



04 SOCCER LEAGUE, BIKITA EAST
MATCH OFFICIALS
USER GUIDE

For Referees and Assistant Referees

Based on FIFA Laws of the Game (2024/25 Edition)

Adapted for ZIFA Lower Division Competitions

04 SOCCER LEAGUE (04SL)

Match Officials Department

Edition: 2026

FOREWORD

This Match Officials User Guide has been developed specifically for referees and assistant referees (linesmen) officiating in lower division football competitions in Zimbabwe. It is grounded in the FIFA Laws of the Game (2024/25 Edition) and adapted to reflect the practical realities and standards expected in ZIFA-affiliated lower division leagues.

Whether you are a newly appointed referee stepping onto the pitch for the first time or an experienced official seeking a reliable reference, this guide is your companion. It is written in plain, accessible language so that every official — regardless of educational background — can understand and apply the rules confidently and consistently.

Sound officiating protects players, respects the integrity of the game, and upholds the reputation of football in Zimbabwe. We call on every official to study this guide thoroughly, attend all prescribed training sessions, and carry out their duties with professionalism, courage, and fairness.

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Section 1: Introduction & Governing Framework

Football in Zimbabwe is governed by the Zimbabwe Football Association (ZIFA), which is affiliated to the Confederation of African Football (CAF) and FIFA. All matches — including those in lower division leagues — are conducted in accordance with the FIFA Laws of the Game, subject to any specific regulations issued by ZIFA for lower division competitions.

1.1 Authority of the Laws

The Laws of the Game are set by the International Football Association Board (IFAB). The current edition is the 2024/25 version. All referees in ZIFA-affiliated competitions must apply these laws unless ZIFA has issued specific variations in writing for a competition.

1.2 Purpose of This Guide

This guide translates the full Laws of the Game into practical, step-by-step guidance for match officials. It covers:

- Roles and responsibilities of all officials
- Pre-match, in-match, and post-match duties
- Decision-making in common and complex situations
- Signals, positioning, and communication
- Disciplinary procedures and reporting

1.3 ZIFA Lower Division League Structure

ZIFA lower division competitions typically include the following tiers below the top-flight Castle Lager Premier League:

Division	Typical Coverage	Officiating Tier Required
Division One (Zonal)	Provincial/Regional level	Grade 3 Referee
Division Two	District level	Grade 4 Referee
Local & Community Leagues	Village / Ward level	Grade 4 or Trainee

IMPORTANT NOTE

Match officials must hold a valid ZIFA referee license appropriate to the division they are officiating. Officiating without a valid license is a serious misconduct offence.

Section 2: The Match Officials Team

A standard lower division match in Zimbabwe should be officiated by a team of three officials: one Referee and two Assistant Referees (also known as linesmen). In some lower division competitions where three officials are not available, a reduced officiating panel may be permitted with prior approval from the relevant league committee.

2.1 Composition of the Officiating Team

Role	Number	Key Responsibility
Referee (R)	1	Controls the match; has full authority over all decisions
Assistant Referee 1 (AR1)	1	Assists on one half of the touchline; offside, out-of-play decisions
Assistant Referee 2 (AR2)	1	Assists on the opposite half; offside, out-of-play decisions
Fourth Official (Optional)	1	Where appointed: controls substitutions, technical areas

2.2 Kit & Equipment Requirements

All match officials must arrive at the venue in proper attire. The following is mandatory:

- Official ZIFA referee jersey (must differ in colour from both teams and the goalkeeper)
- Black referee shorts or tracksuit bottoms
- Black referee socks
- Appropriate football boots or flat-soled shoes
- Whistle (minimum two, carry a spare)
- Red card and yellow card
- Notebook and pen (for recording match incidents)
- Stopwatch or watch with stopwatch function
- Coin for the toss
- Flags for Assistant Referees (bright orange/yellow — provided by home club if not carried personally)

GOOD PRACTICE

Always carry a spare whistle. A broken or lost whistle mid-match can seriously disrupt play. Ensure your cards are clean and clearly visible.

2.3 The Referee's Authority

The referee has full authority to enforce the Laws of the Game from the moment they arrive at the venue until they depart after the match. Their decisions on facts of the game — such as whether a goal is scored or a foul is committed — are final and cannot be reversed once play has restarted.

Section 3: Duties & Responsibilities of the Referee

3.1 Before the Match

The referee carries significant responsibilities before the first whistle:

1. Arrive at the venue at least 45 minutes before kick-off.
2. Check the field of play for safety hazards (holes, glass, hard objects, poor pitch markings).
3. Inspect the goalposts, nets, corner flags, and touchlines.
4. Check that the match ball(s) comply with regulations — correct size (Size 5 for open age; Size 4 for under-16 and below), pressure, and condition.
5. Verify player registration cards and team sheets against registered players.
6. Check players' equipment (boots, shin guards, jewellery, casts).
7. Conduct the team captains' coin toss. The winning team chooses their half or kick-off.
8. Brief assistant referees on positioning, signals, and communication.
9. Confirm kick-off time with both team officials.

3.2 During the Match

3.2.1 General Control

- The referee shall enforce the Laws of the Game at all times.
- The referee shall refrain from making decisions where the advantage rule applies and playing on benefits the non-offending team.
- The referee shall not penalise a team for an offence if stopping play would disadvantage the team that was fouled.
- The referee has the power to stop, suspend, or abandon a match for any infringement or interference of any kind.

