

# Australian Football An Introduction to Umpiring International Version



## ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

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Elements of this guide are taken from other AFL Umpiring resources and have been tailored for an international audience.

*The Spirit of the Laws* was developed and produced by the AFL Umpires Development Program through support from the Australian Government and the Australian Sports Commission.

The post match meeting report was developed by the East Fremantle District in Western Australia.

## **Welcome to Umpiring**

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G'day,

Welcome to Australian Football, the most exciting, fast paced, hard hitting game in the world. Congratulations on your decision to pick up the whistle and help grow the game throughout the world. The game has achieved elite status in Australia, but is still at a grassroots levels elsewhere. The efforts by international affiliates today reflect the same approach taken by the game's founders. Just as those men pioneered the sport in Australia, you have the opportunity to embrace their ambitious spirit and develop the game in your country.

### **Australian Football as an Import**

The goal of AFL international affiliates is to grow the game throughout the world. Your decision to become an umpire makes you part of an international community made up of over 50,000 players, coaches, and umpires. How much that community grows will depend on the efforts and dedication of individuals like you.

Most international teams, clubs and leagues are started by Australians living abroad, but attracting and maintaining new non-Australian players is vital to the sport's growth. The degree of professionalism displayed by coaches and umpires will have a direct impact on those who are new to the game; as they will only return if their experiences are positive.

### **The Challenge**

Australian Football is influenced by the standard of umpiring more so than any other sport. The unique role of the umpire in Australian Football causes significant impact on the manner in which the game is played. Good umpiring enhances the game as a spectacle, contributes to the safety of players and adds to the enjoyment by all who participate.

### **The Reward**

Umpiring is vital to the development of the game, but will also lead to your own personal development. You will gain confidence, improve your communication skills, increase your physical fitness and become a more effective leader both on and off the field.

Thank you for your time, effort and dedication to growing the greatest game in the world. This guide is your first step; enjoy the journey and all the best!

Yours in Umpiring,



Jim Cail  
AFL Manager, Umpiring Development



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## Common Australian Football Vocabulary

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**Mark:** A "mark" is another term for a catch, or controlling the ball and can be taken over the head or against the chest. The ball must be kicked and cannot touch the ground or anyone else, and travel at least 15 metres through the air. A mark entitles a player to an uncontested disposal of the ball or shot at goal. The Umpire blows the whistle to signal a successful mark.



**Handball:** A player punches the football with a closed fist off of their opposite hand.

**Disposal:** A player correctly disposes of the football if he or she kicks or handballs the football. Handing or throwing the football to another player is not allowed and will result in a free kick for the opposition.

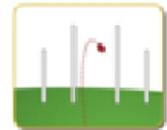
**Shepherd:** A shepherd is using the body or arm to push, bump or block an opposing player who does not have possession of the football and who is no further than 5 metres away from the football at the time when the push, bump or block occurs.

**Legal Tackle:** A player in possession of the ball is grabbed by an opposition player; legal contact is below the shoulders and above the knees.

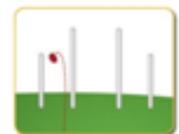
**Out of Bounds:** The football passes completely over the boundary line or touches a behind post, but before doing so, touches the ground or is touched by a player. If any portion of the football is on or above the boundary line, the football is not out of bounds.

**Out of Bounds on the Full:** When the football is kicked and passes completely over the boundary line without touching the ground or being touched by a player, or the football has touched the behind post or passed over the behind post without touching the ground or been touched by a player. The result is a free kick for the opposition on the spot where the ball travelled over the boundary line.

**Goal:** An attacking player kicks the football (from below the knee) through the 2 high goal posts without another player touching the football.



**Behind:** The football crosses the goal line outside the 2 higher goal posts, but inside the 2 smaller behind posts **OR** if a player from the defending team kicks, handballs, knocks or otherwise takes the football over the goal line or behind line **OR** the football touches or passes over the goal post or touches padding or any other attachment to the goal post.



**Kick Out (After a behind):** Following a behind, the defensive team kicks the ball back into play from within the goal-square.



**Ball up:** The ball is thrown up or bounced so that the centre players can contest the ball (similar to a basketball 'jump ball'). This is done at the start of each quarter, after a goal has been scored or when the ball has been trapped in a scrum.

