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ENGLAND TOUCH

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5<sup>TH</sup> EDITION RULES

# IN-DEPTH REVIEW OF CHANGES

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5<sup>TH</sup> EDITION 2020  
ACCOMPANYING NOTES

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FEDERATION  
OF INTERNATIONAL  
TOUCH



# FIT 5<sup>TH</sup> Edition Rules In-depth Review of Changes

## Introduction

The Federation of International Touch (FIT) has released the 5th Edition of the Rules of Touch. These are based on Touch Football Australia's 8th Edition Rules and will be rolled out for a two-year trial period starting in 2020.

This document is designed as a comprehensive list of changes between the FIT 4th (FIT4) and 5th (FIT5) Editions. It has been prepared by the European Federation of Touch (EFT), based on preliminary work by the England Touch Association (ETA), with contributions from Gareth Hinds, Robin Budd, Peter Faassen de Heer, Luke McKenzie, Ian Matthew and Tim Osborne.

The text in red provides a reference to the relevant passages of the FIT4 and FIT5 rulebooks, along with further context and guidance for the application of the Rules where pertinent. The videos provided by Touch Football Australia have also been used as a reference and are available [here](#).

There is also a separate document that provides a brief summary of the main changes which, along with the full rules, can be found on the England Touch website:

[www.Englandtouch.org.uk/play/how-to-play/the-rules/](http://www.Englandtouch.org.uk/play/how-to-play/the-rules/)



## Terminology

The terminology used throughout the Rules realigns our sport with rugby. 'Touchdowns' are now 'Tries', the 'Touchdown Area' is now the 'In-Goal Area', the 'Scoreline' is now the 'Try Line' and 'Period of Time' is now 'Sin Bin'.

*FIT5: Definitions & Terminology / FIT4: Definitions & Terminology*

## Onside Distance 7m

Defenders are now required to retreat a fixed distance of 7m from the Rollball to be onside, as opposed to the previous 'not less than 5m' rule. In line with this change, the dashed 5m line at each end of the field is replaced by a 7m line and the In-Goal Area is now 7m deep.

*FIT5: Rule 15.1 / FIT4: Rule 9.8*

*FIT5: Appendix 1 / FIT4: Figure 1*

*This is essentially what we have been refereeing up to now in general play. However, on the Try Line it is critical that the Referee observes a strict 7m onside distance. If the Rollball occurs on or within the 7m line the Referee should call the defenders to the Try Line, but if the Rollball takes place before the 7m line the Referee should not call the defenders to the Try Line. This is an important distinction and will ensure a lot more clarity and consistency in what is expected from players around the Try Line.*

Similarly, when an attacking player or the ball leaves the field of play, by crossing the sideline, play is restarted 7m infield from the sideline, rather than 5m.

*FIT5: Rule 13.6 / FIT4: Ruling 11.A*

## Obstruction (During Retreat)

Following a Touch, an offside defender may now choose any direction of retreat and change that direction as many times as they like while returning to an onside position, provided they do not obstruct (interfere with or impede) the attacking team.

This replaces the concept of 'deviation' or 'change of direction'. A defender who is obstructing (interfering with or impeding) the attack as a result of a change of direction should be subject to Penalty/Advantage.

*FIT5: Rule 15.5 / FIT4: Rule 13.4*

*We already allow some changes of direction in retreat at elite level, for example a 'J' retreat, so the main nuance here is the distinction between obstruction and deviation. This is very clear – the defender is entitled to change direction to the side of the line of attack but not directly in front of it if this leads to obstruction of the attacking player. This will require some adjustment in Europe in that not all changes of direction will now lead to Penalty/Advantage.*

*As before, defenders are still entitled to occupy space on the retreat if they keep a consistent path and should not be penalised for obstruction if they do not change direction.*



The Referee is no longer explicitly required to warn offside players before playing Advantage. Doing so is still good practice, however.

*FIT5: Rule 19.1 / FIT4: Rule 16.5*

It should be emphasised that Referees should still strive to warn offside players wherever possible. This change merely allows the Referee to play Advantage in situations where they have not had time to warn a player who is clearly offside, which is something that was already done at elite level anyway.

*The Mark for a Penalty for obstruction by an offside defender is now 10m ahead of the point of the infringement, rather than at the onside line from the previous Rollball. When the point of the infringement is within 10m of the attacking Try Line, the Mark is on the 7m line.*

*FIT5: Rule 15.5 / FIT4: Rule 13.B*

### **Defence in 7m Zone – Speed of Advance and Not Dropping Early**

The pace at which defenders are required to move forward once they have entered their defending 7m Zone is now more explicitly defined. This rule was previously described as the ‘Mexican Standoff’.