3.2.2 Positioning During Play

Good positioning is crucial. The referee must be close enough to make accurate decisions but not so close as to interfere with play. Key positioning principles are:

Phase of Play	Recommended Referee Position
General open play	Diagonal (referee's diagonal: near-side touchline to far penalty area corner)
Free kick near penalty area	10-15 metres from the ball, on the wall side to see both the kick and player positions
Penalty kick	Just outside the penalty area at the penalty spot angle; can observe both goalkeeper and penalty taker
Corner kick	Between the goal area and the penalty spot, on the far post side
Throw-in	Position on the opposite side of the touchline from the Assistant Referee
Goal kick	Position near penalty area to ensure ball is placed correctly and no encroachment before the kick

3.2.3 The Advantage Rule

The referee may allow play to continue after a foul or misconduct if doing so benefits the team against whom the offence was committed. This is known as playing the advantage.

HOW TO APPLY ADVANTAGE

Step 1: An offence occurs. The referee sees it clearly.

Step 2: The ball remains with the non-offending team in a promising position.

Step 3: The referee extends both arms forward at shoulder height and shouts 'PLAY ON' or 'ADVANTAGE'.

Step 4: If the advantage does not materialise within 2-3 seconds, the referee may return and award the original free kick.

Step 5: Even when advantage is played, the referee may still caution or send off the offending player at the next stoppage.

3.2.4 Recording Incidents

The referee must record in their notebook:

- All goals (time, player number, nature of goal)
- All cautions (yellow cards) — player name, number, team, time, offence
- All dismissals (red cards) — player name, number, team, time, offence
- All injuries requiring stoppage of play
- Any serious incidents, crowd trouble, or protests
- All substitutions (player out, player in, time)

3.3 Stopping Play

The referee shall stop the match by blowing the whistle clearly and firmly. The referee stops play for:

Reason	Action
Goal scored	Blow whistle; point to centre circle; record goal details
Foul or infringement	Blow whistle; signal for free kick direction; manage the restart
Player injury	Blow whistle only if the injury is serious; allow play to continue otherwise (advantage may apply)
Ball out of play	No whistle needed if ball is clearly out; signal restart type to assistant referee
Offside	Wait for assistant referee flag then decide whether to stop play
Encroachment at free kick / corner / throw-in	Caution the offending player and order retaking of the kick if play was affected

3.4 After the Match

10. Check the safety of players and officials as they leave the field.
11. Secure the match ball.
12. Complete the official match report within 24 hours of the match (see Section 15 and Appendix A).
13. Report any serious incidents (violence, abandonment, crowd disturbance) to the league secretariat immediately by phone and follow up with a written report.
14. Sign and exchange match report copies with both team managers/secretaries.

Section 4: Duties & Responsibilities of the Assistant Referee

The Assistant Referee (AR) — historically called the linesman — assists the referee in controlling the match. The AR operates along the touchline and has specific responsibilities. The referee always has the final say, but the AR's assistance is vital for correct decisions.

4.1 Positioning

Each Assistant Referee is responsible for half the length of the pitch, specifically covering one half of the touchline plus the goal line on their side. AR1 typically covers the same half as the referee's starting half.

Situation	AR Positioning
Open play (attacking half)	Level with the second-to-last defender (the offside line)
Defensive play (defending half)	Level with the ball if the ball is behind the second-to-last defender
Corner kick on their side	At the intersection of the goal line and the penalty area line
Corner kick on opposite side	Level with the penalty spot (to see if ball fully crosses goal line)
Penalty kick	On the goal line, to the right of the post, to see if the ball crosses the line
Throw-in near their position	Slightly behind the line to see who last touched the ball

4.2 Offside Decisions

Deciding offside is the most technically demanding duty of the AR. The AR must:

15. Always keep level with the second-to-last defender (usually the last outfield player before the goalkeeper).
16. At the moment the ball is played forward by an attacker's teammate, note the position of the receiving attacker relative to the second-to-last defender.
17. If the attacker is in an offside position AND is involved in active play, raise the flag immediately after the ball has been played.
18. Hold the flag upright and wait for the referee to stop play before indicating which side and zone (near, middle, or far).

OFFSIDE ZONE SIGNALS (Flag Positions)

Far post (far side of pitch from AR): Flag raised above the head at a high angle
 Middle of the pitch: Flag held horizontal at shoulder level
 Near post (AR's side of the pitch): Flag pointed downward at a 45-degree angle

4.2.1 When NOT to Flag Offside

The AR should NOT raise the flag when:

- The attacker receives the ball directly from a goal kick, corner kick, or throw-in.
- The attacker is in their own half of the field.
- The attacker is level with the second-to-last defender (level = onside).
- The attacker is not involved in active play (not interfering with play, not gaining an advantage from the position).
- There is doubt — the benefit of the doubt goes to the attacking team.

4.3 Out-of-Play Decisions

The AR signals when the entire ball has crossed the touchline or goal line. Only when the WHOLE ball has crossed the line (including crossing on the ground, not just in the air above the line) is the ball out of play.

