



To the  
Member federations  
Continental Federations

Basle, 1 April 2005

## **Rules Changes Effective August 1, 2005**

Dear Friends in Handball,

Below are the 12 substantive changes in the rules that the IHF Council has approved. They will take effect through the new rule book effective August 1, 2005.

In addition, several new interpretations were announced and given official status during the period 2002-04. They are already part of the current rules, but will now be incorporated into the rule book for the first time. The third type of changes are of an editorial nature: minor clarifications or improvements in the rules text, reorganizing of text in certain rules to make the sequencing or the overview of the rules more logical, and minor changes in the wording to improve the clarity and understanding.

**1. If a free-throw is to be executed at the end of a half of the game (or an overtime period), there are no player substitutions allowed, with the exception of one player for the throwing team; moreover, the teammates of the thrower must be positioned at least 3 meters away.**

The objective is to speed up the execution of such free-throws, and to avoid having a cluster of players from the throwing team trying to ‘camouflage’ the execution. As before, only the players of the defending team are allowed inside their 9-meter line. For a free-throw taken from a longer distance, the referees must be alert to illegal action if players from both teams try to ‘fight’ for positions at the 3-meter distance.

**2. It is no longer obligatory for the referees to give a time-out when awarding a 7-meter-throw.**

This change was initiated by the IHF Council after pressure from television and others having concern about the overall length of the game. Instead of the obligatory time-out, the referees are expected to use their judgment and give a time-out only if there is a substantial delay prior to the 7-meter execution (for instance, if there is a substitution of the goalkeeper or the thrower), and the loss of time would be unfair to one of the teams. As usual, the result in the game, the time remaining, and the fact that one of the teams may have a player serving a 2-minute suspension, are factors that enter into the judgment of the referees. In cases of doubt, the advice would be to decide to give a time-out.

**3. When the timekeeper (or the delegate) whistles, normally for a team time-out or a faulty substitution, the official clock is to be stopped simultaneously, without waiting for any signal or confirmation from the referees.**

The objective is to avoid situations where the referees do not hear the signal from the table, and the clock continues running even though any action after the whistle from the table is invalid. It should be noted that this new rule in these situations effectively gives the authority over the playing time to the timekeeper/delegate, instead of the referees who are otherwise always having the final word. In these situations, the referees could only intervene if they, for instance, observed that in fact the official clock was not stopped exactly at the moment of the whistle. Conversely, if the referees did not hear the whistle, they must get help from the timekeeper/delegate to determine what the situation was on the court at the time of the whistle.

**4. It has been decided to change the maximum number of players on a team from 12 to 14.**

This change does not require much explanation. 14 players were already allowed in IHF events in recent years, and many national federations had already experimented with this rule change for some time. It is on the basis of the generally positive experience that the basic rule is now being changed.

**5. If a player not included in the scoresheet enters the court, this now means that the 'responsible team official' receives a progressive punishment, in analogy with punishment for unsportsmanlike conduct.**

Traditionally, the entering player was disqualified. This was not seen as a reasonable punishment for an administrative mistake and it is also important to punish the person who should really be responsible for preventing the mistake. **The same thing applies if**

**the ‘responsible team official’ does not ensure that only the registered team officials and the participating players are in the substitution area.**

**6. Visible body piercing can be allowed, but only if it can be safely taped over in the same way as a flat ring or small earring.**

Body-piercing has gradually become a specific concern in the context of ‘dangerous objects’. The focus is on piercing that could be dangerous to another player, i.e., not those inside the mouth or under the clothing. Visible piercing must never be allowed if it is not taped over.