Defenders are now required to move forward ‘at a reasonable pace’, until a Touch is imminent or made, which is aimed at speeding up the game. What is deemed ‘reasonable pace’ is showing positive intent to make a touch. This is at the discretion of the Referee.

*FIT5: Rule 10.13 / FIT4: Rule 11.5.2*

*This is designed to speed up the game and make it a more attractive spectacle. The TFA instructional videos provide clear guidance on what does and doesn't constitute ‘reasonable pace’. All defenders must move forward with a positive intent to make a Touch. Anything overly cautious or ‘cat and mouse’ is now definitely prohibited.*

Onside defenders now cannot drop to the Try Line when the ball enters the 7m Zone, as they could previously in the 5m. They do not need to keep moving forward, but cannot drop until a Touch is made or imminent.

*FIT5: Rule 10.14 / FIT4: Rule 11.5.1*

*This rule prevents the defending team from dropping at the instant the player in Possession crosses the 7m line, in order to keep the defence off the line until the Touch is imminent. As before, the definition of ‘imminent’ is subject to interpretation and the Referee will need to judge whether any dropping early by the defence (e.g. sucking/rolling) has actually had a material impact on play. In practice, it shouldn't make much difference if the ‘reasonable’ pace of advance is consistently enforced.*

### **Defence in 7m Zone – Exclusion for 3 Penalties**

After any defender has entered their defending 7m Zone, 3 Penalty infringements by the defending team in that same Possession now result in the last player to infringe being given an Exclusion (i.e. placed in the Sin Bin Area behind the defending team's Dead Ball Line on the same



side of the field as their Interchange Area) until their team regains Possession. The referee is still at liberty to apply a stronger sanction if appropriate.

*FIT5: Rule 18.8 / FIT4: n/a*

The previous rule on removal of a defender following 2 Penalty infringements for not advancing/dropping early no longer applies.

*FIT5: n/a / FIT4: Rule 11.7*

### **Drop-Off**

A new Drop-Off procedure is now in place, starting with a 2-minute period of extra-time with two members of each team removed (leaving 4v4). The Tap to commence the Drop-Off is taken by the team that did not receive Possession at the start of the match. The team in the lead at the expiry of the 2-minute period is declared the winner. If the scores are still tied, the match is paused while each team removes another player to go to 3v3. Play then resumes with the first team to score winning – there is no right of reply.

*FIT5: Rule 24.1 / FIT4: Rule 4.9*

*Note that there is no longer any requirement for both teams to have had Possession during the Drop-Off before a winner can be declared.*

Mixed teams may field no more than two male players in the Drop-Off.

*FIT5: Rule 24.2 / FIT4: Rule 4.9.11.2*

Male players who have been sent off or are in the Sin Bin count towards this total.

### **Half in Place**

If the Half is not within 1 metre of the Rollball, onside defenders may move forward as soon as the player performing the Rollball releases the ball.

*FIT5: Rule 13.12.1 / FIT4: Rule 9.8*

*The Referee will be the sole judge of whether the Half is within 1 metre of the Rollball. This does not prevent defenders from moving forward from an onside position if they see that no Half is in position. However, in the absence of prior communication from the Referee they do so at their own risk and are liable to Penalty/Advantage should the Referee be of the view that a Half was in fact in position.*

### **Interchange on Intercept or Line Break**

Interchanges during an intercept or line break situation are no longer permitted. Any defending player who enters the field from the Interchange Area during a line break or interception will be sent to the Sin Bin and if they prevent a Try, a Penalty Try will be awarded.

*FIT5: Rule 17.7 / FIT4: n/a*

## Sin Bin

The duration of a Sin Bin (formerly Period of Time) is now explicitly defined as 4 completed Possessions. This duration is no longer at the discretion of the Referee. A completed Possession is marked by a Try, a Change of Possession, or when the ball goes dead for Half-Time or Full-Time.

*FIT5: Definitions & Terminology / FIT4: Rule 17.4.1*

The Onfield Referee is now responsible for indicating the start and end of the duration of the Sin Bin.

*FIT5: Rule 22.1 / FIT4: Rule 17.4.1*

Upon completion of the Sin Bin, the offending player must now go to the Interchange Area before returning to the field of play.

*FIT5: Rule 22.3 / FIT4: Rule 17.4.1*

## The Toss

The team winning the toss now has the option to defend from the Tap-Off at the start of the match should they wish to do so. This is in addition to choice of direction to run in the first half and choice of interchange area, which are both unchanged.