Ball Exits Via	AR Signal
Touchline — for throw-in	Flag raised; point in direction of team entitled to throw-in
Goal line — for goal kick	Flag points toward corner flag quadrant; swing toward goal area if goal kick
Goal line — for corner kick	Flag points toward the corner flag on AR's side
Ball fully over goal line between posts — GOAL	AR should be in line with play; do not flag — look to referee; make eye contact confirming the whole ball crossed

4.4 Foul Detection & Misconduct

The AR assists the referee in detecting fouls, particularly in areas far from the referee. The AR should:

- Flag for serious fouls that the referee clearly has not seen and is moving away from.
- NOT flag if the referee is in a good position to see the foul — avoid creating confusion.
- Indicate when a substitution is requested by raising the flag and pointing to the technical area.
- Draw the referee's attention to misconduct in the technical area (e.g., team officials leaving their area).

4.5 Goalkeeper & Penalty Area Violations

During penalty kicks, the AR stationed on the goal line specifically watches for:

- Whether the goalkeeper moves off their line before the ball is kicked (must remain on the goal line between the posts until the ball is kicked).
- Whether the ball fully crosses the goal line.
- Encroachment by players into the penalty area before the kick is taken.

4.6 Communication with the Referee

The AR and referee must establish clear communication protocols before the match:

Signal	Meaning
Flag upright (stationary)	AR wants referee's attention for a decision
Flag waving rapidly	Urgent attention needed — serious foul, violent conduct
Eye contact + slight nod	Confirmation: AR and referee agree on a decision
Flag stationary after referee waves play on	AR defers to referee's decision

Section 5: Pre-Match Procedures

5.1 Arrival & Ground Inspection

The referee and assistant referees should arrive together at the venue and conduct a joint inspection. Use the Pre-Match Checklist in Appendix B.

5.2 Pitch Inspection Criteria

The referee has sole authority to decide whether the pitch is playable. The following conditions make a pitch unfit for play:

- Waterlogged areas covering more than 25% of the playing surface
- Hard, frozen ground posing a risk of serious injury
- Visible glass, metal, rocks, or other dangerous debris on the surface
- Goalposts that are unstable, damaged, or missing
- Insufficient pitch markings that make boundary lines indistinguishable
- The pitch is shorter than 90m in length or narrower than 45m in width

PITCH DIMENSIONS — LOWER DIVISION ACCEPTABLE RANGE

Length: Minimum 90 metres, Maximum 120 metres

Width: Minimum 45 metres, Maximum 90 metres

The length must always be greater than the width.

For international matches: Length 100-110m, Width 64-75m (not applicable to lower divisions but provided for reference).

5.3 Team Sheet & Player Inspection

19. Both teams must submit their official team sheet to the referee at least 30 minutes before kick-off.
20. The referee checks that the names and numbers on the team sheet match the player registration documents provided.
21. No player may participate without a valid registration card unless the league rules provide for a grace period with written confirmation.
22. The maximum squad size on the team sheet is 18 players (11 starters + 7 substitutes) unless league rules specify otherwise.
23. Jersey numbers must match those on the team sheet.

5.4 Equipment Inspection

The referee inspects all players' equipment. The following are mandatory:

- Jersey/shirt (must be numbered; goalkeepers must wear a different colour from outfield players and the referee)
- Shorts
- Socks (must cover the shin guards completely)
- Shin guards (compulsory — must be made of rubber, plastic, or a similar protective material)
- Footwear (appropriate boots or shoes — barefoot is not allowed)

The following items are NOT permitted:

- Jewellery of any kind (rings, chains, earrings, bracelets, anklets) — tape does NOT make jewellery acceptable
- Hard casts on arms or legs
- Items that could injure another player

5.5 The Coin Toss

The referee conducts the coin toss in the centre circle with the two team captains before kick-off:

24. The visiting team captain calls heads or tails before the coin is tossed.
25. The winner of the toss chooses which half to attack in the first half OR chooses to take the kick-off.
26. The other captain takes whichever option remains.
27. Teams change ends at half-time.
28. The team that did not kick off in the first half takes the kick-off in the second half.

Section 6: The Field of Play & Equipment Standards

6.1 Field Markings

The referee should verify the following markings are visible before the match:

Marking	Requirement
Touchlines (sidelines)	Full length, unbroken, clearly visible
Goal lines	Full width between goalposts and extending to touchlines
Halfway line	Clearly marked across the width of the pitch
Centre circle	Radius of 9.15m (10 yards)
Penalty areas	One at each end: 40.32m wide, 16.5m deep from the goal line
Goal areas	One at each end: 18.32m wide, 5.5m deep from the goal line
Penalty spots	Each 11m from the midpoint of the goal line
Penalty arcs	Arc of 9.15m radius from each penalty spot (outside the penalty area)
Corner arcs	Radius of 1m at each corner flag position
Corner flags	Upright flag, minimum 1.5m high, at each corner

6.2 Goals

Goalposts and crossbars must:

- Be 7.32m (8 yards) apart (inner edge to inner edge)
- Have the crossbar at 2.44m (8 feet) from the ground
- Be white in colour
- Be anchored securely to the ground — unstable goals are a safety hazard and the match must not proceed until made safe
- Have nets attached where available (not mandatory but strongly recommended in lower divisions)

6.3 The Match Ball

The ball used in lower division matches must:

- Be spherical in shape
- Be Size 5 for adult / open age; Size 4 for youth categories (Under-16 and below)
- Be made of leather or an approved synthetic material
- Be between 68cm and 70cm in circumference (Size 5)
- Weigh between 410g and 450g at the start of the match (Size 5)
- Be inflated to the correct pressure: 0.6 to 1.1 atmospheres (600g to 1100g/cm²) at sea level

The home team is responsible for providing the match ball. The referee may reject a ball that does not meet these requirements. If the ball becomes defective during the match, a replacement ball is introduced and the match is restarted with a dropped ball at the location where the ball became defective (or in the penalty area, at the nearest point on the penalty area line).