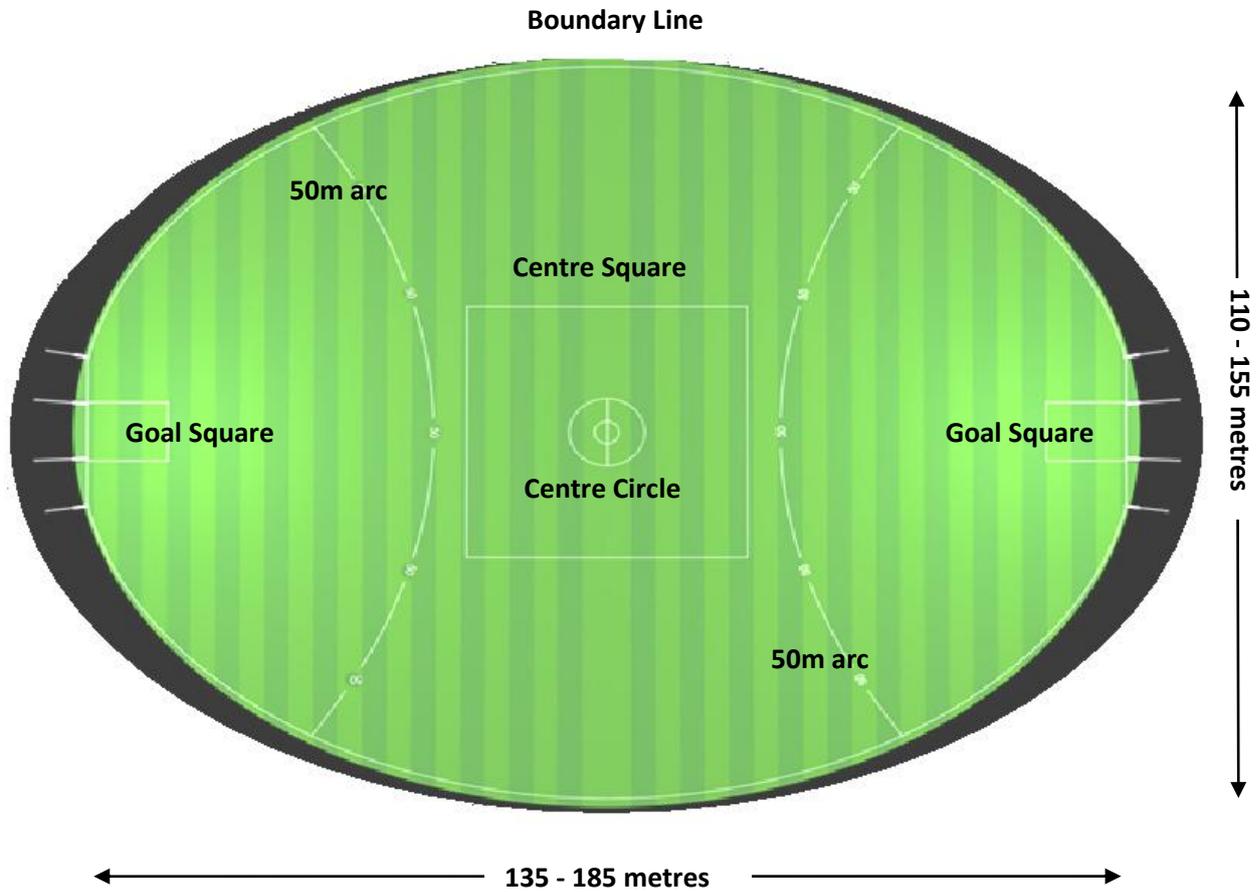
**Free kick:** A free kick will be awarded when a player has infringed a law of the game. The most common free kicks awarded are for: 1) high tackle, 2) push in the back, 3) holding a player not in possession of the football and 4) holding the ball. When a free kick has been awarded the offending player 'stands the mark' (on the spot) where the free kick was given and play continues as with a mark. Play continues when the player kicks, handballs or plays the ball other than over the mark. In the latter situation the Umpire would call and signal 'play on' which means the player can be tackled.

**Play On:** The verbal and visual instruction (arms extended to your sides, palms up) given by a field Umpire to indicate that: (a) a free kick or mark will not be awarded and play will continue; or (b) a player has attempted to dispose of the football other than in a direct line over the mark and the football is therefore in play.

