

Trial information

# **Ban on ‘deliberate heading’ in competitions and matches involving players aged u12 and below**

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## Trial of a ban on 'deliberate heading' in competitions and matches involving players aged u12 and below

### Background

There are concerns about the potential negative impact on players' short- and long-term health/welfare with regards to potential head injuries resulting from:

- deliberately heading the ball
- being accidentally hit on the head by the ball (especially unexpectedly or from short-range)
- attempts to head the ball (especially 'aerial challenges') resulting in the head making contact with:
  - another player's body (elbow, head etc...)
  - the ground
  - the goal post

These concerns are exacerbated when children are involved as their bodies, brains and motor skills are still developing, and they may not have the physiological strength or expertise to reduce potential risks. Consequently, some football authorities have already introduced restrictions on heading in practice/training for younger players and it is therefore logical to extend such restriction to matches.

Although a ban on deliberate heading may remove some risks, it might also increase others e.g. players trying to kick 'high' balls which could result in the kicker being injured (e.g. falling awkwardly) or the kicker injuring another player by kicking them in the head or upper body.

Therefore, decisions about heading bans must take into account the relative risks of heading at different ages, whether a ban results in other unintended risks and the major impact on the way football is played that would result if heading was to be banned at all levels.

Considering the importance of this matter, The IFAB has approved a trial to investigate the effects of 'deliberate heading' becoming an offence punishable by an indirect free kick\*. The trial will be conducted in competitions and matches involving players aged 12 and below, where there are restrictions on heading in practice/training.

*\*It was felt that, in the initial stages, a direct free kick (and especially a penalty for a header in the penalty area) would be too harsh for such young players.*

## Protocol

- Deliberately heading the ball is an offence punishable by an indirect free kick
- The indirect free kick is taken at the point where the ball was deliberately headed except:
  - where a player of the defending team deliberately heads the ball in their own penalty area, the indirect free kick is taken from the penalty mark
- Deliberately heading the ball is not a cautionable (yellow card) or sending-off (red card) offence unless it:
  - stops or interferes with a promising attack (yellow card)
  - denies the opposing team a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity (red card)
  - occurs often enough to be considered 'persistent misconduct' (yellow card)

## Explanation and guidance

*Deliberate header/heading:*

- a deliberate header will usually involve:
  - a player moving their head and/or body:
    - towards the ball and/or
    - into the path of the ball
- when judging if a header is 'deliberate', account should be taken of whether the player had the time/opportunity to avoid the ball - this will be influenced by:
  - the speed of the ball
  - the distance between the ball and the player when it is played by another player or rebounds from the goal post or crossbar etc.

*Location of the indirect free kick in the penalty area:*

- the indirect free kick awarded for a defending team player deliberately heading the ball inside their own penalty area is taken from the penalty mark because:
  - under the current Laws, if an offence occurs inside the goal area, the indirect free kick is taken on the goal area line which creates major problems trying to keep the defenders on the goal line between the goal posts
  - an indirect free kick taken from the penalty mark is more advantageous for the attacking team and thus partly addresses the concern of some that an indirect free kick is not a strong enough punishment

## Competition feedback

Competitions will be required to collect a variety of data and feedback for submission to The IFAB – *exact details and methodology to be determined.*