Section 7: Duration of the Match

7.1 Standard Duration

A standard match consists of two equal halves of 45 minutes each, with a half-time interval of no more than 15 minutes. The referee has the authority to adjust the half-time interval.

7.2 Added Time (Stoppage Time)

The referee adds time at the end of each half to compensate for time lost. Added time is calculated based on:

Reason for Stoppage	Guidance
Player substitution	30 seconds per substitution
Assessment/removal of injured player	Actual time used
Time-wasting	Actual time assessed by referee
Disciplinary procedures (card shown)	30–60 seconds per incident
Drinks breaks (if permitted by competition rules)	Actual duration
Goal celebration delays	Actual time assessed
VAR reviews	Not applicable in lower divisions

IMPORTANT

The referee is the sole judge of how much added time to play. They are not obliged to add exactly what is calculated. The referee signals the minimum added time to the fourth official (if present) or announces it clearly at the end of 45 minutes.

7.3 Half-Time

29. The referee blows the whistle to end the first half after 45 minutes plus any added time.
30. Players and officials proceed to the dressing rooms or team areas.
31. The referee should use half-time to update notes, brief assistant referees, and review any issues from the first half.
32. The referee blows the whistle to signal the start of the second half.

7.4 Extra Time & Penalty Shoot-Out

In knockout competitions where a winner must be determined on the day, the following additional procedures may apply as specified in the competition rules:

- Extra time: Two equal periods of 15 minutes each
- Penalty shoot-out: As per FIFA procedure — alternating kicks, 5 kicks per team, then sudden death

The referee applies the same standards for control and discipline during extra time and penalty shoot-outs. During a penalty shoot-out, the referee controls the kicks from the spot and the AR monitors the goalkeeper line and goal line.

Section 8: The Offside Law

Offside is one of the most frequently misunderstood laws in football. This section explains the law in simple terms.

8.1 Offside Position — Definition

A player is in an offside position if:

- Any part of their head, body, or feet is in the opponents' half of the pitch (excluding the halfway line), AND
- Any part of their head, body, or feet is closer to the opponents' goal line than both the ball AND the second-to-last opponent

Note: Hands and arms are NOT considered for offside purposes for any player including the goalkeeper.

SIMPLE RULE OF THUMB

Ask: Is the attacker nearer to the opponents' goal than the ball AND the second-last defender? If YES to BOTH, the player is in an offside position. Being in an offside position alone is NOT an offence.

8.2 When Offside Is an Offence

Being in an offside position only becomes an offence when the player is INVOLVED IN ACTIVE PLAY at the moment the ball is played forward by a teammate. Active play means:

- Interfering with play (receiving or touching a pass)
- Interfering with an opponent (preventing the opponent from playing the ball or obscuring the opponent's vision)
- Gaining an advantage by being in that position (e.g., the ball rebounds to them from the post or from a defender)

8.3 When Offside Does NOT Apply

A player CANNOT be offside when:

Situation	Reason
Receiving directly from a goal kick	Law specifically excludes this situation
Receiving directly from a corner kick	Law specifically excludes this situation
Receiving directly from a throw-in	Law specifically excludes this situation
Player is in their own half	Offside can only occur in the opponents' half
Player is level with the second-last defender	Level = onside; attacker must be clearly ahead
Player is level with or behind the ball when played	Must be beyond the ball as well as the defender

8.4 Restart After an Offside Decision

When an offside offence is called, the restart is an INDIRECT FREE KICK to the opposing team, taken from the position of the offending player at the time the ball was played (not where they were when they received the ball).

8.5 Guidance for the AR on Offside

The AR must:

33. Focus on the second-to-last defender's position — NOT the goalkeeper — unless the goalkeeper is the last outfield player.
34. Use the body turned at a 45-degree angle while running — watching both the ball (in the corner of the eye) and the defenders.
35. Not raise the flag immediately on every forward pass — wait to see if the player receives the ball and is involved in active play.
36. If in doubt, keep the flag down. The benefit of the doubt goes to the attacking team.
37. Communicate regularly with the referee about who is the second-to-last defender.