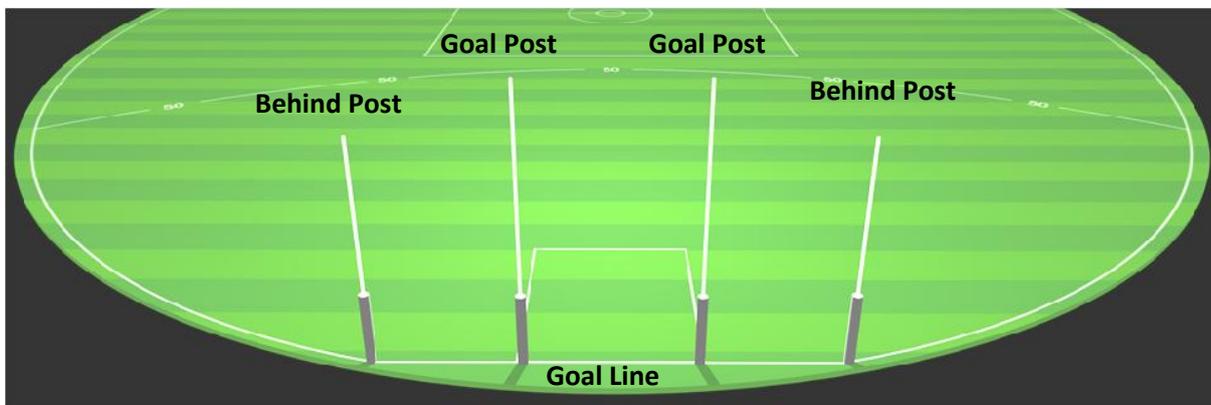
## Parts of the Ground

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### Overhead View



### Half View of the Ground

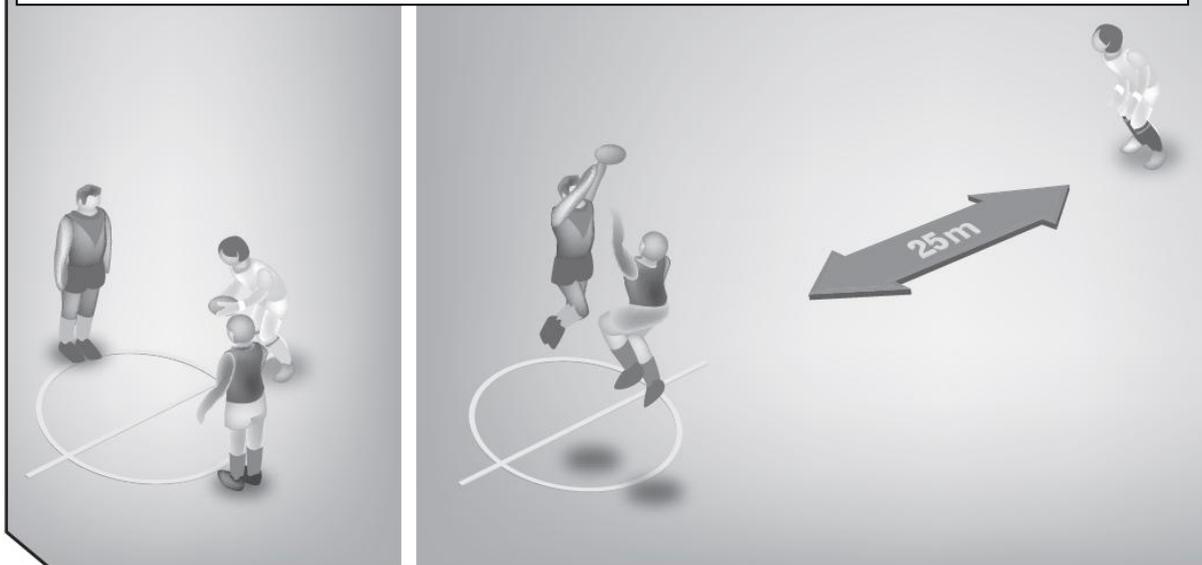


## Positioning

### Centre Bounce or Throw-up

#### Centre Bounce or Throw-up

The umpire should begin the bounce or throw-up by coming in with their back to the wing area. After bouncing the ball, they should back away quickly, attempting to obtain a side-on position 20-25 metres away.



