

Rule Changes 2009: Free Hit

- Anywhere on the pitch the free-hits rule applies to corners (long), sidelines, hit outs (16's) and centre passes. The free hit may now be passed to your self.
- All self-pass free hits may travel any distance, as long as there are two clear and distinct actions to taking the hit and playing the ball
- All free hits to the attack within the 5 metres from the circle must be taken just outside the 5 metre dotted line.
- At a free hit, corner or sideline ball to the attack within the 23 metre area all players must be 5 metres.
- The ball may not be played directly in to the circle from any free hit, long corner or sideline ball unless it has travelled 5 metres (travel of the ball) before being played in unless it has been deflected, or played by a defending or attacking player. Penalise as it enters the circle with the hit taken from where it was incorrectly played.
- All free hits which are passed to another player must travel 1 metre.
- At Free Hits, hit outs and sideline balls to the defence in their 23 only the opposition have to be 5 metres.

Key Areas of Note

- The new rule is designed to encourage flow in the game. It is still important to play advantage, because the time it takes to take the self pass is often slower than the advantage would be.
- Be willing to play more advantage inside the 5 metres by the circle, as taking the ball outside the 5 maybe disadvantageous as it allows the defence to set. If possible play advantage in to the circle and let the game flow.
- Encourage the taker to get the ball stationary before the free hit is played. Be aware that the taker not making any effort to stop the ball before a self-pass can unfairly take defenders out of the game.
- Penalise players who drag the ball at the self-pass as this does not show two distinct movements. The stick must leave the ball to achieve two movements.
- Inside the 23 metre area all players should retreat 5 metres including attackers. Manage this early. If a player is tracking back and inside the 5 metres, do not penalise them unless they interfere with the hit/self pass. Recognise defenders trying to be passive as they will often be inside the 5 metres and may not have time to retreat – only allow them to be there as long as they do not interfere. Encourage them to get 5 metres before even considering a tackle.
- Beware of defending players tracking back and breaking down play. This is an automatic penalty corner inside the 23 metre area, and deal as suitable with a card. Watch out for attackers manufacturing the foul by running at the defender - here a free hit to the attack is more appropriate.
- It is more important now that we make the free hit be taken “close to” (within playing distance) from where the offence occurred and more precise in the 23 metres area. Prevent players from moving it from inside to outside the 23 metres to improve their options by early management.
- Clamp down on defenders knocking away the ball after the whistle because even the smallest nudge can cause the game to slow down and stop the attacking team. Deal with this misconduct as appropriate.
- The self-pass allows players to take the free hit faster and therefore the game is much faster if the player takes the self pass then dribbles 5 metres they are allowed to pass the ball in to the circle.
- Manage the defenders taking ‘Hit outs’ early. Ensure they need to enable you to recognise the difference between a defender merely moving the ball to the 16 and actively taking a self pass.
- Get defenders 5 metres at the centre pass to avoid early problems of breaking down.