Section 9: Fouls & Misconduct

9.1 Types of Offences

Fouls are divided into two main categories:

9.1.1 Direct Free Kick Offences

These are committed against an opponent carelessly, recklessly, or with excessive force:

Offence Type	Description
Kicking or attempting to kick	Using the foot against an opponent
Tripping or attempting to trip	Bringing down an opponent using the foot or leg
Jumping at an opponent	Jumping aggressively into an opponent
Charging	Unlawful physical challenge against an opponent
Striking or attempting to strike	Using the hand, arm, head, or body to hit
Pushing	Shoving an opponent with the hands or body
Tackling	A tackle that makes contact with the player before the ball
Spitting	Spitting at any person
Biting	Biting any person
Handball	Deliberately handling the ball (see 9.2 below)

9.1.2 Indirect Free Kick Offences

These are technical violations that do not involve physical contact:

- Playing in a dangerous manner (e.g., high boot near an opponent's head when an opponent is nearby)
- Impeding the progress of an opponent without contact (blocking the path without playing the ball)
- Preventing the goalkeeper from releasing the ball with the hands
- Goalkeeper handling a deliberate back-pass played by a teammate's foot
- Goalkeeper holding the ball with hands for more than 6 seconds
- Goalkeeper handling a ball thrown-in directly by a teammate

9.2 Handling the Ball (Handball)

Handling is a deliberately made contact between a player's hand or arm and the ball. The referee must consider:

Situation	Decision
Ball touches the hand that was clearly moved toward the ball	Handball — direct free kick
Ball touches hand in an 'unnatural' arm position (arm extended away from the body)	Handball — direct free kick
Hand/arm is close to the body and ball strikes it unexpectedly	Not handball — accidental

Ball strikes hand after deflecting from player's own foot	Not handball if arm is in a natural position
Attacker scores with hand or arm	Goal disallowed — indirect free kick
Goalkeeper handles ball in own penalty area	No offence — goalkeepers may use hands in their own area

9.3 Foul Severity Levels

The referee assesses the severity of a physical foul and responds proportionately:

Severity	Description & Response
CARELESS	Insufficient attention or care. Award free kick — no disciplinary action required.
RECKLESS	Disregard for danger to opponent. Award free kick AND show YELLOW CARD.
EXCESSIVE FORCE	Uses strength far exceeding what is necessary, endangering safety. Award free kick AND show RED CARD.

Section 10: Disciplinary Sanctions (Cards)

10.1 The Yellow Card — Caution

A yellow card is shown as a caution. A player, substitute, or substituted player who receives two yellow cards in the same match is automatically dismissed (shown a red card).

Yellow card offences (mnemonic: DOGSO-U-WUDA):

Yellow Card Offence	Explanation
Unsporting behaviour	Simulation/diving, time-wasting, deliberate handball (not DOGSO), unfair challenges, disrespecting opponents
Dissent by word or action	Verbally or physically disagreeing with referee's decision
Persistent infringement	Repeatedly fouling regardless of the nature of each individual foul
Delaying restart of play	Kicking or moving the ball after a stoppage, slow goalkeeping, taking excessive time on a throw-in
Failure to respect required distance	Not staying 9.15m from a free kick or corner kick without permission
Entering/re-entering without permission	A player who left the field and re-enters without the referee's knowledge
Leaving without permission	Leaving the field of play without the referee's permission

10.2 The Red Card — Dismissal

A red card results in the player being dismissed immediately. The team plays with one fewer player for the rest of the match and the dismissed player cannot be replaced.

Red Card Offence	Explanation
Serious foul play	Excessive force or brutality against an opponent in challenging for the ball
Violent conduct	Using excessive force or brutality against any person, whether the ball is in play or not
Biting or spitting	At any person on or off the pitch
Denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity (DOGSO)	Deliberately handling the ball to deny a clear goal — also applies if the hand prevents a goal
DOGSO — foul	Last defender fouls an attacker with a clear path to goal (see 10.3 below)
Using offensive/insulting/abusive language	Directed at any person
Receiving a second caution	Two yellow cards in the same match = automatic red

10.3 DOGSO — Denying an Obvious Goal-Scoring Opportunity

One of the most important and frequently debated disciplinary decisions. The referee must assess the 4 D's:

THE 4 D's OF DOGSO

1. DISTANCE — How far is the attacker from the goal? (Must be close enough to represent a clear opportunity)
2. DIRECTION — Is the attacker moving toward goal? (Must be heading toward the goal, not away)
3. DEFENDERS — Are there other defenders who could have intervened? (If yes, DOGSO may not apply)
4. DISTANCE to ball/control — Did the attacker have clear control of the ball? (Ball must be playable by the attacker)

If ALL 4 criteria are clearly met: RED CARD. If one or more criteria is uncertain: consider YELLOW CARD for reckless play instead.

10.4 Misconduct Procedure — Step by Step

38. Stop play (if not already stopped) and ensure player safety.
39. Approach the offending player calmly but decisively. Do not run aggressively.
40. Ensure you are facing the crowd (where possible) when showing the card.
41. Note the player's name and number before showing the card.
42. Hold the card clearly above the head with a straight arm so all players, officials, and spectators can see it.
43. Record the offence, player details, time, and nature of the offence in your notebook.
44. For a dismissal: clearly indicate the player must leave the field. Escort them if necessary.
45. Restart play as appropriate (free kick, penalty, dropped ball).

10.5 Misconduct by Technical Area Personnel

The referee has the authority to caution or send off coaches, assistant coaches, and other team officials in the technical area. The fourth official (if present) assists with monitoring the technical area. Offences include:

- Entering the field of play without permission
- Provocative or aggressive behaviour toward match officials
- Using offensive, insulting, or abusive language
- Persistent dissent

Section 11: Free Kicks

11.1 Direct Free Kick vs Indirect Free Kick

Type	Can Score Directly?	When Awarded
Direct Free Kick	YES — a goal can be scored directly	For physical fouls and deliberate handball
Indirect Free Kick	NO — must touch another player before scoring	For technical fouls (offside, dangerous play, back-pass, etc.)