### General Play

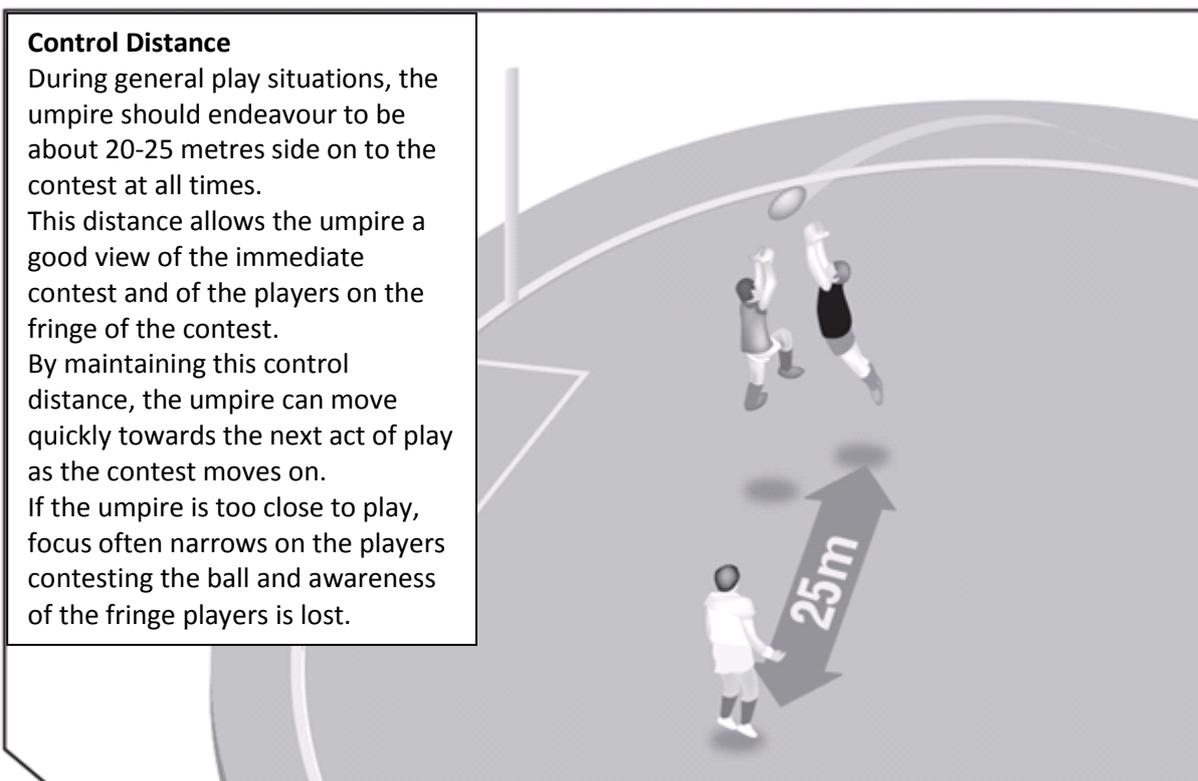
#### Control Distance

During general play situations, the umpire should endeavour to be about 20-25 metres side on to the contest at all times.

This distance allows the umpire a good view of the immediate contest and of the players on the fringe of the contest.

By maintaining this control distance, the umpire can move quickly towards the next act of play as the contest moves on.

If the umpire is too close to play, focus often narrows on the players contesting the ball and awareness of the fringe players is lost.

