

RULE CHANGES 2009

No formal guidance on the interpretation of the new mandatory experimental rules has yet been issued by EH. Accordingly the guidance that follows is temporary, and may be amended by such official guidance in due course. The full text of the 2009/10 rule book can be downloaded from the Officiating page of the EH website.

To start or restart the game with a free hit, centre pass or after the ball has left the field (but not for injecting a penalty corner or taking a penalty stroke):

- A player may make a self-pass.
- The action of the self-pass must be separate from the action of next playing the ball. The take and the subsequent play must be visibly separate. Because of this the ball should be stationary before a self-pass.
- A self-pass need not travel 1m before the ball is next played (but an ordinary pass to another player must still go 1m);
- An opponent within 5m of the ball must not interfere with taking the free hit or attempt to play the ball, but the hit need not be delayed so long as there is no such interference from the opponent. There is no real change here, but this has a much greater significance in terms of advantage with a self-pass. Where an opponent is interfering with the taking of a free hit, umpires have the options of awarding another free hit, advancing the hit up to 10m, or upgrading to a penalty corner if the offence took place in the 23m zone. There is more opportunity for breaking down play in this situation, which umpires should be aware of and penalise accordingly. On the other hand the taker should not hit the ball at an opponent within 5m or run a self-pass through an opponent who is not trying to interfere, and the attacker should be penalised accordingly.
- A free hit should still be taken 'close to' where the offence occurred, which means within playing distance and with no significant advantage gained. The location from which a free hit is taken within the 23m zone must be more precise.

From any attacking restart within the 23m zone (free hit, sideline or long corner):

- All players must be 5m from the ball;
- The ball may not be played into the circle until it has travelled 5m or been touched by another player (of either team).

Hence for example, the taker can dribble the ball 5m and then play it into the circle; the taker can pass the ball 5m for a fellow attacker to play into the circle; a fellow attacker who was 5m away can come and play the ball into the circle so long as it has moved 1m from the free hit; the ball can be played immediately into the circle once a defender has touched it, say in a fluffed tackle.

When a free hit is awarded to the attack within 5m of the circle, it must be taken from the nearest point 5m from the circle.

This rule will be difficult to deal with unless pitches are marked with the 5m dotted line. This is not yet mandatory in England. Players must realise that 5m is a much greater distance than they normally imagine when they have till now been supposed to be 5m away from a hit taken close to the circle!

M Harvey
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