*FIT5: Rule 7.1 / FIT4: Rule 6.1*

## Zero Touch

Any Touch made following an interception is now counted as Zero Touch.

*FIT5: Rule 9.2 / FIT4: n/a*

If the ball is intentionally touched in flight by the defending team and regathered by the attacking team the next Touch is also counted as Zero Touch.

*FIT5: Rule 12.2 / FIT4: Rule 12.2*

## Tap

The Mark must now be indicated by the Referee before the Tap can be taken.

*FIT5: Rule 18.5 / FIT4: Rule 15.4*

A Tap performed incorrectly or taken off the Mark no longer results in a Change of Possession.

*FIT5: Rule 18.1 / FIT4: Ruling 15.B*

A Tap on the halfway line to start/restart the game cannot be taken until all attackers are onside and at least 4 defenders are onside.

*FIT5: Rule 7.6 / FIT4: Rule 15.4*



In all of the above cases, the attacking team is told to return to the Mark and perform the Tap again.

Delaying the taking of a Tap now results in a Penalty to the defending team as opposed to a Change of Possession.

*FIT5: Rule 18.6 / FIT4: Ruling 15.F*

It is no longer permitted to take a tap up to 10m behind the Mark.

*FIT5: n/a / FIT4: Rule 15.2*

### **Rollball**

The player performing the Rollball now only needs to make a genuine attempt to stand parallel to the sidelines. Passing only one foot over the ball is now explicitly permitted.

*FIT5: Rule 13.1 / FIT4: Rule 9.1*

*'Genuine attempt' clarifies that Referees should look for players who make no attempt to correct their body position when performing a Rollball - for example, a player who runs diagonally across the pitch and does not square up at all in the Touch.*

A Tap performed instead of a Rollball no longer results in a Change of Possession – instead the attacking team is told to return to the Mark and perform the Rollball again.

*FIT5: Rule 13.7 / FIT4: Ruling 15.B*

The Half may no longer roll the ball along the ground towards themselves with the hands before picking it up.

*FIT5: n/a / FIT4: Rule 9.6*

### **Touched in Flight**

Players who accidentally propel the ball forward are no longer awarded Possession if an opposition player makes intentional contact with the ball before it goes to ground.

*FIT5: Rule 9.6 / FIT4: Rule 12.1*

*This eliminates the FIT4 rule whereby an attacking player did not lose Possession following a knock on if a defending player made intentional contact with the ball but failed to gather it. Now, the opposition player has the right to attempt to gather the ball but if they are unsuccessful their team still receives Possession.*

If the ball is intentionally touched in flight by a defending player, propelling it in the direction of their own defending Dead Ball Line, a Change in Possession occurs if the attacking team attempts but fails to regather the ball.

*FIT5: Rule 12.4 / FIT4: Rule 12.3*



## Change of Possession

At a Change of Possession, it is now specified only that the ball must be returned to the Mark without delay. The option of passing or handing the ball to the nearest player has been removed.

*FIT5: 9.3 / FIT4: Rule 7.2*

*In practice, immediate return of the ball to an opposition player is not an issue. However, if taking the option of passing the ball is used to delay the turnover in any way, this should be penalised.*

## Scoring a Try

It is now explicitly stated that an attacking player must have control of the ball immediately before and during the grounding in order for a Try to be awarded.

*FIT5: Rule 14.3 / FIT4: Rule 4.5*

*This is not a change from how the game has been refereed up to now.*

## Sin Bin Area

The Sin Bin Area for each team is now on the side of the field nearest to their Interchange Area, beyond their attacking Dead Ball Line.

For an Exclusion, the offending player on the defending team should be placed in the Sin Bin Area beyond their defending Dead Ball Line, on the side of the field nearest to their Interchange Area.

*FIT5: Rule 22.2/Appendix 1 / FIT4: Rule 17.4.1*

## Touched behind Try Line

If an attacker is touched on or behind their defending Try Line (their defending In-Goal Area), they must now wait for the Referee to indicate the Mark on the 7m line before being allowed to perform the Rollball.

*FIT5: Rule 10.9 / FIT4: Rule 11.3*

## Retreating beyond Try Line

Defenders are no longer allowed to retreat an 'unreasonable distance' beyond the Try Line when attempting to get onside at a Rollball. This is at the discretion of the Referee.

*FIT5: Rule 15.3 / FIT4: n/a*

*Defending players should not be retreating more than 1 metre beyond the Try Line if it is evident that they are attempting to gain an advantage by doing so.*





### **Interfering with Rollball**

The Mark for interfering with the Rollball or the Half is now 10m ahead of the point of the infringement.