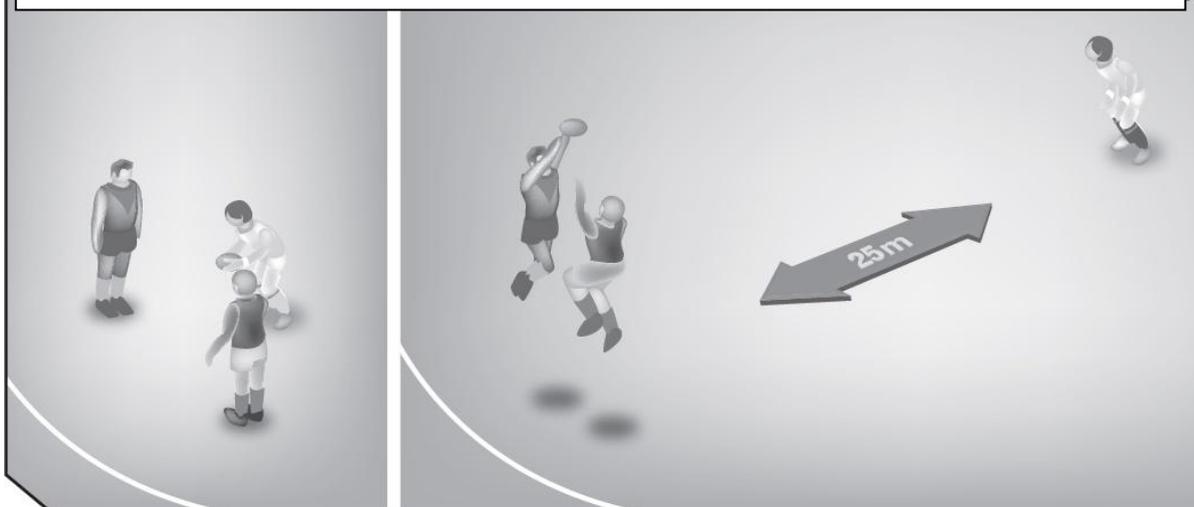


## Positioning

### Field Bounce or Throw-up

#### Field Bounce or Throw-up

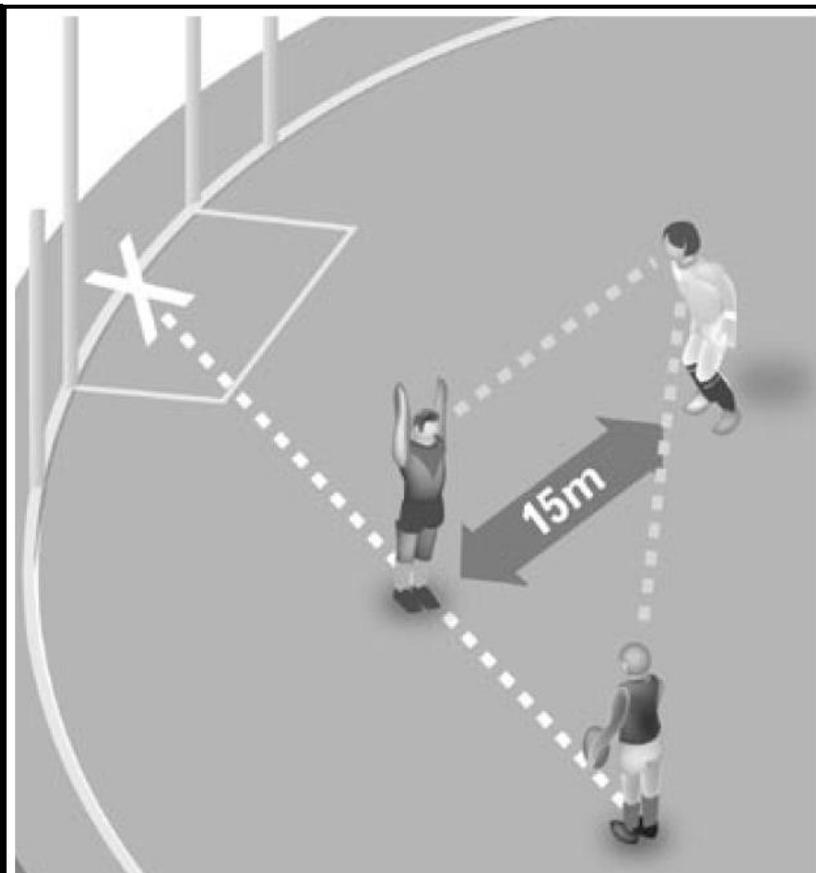
The umpire should always have their back to the centre of the ground. After bouncing or throwing the ball, the umpire should back quickly away, attempting to obtain a side-on position 20-25 metres away.



### Free Kick

#### Free Kick

The umpire lines a player up along an imaginary line between the centre of the goals and the spot where the player took the mark or was awarded the free kick.



## Field Umpire Indications/Signals

### Beginning a Match

The match begins with a centre circle ball up, similar to basketball. When you can see that both teams are in position and you have confirmed with the captains from each team that they are ready to start, you can begin the match.

To begin the match:

1. Hold the ball directly over your head
2. Blow your whistle
3. Throw the ball up high in the air

Go through the same process after each goal and at the beginning of each quarter.

**NOTE:** Only 4 players from each team may be inside the centre square until the ball has been bounced or thrown up.



Start the game

#### 1. Start the match / Quarter

Hold the ball directly overhead with a long, loud whistle to indicate the match is ready to begin.



End of quarter or game

#### 2. Quarter Time / End of Match

**Signal:** When time expires, at the end of each quarter, the timekeeper will sound the siren (if available). If no timekeeper or siren are available, you will have to keep time on the field and blow your whistle in 3 consecutive short bursts, while holding arms above your head at shoulder width.

**Note:** Similar to the signal for a touchdown in American football.

### During the Match

The following are the most common Umpire decisions and corresponding indications. Each decision is to be made with a loud, clear whistle and the appropriate indication. **NOTE:** in Australian Football when awarding a free kick the Umpire points in the direction of the goal that the awarded team is defending; **this is the opposite of soccer**. The use of the whistle and the indication should be performed in a confident, clear and decisive manner. In addition, a verbal explanation of the decision should be given. For example, "High tackle, your free kick number 5, Tigers."