**7. Entering of the goal-area (including touching the ball in the goal-area) by an opponent of the goalkeeper’s team, will now cause a restart through a goalkeeper-throw, i.e., the goalkeeper can execute the throw from any place inside the goal area.**

Situations where an attacker has entered the goal-area and caused a free-throw for the opponents have caused undesirable delays and corrections, as the goalkeeper normally has the ball in the goal-area but must move to a specific area outside the goal-area to execute the free-throw. It is important to note that all the flexibility that goes with a goalkeeper-throw applies, compared with the more strict execution rules for a free-throw. (There is no provision for having the restart done as a free-throw, if the ball happens to be outside the goal-area at the time of the whistle; the restart is always through a goalkeeper-throw).

**8. The focus of the rule regarding dangerous actions leading to disqualification has tended to be on very forceful and violent actions. A clarification will now be inserted to emphasize that an action involving a relatively small impact can also be very dangerous, if it comes at the moment when the opponent is defenseless.**

The experience has increasingly been that injury results from relatively minor body contact, if the guilty player takes such action when the opponent, for instance, is jumping or running a counterattack, or more generally cannot anticipate the action and defend himself. Referees must take care to include these situations among those that should lead to disqualification.

**9. If the ball hits the ceiling or an object attached to the ceiling above the court, the restart shall be through a throw-in for the opponents of the team that last touched the ball. The throw-in is taken from the nearest point on the nearest side-line, in relation to the point where the ball hit the ceiling.**

In 2001 the rules were changed so that a free-throw would be the normal way of restarting the game after the ball has hit the ceiling. The experience with that rules change has shown that unintended and unfair positional advantages can arise. A throw-in gives a more correct opportunity for the now defending team to take up position.

**10. Following the execution of a goalkeeper-throw, the throwing player is allowed to touch the ball again after it has rebounded from the goal of the opponents.**

This change is simply undertaken to correct an omission in the rules. The corresponding rule has existed in the case of the free-throw, 7-meter-throw, throw-in and throw-off, and the intention has always been that the same should apply to the goalkeeper-throw, but this has not been clear from the rules.

**11. 2-minute suspensions (and also exclusions) can now be given with respect to infringements during half-time breaks and other intermissions (e.g., before and between overtime periods).** Special rules have also been inserted to address violations during tie-breakers, such as 7-meter throwing following overtime.

A number of years ago, when the rules regarding 2-minute suspensions and exclusions for infringements outside the playing court were changed, it was overlooked that the rules should, as a matter of consistency, be extended to cover violations also during half-time breaks and other intermissions. Currently, the next step after a 'yellow card' is a disqualification, something which is not considered desirable.

**12. A disqualification during the last minute of a game, where the offending team is ruthlessly trying to prevent that the opponents obtain a 'clear scoring chance' (as defined under Rule 14) or at least a good position for a shot on goal, when the potential goal would have been decisive (winning, tying, or gaining the necessary goal difference), must be reported by the referees after the game, so that the responsible authorities can take further action against the guilty player.**

There is a clear and unfortunate tendency that players act very cynically in the situation just described. They simply 'take out' the opponent, with any means necessary to take away the final chance, in the knowledge that preventing a goal is important whereas receiving a disqualification is not important at that late stage. However, if the standard procedure is to report the player, so that there is an expectation of a suspension for some matches, then this could have a deterring effect, something that would be very important for the image of fair play and ethics in our sport.

**Any questions regarding the correct understanding and interpretation of these rules changes can be directed to the Head Office of the International Handball Federation (e-mail: [IHF.office@ihf.info](mailto:IHF.office@ihf.info)).**

Alternatively, questions can be sent directly to Mr. Christer Ahl, President of the IHF Playing Rules & Referees Commission (e-mail: [cahl0103@att.net](mailto:cahl0103@att.net)) or Mr. Manfred Prause, Member of IHF Playing Rules and Referees Commission (e-mail: [prause-offenburg@t-online.de](mailto:prause-offenburg@t-online.de)).

Kindest regards.

INTERNATIONAL HANDBALL FEDERATION

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Christer Ahl', written in a cursive style.

Christer Ahl  
PRC President

cc: Council  
Commissions  
Media