

FULL TEXT OF LAW 3

Players

A match is played by two teams, each consisting of not more than eleven players, one of whom is the goalkeeper. A match may not start if either team consists of fewer than seven players.

Official competitions

Up to a maximum of three substitutes may be used in any match played in an official competition organised under the auspices of FIFA, the confederations or the member associations.

The rules of the competition must state how many substitutes may be nominated, from three up to a maximum of seven.

Other matches

In national "A" team matches, up to a maximum of six substitutes may be used.

In all other matches, a greater number of substitutes may be used provided that:

- the teams concerned reach agreement on a maximum number
- the referee is informed before the match

If the referee is not informed, or if no agreement is reached before the match, no more than six substitutes are allowed.

All matches

In all matches, the names of the substitutes must be given to the referee prior to the start of the match. Any substitute whose name is not given to the referee at this time may not take part in the match.

Substitution procedure

To replace a player with a substitute, the following conditions must be observed:

- the referee must be informed before any proposed substitution is made
- the substitute only enters the field of play after the player being replaced has left and after receiving a signal from the referee
- the substitute only enters the field of play at the halfway line and during a stoppage in the match
- the substitution is completed when a substitute enters the field of play
- from that moment, the substitute becomes a player and the player he has replaced becomes a substituted player
- the substituted player takes no further part in the match
- all substitutes are subject to the authority and jurisdiction of the referee, whether called upon to play or not

Changing the goalkeeper

Any of the other players may change places with the goalkeeper, provided that:

- the referee is informed before the change is made
- the change is made during a stoppage in the match

Infringements and sanctions

If a substitute or substituted player enters the field of play without the referee's permission:

- the referee stops play (although not immediately if the substitute or substituted player does not interfere with play)
- the referee cautions him for unsporting behaviour and orders him to leave the field of play
- if the referee has stopped play, it is restarted with an indirect free kick for the opposing team from the position of the ball at the time of the stoppage (see Law 13 – Position of free kick)

If a player changes places with the goalkeeper without the referee's permission before the change is made:

- the referee allows play to continue
- the referee cautions the players concerned when the ball is next out of play

In the event of any other infringements of this Law:

- the players concerned are cautioned

- the match is restarted with an indirect free kick, to be taken by a player of the opposing team from the position of the ball at the time of the stoppage (see Law 13 – Position of free kick)

Players and substitutes sent off

A player who has been sent off before the kick-off may be replaced only by one of the named substitutes. A named substitute who has been sent off, either before the kick-off or after play has started, may not be replaced.