

Changes to Free Hit Rules

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Rules of Hockey 2009 – free hit

The International Hockey Federation (FIH) released the revised free hit rules because of the great interest in them. The next Rules of Hockey will take effect from 1 May 2009 and the full set of rules will be published as soon as possible. Please find below the text of the revised free hit rules.

Rules of Hockey 2009: free hit

The text of the free hit rules which will apply in international hockey from 1 May 2009 is provided below.

One of the objectives of the FIH and therefore of the Hockey Rules Board (HRB) is to decrease the number and duration of interruptions to the flow of play and to increase the length of time the ball is in active play. A "self-pass" from a free hit has therefore been introduced. It enables the player taking the free hit to play the ball again after taking the free hit which will encourage free-flowing hockey.

As with other actions on the hockey pitch, this must take place safely. Other aspects of the free hit rules have therefore been reviewed. The HRB is concerned that the ball is often played hard, indiscriminately and therefore potentially dangerously into the circle from free hits in the attacking 23 metres area. In future, these free hits must not be played directly into the circle.

FIH believes these are indications of the way it wishes to see hockey develop. Exciting innovations will take place but there will also always be a concern that the game should be as safe as reasonably possible.

These Rules changes above are referred to as Mandatory Experimental Rules. They are mandatory because they must be played throughout hockey; they are experimental to show that they will be reviewed after experience before deciding if they become permanent Rules. When the full set of the Rules of Hockey is published, small changes to some wording and various additional notes will also be added to clarify certain current rules. It is anticipated that the full set of Rules will be published in the next month or so.

The text of the relevant free hit Rules will be as follows:

13.1 Location of a free hit:

- a. a free hit is taken close to where the offence occurred

'Close to' means within playing distance of where the offence occurred and with no significant advantage gained.

The location from which a free hit is taken must be more precise inside the 23 metres area.

- b. a free hit awarded within 5 metres of the circle to the attack is taken at the nearest point 5 metres from the circle
- c. a free hit awarded outside the circle to the defence within 15 metres of the back-line is taken up to 15 metres from the back-line in line with the location of the offence, parallel to the side-line
- d. a free hit awarded inside the circle to the defence is taken anywhere inside the circle or up to 15 metres from the back-line in line with the location of the offence, parallel to the side-line.

13.2 Procedures for taking a free hit, centre pass and putting the ball back into play after it has been outside the field:

- a. the ball must be stationary
- b. opponents must be at least 5 metres from the ball

If an opponent is within 5 metres of the ball, they must not interfere with the taking of the free hit or must not play or attempt to play the ball. If this player is not playing the ball, attempting to play the ball or influencing play, the free hit need not be delayed.

c. when a free hit is awarded to the attack within the 23 metres area, all players other than the player taking the free hit must be at least 5 metres from the ball

d. the ball is moved using a push or hit

e. the ball must not be raised intentionally directly from the free hit

f. if the player taking the free hit is the next player to play the ball, the actions of taking the free hit and of next playing the ball must be two separate actions

g. before another player of the team which took the free hit is allowed to play the ball, the ball must move at least 1 metre

The ball does not have to move 1 metre before the player taking the free hit may play the ball again.

h. from a free hit awarded to the attack within the 23 metres area, the ball must not be played into the circle until it has travelled at least 5 metres or has been touched by a player of either team other than the player taking the free hit.

SOURCE: International Hockey Federation (FIH)