11.2 Indicating an Indirect Free Kick

The referee **MUST** raise one arm straight above the head to signal an indirect free kick. The arm is kept raised until the ball is kicked **AND** touches another player. If the ball goes directly into the goal from an indirect free kick without touching another player, it is a goal kick to the defending team — not a goal.

11.3 Wall Distances & Encroachment

Defending players forming a wall must stand at least 9.15m (10 yards) from the ball until it is in play. Encroachment rules:

- If a defending player enters the required distance before the kick is taken: the kick is retaken if it affected the outcome.
- If an attacking player enters the required distance before the kick: the defending team takes an indirect free kick from that position.
- The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves. Simply touching the ball is not enough.

11.4 Free Kicks Inside the Penalty Area

Foul Location	Type	Restart
Defending team fouls inside own penalty area	Direct or Indirect	PENALTY KICK (for direct fouls) or Indirect FK from within the area
Attacking team fouls inside the opponents' penalty area	Any foul	Direct or Indirect FK at the spot of the foul; opponents must be 9.15m away
Defending team — indirect FK inside own goal area	Indirect	All opponents outside the penalty area; ball can be played anywhere in the goal area

Section 12: Penalty Kicks

12.1 When Is a Penalty Kick Awarded?

A penalty kick is awarded when a player commits a direct free kick offence inside their own penalty area while the ball is in play.

12.2 The Penalty Kick Procedure

The referee must follow these steps precisely:

46. Award the penalty kick and mark the penalty spot clearly.
47. Identify and confirm the penalty taker.
48. Ensure the goalkeeper is on the goal line, between the posts and facing the field, until the ball is kicked.
49. Ensure all players (except the kicker and goalkeeper) are: inside the field, outside the penalty area, outside the penalty arc, and at least 9.15m from the penalty spot.
50. Signal to the AR to take the goal-line position (on the goal line, to the right of the far post from the kicker's perspective).
51. Blow the whistle to give the signal for the kick to be taken.
52. The kick must be forward — the ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.
53. After the kick: the kicker may only play the ball again after it has touched another player.

12.3 Common Penalty Kick Infringements

Infringement	By Whom	If Goal Scored	If No Goal
Goalkeeper moves off line before kick	Goalkeeper	Goal stands	Retake (if saved/missed)
Encroachment by attacker	Attacking team player	No goal — retake only if ball went in; if saved, defending FK	Kick retaken
Encroachment by defender	Defending team player	Goal stands	Retake
Kicker feints after run-up	Kicker	No goal — indirect FK to defending team	Indirect FK to defending team
Kicker touches ball twice	Kicker	No goal — indirect FK to defending team	Indirect FK to defending team

NOTE ON GOALKEEPER MOVEMENT

A goalkeeper is permitted to move sideways along the goal line before the kick. They may NOT move forward off the line before the ball is kicked. If the goalkeeper clearly moves forward and the penalty is missed, the referee should order a retake.

Section 13: Goal Kick, Corner Kick & Throw-In

13.1 Goal Kick

A goal kick is awarded when the whole ball passes over the goal line (not between the goalposts) and was last played by an attacking player.

- The ball is placed anywhere in the goal area by the defending team.
- The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.
- Opponents must remain outside the penalty area until the ball is in play. If an opponent enters early, the kick is retaken.
- The kicker may not touch the ball a second time until another player has touched it.
- A goal CAN be scored directly from a goal kick against the opposing team.
- An own goal CANNOT be scored directly from a goal kick — the restart would be a corner kick.

13.2 Corner Kick

A corner kick is awarded when the whole ball passes over the goal line (not between the goalposts) and was last played by a defending player.

- The ball is placed in the corner arc nearest to where the ball crossed the goal line.
- The corner flag must NOT be moved.
- Opponents must be at least 9.15m from the corner arc until the ball is in play.
- The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves.
- A goal CAN be scored directly from a corner kick (in-swinger directly into goal is valid).
- An own goal scored directly from a corner kick results in a corner kick to the opposing team.

13.3 Throw-In

A throw-in is awarded when the whole ball passes over the touchline. The throw-in is taken by the team opposite to the one that last touched the ball.

Correct throw-in technique — ALL of these must be met:

- Player stands facing the field of play
- Part of each foot is on or behind the touchline (on the ground)
- Ball is thrown from behind and over the head using BOTH hands
- Ball is delivered from the point where it left the field (within one metre is the standard tolerance in lower divisions)

Common throw-in errors — award the throw-in to the opponents if:

- Only one hand is used
- The ball is not thrown over the head — it is lofted or dropped
- One or both feet are on the field of play when the throw is taken
- The ball is thrown from an incorrect position (significantly away from where it went out)

THROW-IN NOTE

A goal cannot be scored directly from a throw-in. If the ball enters the goal directly: if it enters the thrower's own goal, a corner kick is awarded; if it enters the opponents' goal, a goal kick is awarded.