To award a free kick when a foul has occurred:

1. Blow your whistle
2. Use the appropriate indication to communicate the free kick
3. Point with your outstretched arm in the direction of the goals that the team receiving the free kick is defending (opposite of soccer)

## Field Umpire Indications/Signals

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### Indications - Common Infringements/Free Kicks



High Tackle

#### 1. High Tackle

**Definition:** Any attempt to tackle an opposition player above the shoulders will result in a free kick to the player who was tackled.

**Signal:** Blow the whistle, touch one hand to the opposite shoulder.

**Explanation:** "High tackle, your free kick number 8, Cats."



Tripping

#### 2. Tripping (Low Tackle)

**Definition:** When a player trips, or attempts to trip an opposition player below the knees, whether by the use of hand, arm, foot or leg.

**Signal:** Blow the whistle, raise one leg and touch the shin with both hands.

**Explanation:** "Tripping, your free kick number 10, Swans."



Illegal Disposal

#### 3. Illegal Disposal

**Definition:** When a player throws or hands the football to another player or when a player has not disposed of the ball legally when being tackled. For example, when a player punches the ball after dropping it or throwing it.

**Signal:** Blow the whistle, in a sweeping motion extend both arms straight out to your sides with a slight lean forward.

**Explanation:** "Throwing, your free kick number 1, Bulldogs."



In the Back

#### 4. In the Back

**Definition:** When a player pushes or tackles an opposition player from behind.

**Signal:** Blow the whistle, extend both arms straight out in front of you.

**Explanation:** "In the back, your free kick number 9, Saints."



Holding the Man

#### 5. Holding the Man

**Definition:** When a player holds or throws an opposition player who is not in possession of the football, including after that player has disposed of the ball.

**Signal:** Blow the whistle, grip your shirt in both hands, at the waist.

**Explanation:** "Holding the man, your free kick number 20, Lions."

## Field Umpire Indications/Signals

### Indications - Common Infringements/Free Kicks

#### 6. Holding the Ball



Holding the Ball

**Definition:** A player who has had prior opportunity and does not immediately dispose of the ball by hand or foot before being legally tackled will be deemed to have been caught holding the ball. **NOTE:** Players that have not had prior opportunity must be given a reasonable amount of time to attempt to kick or handball before being deemed to have been holding the ball. Please refer to the Spirit of the Laws, 4. Tackling section.

**Signal:** Blow the whistle, start with your arms crossed over your chest, lean forward and extend your arms out at your sides to finish in a parallel position.

**Explanation:** "Holding the ball, your free kick number 18, Eagles."

#### 7. Illegal Shepherd



Illegal Shepherd

**Definition:** When a player pushes, bumps, holds or blocks an opposition player when the football is further than 5 metres away or out of play.

**Signal:** Blow the whistle, stretch your arms out to your sides, parallel to the ground.

**Explanation:** "Illegal shepherd, your free kick number 9, Bombers."

### Signals – Scoring (for assisting the Goal Umpire)

The goal Umpire has final decision when it comes to scoring, but the field Umpire assists when appropriate.

#### 1. Goal



Goal

**Definition:** A goal is scored when the football is kicked completely over the goal line by a player of the attacking team without being touched by any other player, even if the football first touches the ground. **NOTE:** If the field Umpire misses the call, then the signal is two hands behind the back.

**Signal:** Hold your hands, palms facing each other, at head height.

**Explanation:** "All clear, goal."

#### 2. Behind (point)



Behind (point)

**Definition:** A Behind is scored when any of the following occurs:

- (a) the football passes completely over the behind line or
- (b) a player of the attacking team kicks the football over the goal line but before passing over the goal line, the football is touched by an opponent; or
- (c) if a player from the defending team kicks, handballs, knocks or otherwise takes the football over the goal line or behind line; or
- (d) the football touches or passes over the goal post or touches padding or any other attachment to the goalpost.

**Signal:** Hold one hand, fingers pointed up, with your arm at a 45 degree angle.

**Explanation:** "All clear, behind."

## Spirit of the Laws

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In an effort to achieve consistency in decision-making, there is an emphasis on understanding the “spirit of the laws” (i.e. the philosophies underlying the laws) and umpiring according to the spirit of the laws.

### FAIRNESS & SAFETY

It is the spirit and intention of the laws to ensure that a match is played in a fair manner and to protect players from sustaining injury. All breaches of the laws shall be penalised. For coaching purposes, seven main areas (spirit of the laws) have been identified.

## 1. Contest for the ball

### GENERAL PLAY

*“The player whose sole objective is to contest the ball shall be permitted to do so.”*

- A player may be fairly met by use of the hip, shoulder, chest, arms and open hand and be pushed or bumped in the chest or side.
- Solid but legal bumps are permitted.

