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FIELD SAFETY STANDARD REQUIREMENTS FOR RUGBY PLAYED IN SA

Should the playing fields and grounds not conform to WORLD RUGBY and SARU safety standards, then referees will be mandated to call these games off. Referees are entitled to decide whether it is safe for a player or safe for the game to continue. The Laws of the Game provide guidelines to referees for ensuring a safe playing environment. Referees should apply a common-sense approach and not rely on Law only to ensure the safety of all players on the field.

The onus, however, is on the hosting rugby body, club, or school to provide a safe match environment that conforms to the required WORLD RUGBY standards, and the referees' roles, are purely to confirm or negate this fact, and then either start the game, have the identified problem rectified by the hosting rugby body before kick-off, or call the game off.

The following extracts from the relevant documents provide context to the above.

Extract from "WORLD RUGBY Law book":

Playing area: The field of play plus the in-goal areas. The touch lines, touch-in-goal lines and dead-ball lines are not part of the playing area.

Playing enclosure: The playing area plus a space around it, which is known as the perimeter area.

Law 1.1 and 1.2:

1.1. *The playing surface must be safe.*

1.2. *The permitted surface types are grass, sand, clay, snow or artificial turf (conforming to World Rugby Regulation 22).*

NOTE: Law 1.1 states the obvious i.e. that the surface must be safe to play on at all times!

Law 1.3:

1.3. *The dimensions of the playing area shown in the ground diagram.*

Dimensions	Field of play length	In-goal length	Width
Maximum (metres)	100	22	70
Minimum (metres)	94	6	68

NOTE: Law 1.3 allows you therefore to adjust your field width or length accordingly to meet the safety criteria required; it specifies “does not exceed”, but does not mention anything further about not being able to adjust field length or width accordingly. So if needs be, for example, you could potentially shift the touchline slightly inwards to meet the requirements.

1.3 (b). *Any variations to these dimensions must be approved by the relevant union for domestic competitions or World Rugby for international matches.*

1.3 (e). *The perimeter area should not be less than **five metres wide** where practicable.*

NOTE: In keeping with the above suggestion regarding Law 1.3 stipulates that one should try and keep these adjustments practical and minimal, and as close as possible to WORLD RUGBY Law dimensions. However, if this remains a safety risk, the field size can be adjusted more to create sufficient space away from dangerous objects or structures, especially in school and club matches.

OBJECTIONS TO THE GROUND

1.11. *Teams must inform the referee of any objections before the match starts.*

1.12. *The referee will attempt to resolve the issues and will not start a match if any part of the ground is considered to be unsafe*

NOTE: Law 1.11 and 1.12 where either one or both teams object to the safety of the ground, or the referee calls off a match if any part of the ground is considered to be unsafe or dangerous, is perfectly within the Laws of the game

Extract from “Referee’s role in controlling the game”:

When inspecting the playing enclosure, it is important to study the pitch itself and look for any obviously dangerous aspects that may be prevalent. The pitch may, for example, be too hard, i.e. stone or gravel; or there may be potholes, which could pose a risk to players’ ankles and feet.

Pitches that are immersed in water should also be investigated and the referee should decide whether a possible danger may exist, in particular when it comes to collapsed rucks, mauls and scrums. Any loose debris should also be removed from the field, especially if the debris is sharp and/or hard

Extract from “Safety in the Playing Environment”:

Advertising hoardings, poles, pylons and barriers must ideally be 5m from the touchline. If one or more of the abovementioned obstacles cannot be removed they must be suitably covered up to provide maximum protection to the players. If areas of the playing surface comprise an asphalt / tartan track it should be suitably covered as well.

The playing surface should be grass, artificial grass (conforming to WORLD RUGBY regulation 22), sand or clay. It must be firm and free of hazards, including stones and glass. In cold environments, the surface must be free from ground ice. If there is surface water sufficient to realistically raise the risk of drowning, the game should not commence. The decision to start a game where ground water is present is at the sole discretion of the referee and common sense should prevail.

In summary

Some key checks to consider include but are not limited to the following:

CHECK THE GROUND AND PLAYING SURFACES

- The ground is level and free of holes
- There are no exposed sprinkler heads, or hard plastic/metal ground spikes or flag supports
- There is no broken glass, rubbish or stones
- There are no cement barriers, shot put rings, drains, protruding steel pipes or structures, ditches, walls, buildings, fences, rails, stands, pylons, overhead lights or the like within the WORLD RUGBY stipulated *playing enclosure*
- There are no other movable objects such as dust bins, scrum machines, steel rollers, tyres, school bags, gazebos, chairs or the like within the WORLD RUGBY stipulated *playing enclosure*
- Goal posts are appropriately padded
- Marker flags will flex on impact with no sharp edges
- No advertising hoardings within the WORLD RUGBY stipulated *playing enclosure*
- Equipment is stable and will not collapse
- Spectators and vehicles’ proximity to the WORLD RUGBY stipulated *playing enclosure* must be managed appropriately