Section 14: Abandoned & Postponed Matches

14.1 Grounds for Abandonment

The referee has the authority to abandon a match. Acceptable grounds include:

- Field of play becomes unplayable due to weather (excessive rain, lightning, waterlogging)
- A player or official suffers a serious medical emergency requiring immediate evacuation
- Crowd disturbance posing an immediate risk to players, officials, or spectators
- The match cannot continue due to insufficient players (a team is reduced to fewer than 7 players through dismissals or injuries)
- Inadequate or complete failure of floodlights where the match cannot continue safely

14.2 Abandonment Procedure

54. The referee must first attempt to suspend the match temporarily (in cases of weather, disorder) to allow the situation to improve.
55. The standard temporary suspension period is 30 minutes before a final abandonment decision is made.
56. Before abandoning, the referee must consult (where possible) with the home team official, league representative, or both team captains.
57. Once the decision to abandon is made, the referee informs both captains, records the exact time, score, and reason.
58. The referee must submit a full written abandonment report to the league secretariat within 24 hours.
59. The league committee — NOT the referee — decides whether the match is replayed in full, completed from the point of abandonment, or if the score at abandonment stands.

14.3 Lightning Protocol

In the interest of player safety, the following lightning protocol is strongly recommended for all lower division matches in Zimbabwe:

- If lightning is visible and thunder is heard within 30 seconds of the flash, suspend play immediately.
- Direct all players, officials, and spectators to a covered structure (not under trees).
- Wait at least 30 minutes after the last lightning strike before resuming.

Section 15: Post-Match Procedures & Reporting

15.1 Immediate Post-Match Actions

60. Ensure the safe departure of both teams from the field.
61. Collect both team sheets, verify final player changes/substitutions, and sign them.
62. Complete the official match report form (see Appendix A) while details are still fresh.
63. Exchange signed copies of the match report with both team officials.
64. Secure your match notes, cards, and any collected evidence (e.g., notes of abuse).

15.2 Reporting Timeframes

Report Type	Deadline
Standard match report	Within 24 hours of the final whistle
Red card report (detailed)	Within 24 hours — separate full written report required for each dismissal
Abandoned match report	Within 24 hours — must include exact time, score, reason, and actions taken
Crowd disorder / security incident	Immediately by phone to league secretariat, followed by written report within 24 hours
Serious injury report	Immediately if medical attention required; written report within 24 hours

15.3 Match Report Contents

Every match report must contain:

- Competition name, venue, date, and kick-off time
- Full names and numbers of players in both starting lineups
- All substitutions (player on, player off, time)
- All goals (scorer, time, type — open play / free kick / penalty / own goal)
- All yellow cards (player, team, time, offence)
- All red cards (player, team, time, offence — detailed description required)
- Details of any injuries
- Details of any crowd incidents
- Names of all match officials
- Final score
- Referee signature and date

Section 16: Referee Communication & Body Language

16.1 Principles of Effective Communication

A referee who communicates well maintains authority, reduces conflict, and earns the respect of players. Key principles:

- Be assertive, not aggressive. Confidence in tone prevents dissent.
- Explain decisions briefly and clearly where possible: 'Handball — direct free kick to Blue.'
- Never shout or swear at players. Stay calm under pressure.
- Use gestures alongside words — visual signals reinforce verbal instructions.
- Do not over-explain. A brief, firm explanation is better than a lengthy discussion on the field.

16.2 Managing Player Dissent

Dissent (arguing with the referee's decisions) is a cautionable offence. Prevention is better than caution:

65. Acknowledge a player's concern briefly if time allows: 'I hear you — play on.'
66. If a player persists, issue a firm verbal warning: 'I've made my decision. Any more and I'll book you.'
67. If they continue: show the yellow card without further discussion.
68. Never be intimidated into changing a decision simply because of pressure. Changing a decision without new information undermines authority significantly.

16.3 Managing the Technical Area

- Coaches and team officials must remain within the technical area.
- Only one person at a time may stand and give instructions.
- The referee (or fourth official) warns a coach for misconduct before escalating to a caution or dismissal.
- A dismissed team official must leave the technical area and its immediate surrounds and has no further involvement in the match.

Section 17: Signals & Hand Gestures Quick Reference

All officials must use the standard FIFA-approved signals. The following table summarises the key signals used during a match:

Signal	Meaning & How to Execute
Whistle — one short blast	Start of play / restart
Whistle — one long blast	Foul / stopping play
Whistle — two long blasts	Half-time / end of match
Arm pointing in one direction (horizontal)	Direct free kick — pointing in direction of attacking team
Arm raised vertically above head	Indirect free kick (kept raised until ball is kicked and touched)
Both arms forward at shoulder height	Advantage — 'Play on'
Pointing to the penalty spot	Penalty kick awarded
Arm waving over head (circular motion)	Goal — signal to restart at centre circle
Index finger pointing to corner flag	Corner kick — pointing toward the relevant corner
Hand sweeping toward corner flag on own half	Goal kick
Arms extended horizontally at sides	No offside / no foul — play on
One arm raised high, flag upright (AR)	Offside — waiting for referee to stop play
Flag pointing down (AR)	Offside — near post zone
Flag horizontal (AR)	Offside — middle zone
Flag raised high above head (AR)	Offside — far post zone
Flag raised + wave toward touchline	AR requests referee attention for substitution
Flag rapidly waved (AR)	Urgent — serious foul / violent conduct unseen by referee
Yellow card held above head	Caution — player is booked
Red card held above head	Dismissal — player sent off

Section 18: Common Scenarios & How to Handle Them

18.1 Scenario: Player Scores with Hand — No One Protests

Decision: The referee must disallow the goal even if no one protests. The referee has an obligation to apply the law. Stop play, disallow the goal (wave no-goal signal), caution the player if deliberate, restart with indirect free kick from where the handball occurred.