### CONTACT TO THE HEAD

- Contact to the head is considered to be illegal.

### HEAD OVER THE BALL

- A free kick will be awarded against a player who bumps or makes forceful contact to an opponent from front-on when that player has their head down over the ball.

#### Note:

- A player can bump an opponent’s body from side-on but any contact forward of side-on will be deemed to be front-on;
- A player with their head down in anticipation of winning possession of the ball or after contesting the ball will be deemed to have had their head down over the ball for the purposes of this law.



## 2. Diving on the ball

*“The ball shall be kept in motion.”*

Where a player elects to dive on the ball or, when on the ground, elects to drag the ball underneath his or her body and is correctly tackled, the player is to be penalised for holding the ball if he or she fails to immediately knock the ball clear or correctly dispose of it.

## 3. Marking Contests

*“The player whose sole objective is to contest a mark shall be permitted to do so.”*

Where there is incidental contact in a marking contest when the ball is the sole objective (eyes on the ball), play on will result. When a player leaps early, the attempt must be realistic (i.e. he/she must be able to touch the ball).

## Spirit of the Laws

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### 4. Tackling

*“A player who is tackled illegally while in possession of the ball will be awarded a free kick.”*

#### **NO PRIOR OPPORTUNITY — REASONABLE TIME**

*“The player who has possession of the ball and is tackled correctly by an opponent shall be given a reasonable time to kick or handball the ball or attempt to kick or handball the ball.”*

- If the tackle pins the ball, a field ball up will result.
- If a correct tackle or bump causes the player with the ball to lose possession, play on will result.



#### **PRIOR OPPORTUNITY — IMMEDIATE DISPOSAL**

*“The player who has possession of the ball and has had an opportunity to dispose of it and is then tackled correctly by an opponent must immediately kick or handball the ball.”*

If a correct tackle pins the ball or causes the player with the ball to lose possession, (see picture to the left) a free kick will result. If a bump or knock to the arm causes the player with the ball to lose possession, play on will result.

### 5. Ruck Contests

*“The player whose sole objective is to contest the ruck shall be permitted to do so.”*

Where there is incidental contact in a ruck contest when the ball is the sole objective (eyes on the ball), play on will result. See picture to the right.



### 6. Advantage Plays

*“The ball shall be kept in motion by permitting the team offended against to take advantage, provided play is continuous.”*

Advantage can apply only to a free kick. It cannot apply to a mark. A guide as to whether play is continuous is that the outcome of the play would have been the same had the whistle not been blown.

### 7. 50-metre Penalty

*“After a mark or free kick has been awarded, a 50-metre penalty will be awarded against the opposing team which unduly delays the play or abuses an Umpire.”*

An undue delay of the play includes:

- Going over the mark before the Umpire calls play on.
- Not returning the ball directly to a player after he or she has been awarded a mark or free kick.
- Unduly holding up an opponent after that player has marked the ball.
- A player not involved in a marking contest holds a player who has marked the ball or has been awarded a free kick.

## **Game Day – 8 Point Plan**

### **Best Practices**

### **Post Match Meeting Report**



## Game Day – 8 Point Plan

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### 1. Manage Yourself

#### 1a. Presentation

Look the part in an umpiring uniform – one chance to make a first impression!

### 2. Manage the match

2a. Start the match – bounce or throw the ball up in the centre of the ground once the captains and teams are ready

2b. Re-commence the match

- Following quarter time/half time/three-quarter time (as above)
- After the ball has become trapped in a contest on the ground, throw the ball up at the spot where the ball was trapped

2c. Communicate with players

- Use your voice to manage the game (working with players/teams). For example, if the ball is at the bottom of a pack yell 'knock it out'

2d. Always make sure you completely ignore any complaining from the crowd and players. Remember that you are the one in control of the game, not the crowd or players.

### 3. Decision making

- Blow your whistle loud
- Be assertive - exude confidence and authority (non authoritarian)
- Communicate in a firm manner when explaining (not justifying decisions)

### 4. Contesting the ball

'Look after the player going in for the ball' – *award free kicks* to players who are:

- (a) pushed in the back,
- (b) contacted above shoulder height – (*high tackle/contact*)
- (c) held when not in possession of the ball - (*holding the man*)

### 5. Players in possession of the ball

- Penalise illegal contact as in (a) & (b) above
- Give players a reasonable time to attempt/to dispose of the ball legally (kick or handball – clenched fist)

### 6. General play

- Players must bounce or touch the ball to the ground every 15 metres if running with the ball (otherwise free kick to opposition)
- A mark is controlling the ball after it has been kicked by another player and the ball has travelled at least 15 metres

### 7. Positioning (see page 3)

- Position on the 'inside of play', (with your back to the centre of the ground and the football between you and the boundary line) some 25 metres from the action (ideally side on to play), so that you have wide vision and can see the whole contest.