*FIT5: Rule 13.11 / FIT4: Ruling 9.D*

*This is to discourage defenders from attempting to break down play in a cynical manner.*

### **Self Forward Pass**

It is now explicitly forbidden to intentionally propel the ball forward over an opposition player and regather it.

*FIT5: Rule 11.2 / FIT4: n/a*

### **Phantom Touch**

The sanction for a falsely claimed Touch is now explicitly defined as a Sin Bin.

*FIT5: Rule 10.2 / FIT4: n/a*

*It should be noted this is for a cynically claimed Phantom Touch (i.e. a player claiming a Touch they did not make, and maintaining their claim) rather than a 'Touch/No Touch' situation where a player claims and then immediately withdraws a claim for a Touch.*

### **Try Line markers**

The four Try Line markers are now explicitly defined as part of the field of play. If the player in Possession makes contact with one without touching any part of the sideline, or the ground beyond the sideline, then play continues.

*FIT5: Rule 1.4.1 / FIT4: n/a*

### **Forced Interchange**

The sequence of actions for the forced interchange is now explicitly defined, i.e. placing the ball on the Mark, sending the player to the Interchange Area and then allowing the Penalty to be taken.

*FIT5: Rule 21.1 / FIT4: Rule 17.3*

*This was already common practice for Referees and is designed to give the attacking team maximum advantage, particularly when on the opposition Try Line.*



## 7 on the Field

The Penalty for Incorrect Substitution no longer exists and is now covered by the more general Penalty for having too many players on the field.

*FIT5: Rule 5.1 / FIT4: Rule 5.B*

The Mark for this offence is now 7m infield on the halfway line or the position of the ball at the time the offence is identified, whichever is the greater advantage.

*FIT5: Rule 5.1 / FIT4: Rule 5.A*

## Touch on Offside Defender

For a Touch by the player in Possession on an offside defender (who is making every attempt to retreat and remain out of play) to count it must be intentional.

*FIT5: Rule 10.10 / FIT4: Rule 10.14*

## Looking for 6 Again

If the player in Possession intentionally seeks a deflection or a restart of the Touch Count by passing the ball into a defender who is not interfering with a legitimate pass, this now results in a Penalty to the defending team, rather than just a Change of Possession.

*FIT5: Rule 12.7 / FIT4: n/a*

## Obstruction (by attacker)

It is now considered obstruction for the player in Possession to hold or impede a defender.

*FIT5: Rule 16.2 / FIT4: Rule 10.3*

*This rule is mainly aimed at the player performing the Rollball. There is no real change to how we have been refereeing as we have always penalised attacking players for holding or obstructing the player making the Touch.*

## Off the Mark

The Mark for the Penalty is now where the infringement occurred, not where the Rollball should have been performed.

*FIT5: Rule 13.2 / FIT4: Ruling 9.A*

*This is a very minor change. If the attacking player performs the Rollball relatively far beyond the Mark a Penalty for delaying play is more appropriate.*



### **Injured players**

Injured players are no longer counted when assessing whether a team has the required 4 players for the match to be allowed to start/continue.

*FIT5: Rule 5.3 / FIT4: Rule 5.1*

### **Simultaneous Touch**

The concept of a Simultaneous Touch no longer exists.

*FIT5: n/a / FIT4: Rule 10.10*

*The onus is on the Referee to make a decision on the relative timing of the touch and the pass.*

### **Dead Heat Catch**

The concept of a Dead Heat Catch no longer exists.

*FIT5: n/a / FIT4: Rule 7.7*

*The onus is on the Referee to make a decision on the timing of the catch.*

### **Ball**

It is now specified that play must be stopped should the ball no longer meet the required specifications.

*FIT5: Rule 3.3 / FIT4: Rule 2.6*

### **Referee footwear**

The ban on metal studs now also applies explicitly to Referees as well as players.

*FIT5: Rule 4.6.1 / FIT4: Rule 3.3*

### **Coach beyond Dead Ball Line**

There are now additional restrictions on coaches who are positioned beyond the Dead Ball Line; they are explicitly prohibited from communicating in any way with either team or the Referees.

*FIT5: Rule 6.2 / FIT4: Rule 5.5*



### **Further information**

This document was authored by the England Touch Referee Committee in Spring 2020.

Further communication on the new Rules will be issued in due course, including video footage and responses to requests for clarification.

For any queries regarding the rules, or the updates in the 5th Edition, England Touch can be contacted by email:

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