18.2 Scenario: Two Players Injured at the Same Time

Decision: Stop play if the injuries are serious. Assess both players. The team that was in possession receives the dropped ball restart if both players were from the same team; otherwise restart based on which team last had possession. Remind players that in lower divisions, any player receiving treatment must leave the field temporarily.

18.3 Scenario: Ball Strikes Referee and Goes into Goal

Decision: Under the 2024/25 Laws, if the ball touches the referee and goes into the goal as a result, the goal is disallowed. The restart is a dropped ball. The referee must immediately recognise this and signal no-goal, then restart with a dropped ball for the defending team's goalkeeper.

18.4 Scenario: Goalkeeper Takes Too Long with Ball in Hands

Decision: After 6 seconds, award an indirect free kick to the opposing team from where the goalkeeper is holding the ball. Before doing so, give the goalkeeper a verbal warning at 5 seconds ('Release the ball'). This is especially important in lower divisions where goalkeepers may be unaware of the 6-second rule.

18.5 Scenario: Player Removes Jersey After Scoring a Goal

Decision: Show a yellow card for unsporting behaviour. Removing the jersey is a mandatory caution regardless of the celebratory nature. Simply removing the jersey to show an undershirt message is also a caution.

18.6 Scenario: Spectator Enters the Field

Decision: Stop play immediately if the spectator's presence directly interferes with play or poses a safety risk. Signal to stewards and/or security to remove the spectator. If play is stopped, restart with a dropped ball where the ball was when play was stopped (within the penalty area if it was in the penalty area). Record the incident in the match report.

18.7 Scenario: Player Receives Two Yellows — Referee Forgets

Decision: The referee cannot correct this once play has restarted. Prevention: keep meticulous notes and ensure both ARs track yellows. Best practice: quietly confirm with AR1 after every yellow card. If the error is realised before a restart, correct it immediately.

18.8 Scenario: Both Teams Refuse to Continue After a Controversial Decision

Decision: Give players up to 3 minutes to return to play after a clear verbal instruction. Record the time of instruction. If they still refuse, abandon the match and submit a full report. The league committee will decide the outcome.

18.9 Scenario: Player Uses Phone on the Pitch

Decision: Stop play at the next opportunity. Caution the player for unsporting behaviour. Remove the phone from the pitch. Restart with an indirect free kick from where the player was standing (or wherever play was stopped).

18.10 Scenario: Team Protests a Referee's Decision After Match

Decision: The referee's job is complete after the match report is submitted. The referee should not engage with post-match protests on the field. Players or team officials who attempt to intimidate the referee after the final whistle can be reported in the match report, and ZIFA can take action based on that report.

APPENDIX A: MATCH REPORT TEMPLATE

Field	Details	Notes
Competition	04 SOCCER LEAGUE	Bikita EastCommunity Social League
Venue		Name and location of ground
Date		DD/MM/YYYY
Kick-Off Time		Actual kick-off time
Home Team		Full club name
Away Team		Full club name
Final Score	__ : __	Home team score first
Half-Time Score	__ : __	
Referee Name		Full name + license number
AR1 Name		Full name + license number
AR2 Name		Full name + license number
Fourth Official		If appointed

GOALS SCORED:

Time	Player Name & Number	Team / Type

YELLOW CARDS:

Time	Player Name & Number	Team / Offence

RED CARDS:

Time	Player Name & Number	Team / Offence (Detailed)

SUBSTITUTIONS:

Time	Player Off (Name/No.)	Player On (Name/No.) / Team

INCIDENTS / ADDITIONAL NOTES:

Referee Signature: _____ Date: _____

APPENDIX B: PRE-MATCH CHECKLIST

Use this checklist before every match. Tick each item once confirmed.

Checklist Item	Status
Arrived at venue 45+ minutes before kick-off	<input type="checkbox"/> Done
Introduced yourself to both team officials	<input type="checkbox"/> Done
Field of play inspected for safety hazards	<input type="checkbox"/> Done / <input type="checkbox"/> Issue noted
Goalposts checked (stable, correct dimensions)	<input type="checkbox"/> Done / <input type="checkbox"/> Issue noted
Corner flags in place	<input type="checkbox"/> Done
Pitch markings visible and correct	<input type="checkbox"/> Done / <input type="checkbox"/> Issue noted
Match ball inspected and approved (minimum 2 balls)	<input type="checkbox"/> Done
Both team sheets received and verified	<input type="checkbox"/> Done
Player registration cards verified	<input type="checkbox"/> Done
Player equipment inspected (both teams)	<input type="checkbox"/> Done
ARs briefed on signals, positioning, and communication	<input type="checkbox"/> Done
Coin toss conducted	<input type="checkbox"/> Done (Winner: _____)
Kick-off time confirmed with both teams	<input type="checkbox"/> Done (Time: _____)
Own equipment check: whistle(s), cards, notebook, pen, watch	<input type="checkbox"/> Done
Emergency medical contact identified	<input type="checkbox"/> Done (Contact: _____)
Nearest hospital / clinic identified	<input type="checkbox"/> Done (Location: _____)

Referee Name: _____ License No: _____ Date: _____

A good referee is invisible. A great referee is indispensable.

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