### 8. Following a mark or free kick (see page 4)

- Around the ground - Ensure an opposition player is on the mark (standing on the spot where the mark/free kick occurred)
- Kick at goal – As above, lined up with the centre of the goal, mark and kicker  
As above, Lined up with centre of goal, mark and kicker

## **Best Practices**

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The following are several practices that have been incorporated by Umpires and leagues throughout the world. These practices have been successful toward the growth and development of Umpires and are for your consideration.

### **1. 3 Strike System**

The 3 Strike system is designed to clearly communicate with players that verbal Umpire abuse will not be tolerated. Prior to the start of the game the Umpire will call both teams to the centre of the ground to explain the system.

*"In football there is zero tolerance for Umpire abuse and the 3 strike system will apply to any player that engages in the verbal abuse of any Umpire. The first offense by a player will result in a warning. Second offense will lead to a 50 metre penalty and the 3<sup>rd</sup> offense is ejection from the game. You've all just received your first warning."*

#### **3 Strikes**

- 1) Warning
- 2) 50-metre penalty
- 3) Player is sent off and not allowed to return for the remainder of the game

### **2. Role of the Captain**

The role of the captain is to be the leader of their team on the field. As such, the captain will be the only player permitted to speak to the Umpire with regard to Umpire decisions. If players have any issues/questions about the rules during the course of the game, they are to bring those issues/questions to the attention of the captain and then he/she will relay the information to the Umpire.

Prior to the start of the game the Umpire will call the 2 captains together for the coin toss to determine which direction the teams will go to start the game. At this time, the Umpire will remind each captain of their role and that they are to serve as the voice for their team. It is the captains' responsibility to make sure their players understand to communicate any issues through them.

In addition, at this time the umpire should ask which players are playing in their first game so that when time allows, during the game, the Umpire can explain why a call went against the new players to foster the learning process.

### **3. Training with Teams**

One of the best ways to learn and practice umpiring is at the local club. Find out when training is and get down to the ground to simulate game scenarios and build relationships with the players and coaches. On game day, the players will be familiar with you and your style of umpiring.

### **4. Handling Non-Constructive Criticism**

It is important to block out the comments from outside the boundary line, much of which will not be supportive or complimentary. Umpires need to be aware that supporters get emotional and vocal with their support for their team and players and that generally the verbal attack on players and Umpires is not meant as a personal attack.

## **Post Match Meeting Report**

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Game Day Environments are one of the most important issues facing international football and it is important that everyone involved takes a proactive approach to ensure that these environments are positive to assist in the retention of players, umpires, coaches and volunteers.

This meeting is to commence no later than 20 minutes following the conclusion of the match. It is requested that the meeting be attended by the umpires, captains of both teams, and the coaches of both teams.

The meeting is to be facilitated by an independent person.

**NOTE:** This report can also be used as a pre match report to help build rapport between umpires, players and coaches prior to the match and establish expectations.

Facilitator's Name: \_\_\_\_\_

Match: \_\_\_\_\_ v \_\_\_\_\_

Venue: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

**COMPETITION / LEAGUE:** \_\_\_\_\_

### **ATTENDEES:**

Umpires' Names: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

Team Captains: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

Coach / Manager: \_\_\_\_\_ and \_\_\_\_\_

## Post Match Meeting Report

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### 1. Match Day Issues

Facilities/Venue	Comments:
Ground markings Change rooms Welcoming Encouraging	

### 2. Coaching issues

Coaching staff	Comments:
Supportive Non abusive Encouraging Ability to control spectators  <i>Please include notes</i>  <i>RE: assistant coaches / runners / water boys</i>	

## Post Match Meeting Report

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### 3. Player/team issues

Player behaviour	Comments:
Respectful to opposition Respectful to umpires Respectful to the game	

### 4. Spectators

Player behaviour	Comments:
Supportive Non abusive Encouraging Respectful to players Respectful to umpires Respectful to the game	

## Post Match Meeting Report

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### 5. Umpiring

Communication	Comments:
<p>Loud, strong whistle</p> <p>Effective use of voice</p> <p>Clear signals/indications</p> <p>Friendly tone of voice</p> <p>Positive body language</p> <p>Confident</p>	
Decision making	Comments:
<p>Prepared to make a decision</p> <p>Explained decision to players</p> <p>Looking after player going in for the ball</p>	



**Notes**

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