



INTERMEDIATE FOOTBALL GROUND CRITERIA

INTRODUCTION

One of the long-term objectives within the Irish FA's 5-year strategy 2017-2022 is to reinvigorate the everyday game. Specifically, within this objective is a proposal for the restructure of Intermediate Football. The restructure aims to raise standards and continue the development of the game at Intermediate level by seeking to improve the standard of football on the pitch, introducing a more standardised league format and enhancing the quality of facilities/spectator experience.

The following ground criteria has been approved by both the IFA Intermediate Committee and the IFA Board. The current version of the ground criteria (October 2017) will remain in effect for the next 2 seasons (2019-20 and 2020-21) but clubs will need to be working during that period to meet this enhanced ground criteria with any final inspections to confirm compliance to take place by not later than January 2021, in advance of the implementation of the revised structure for Intermediate Football in Northern Ireland to come into effect from season 2021-22.



PITCH AND PLAYING SURFACE

The field of play must be rectangular and the length of the touch line must be greater than the length of the goal line.

The pitch must be a minimum of 90m in length with a minimum width of 55m.

With the exception of football goals, no other goals or sports posts are permitted to be permanently fixed within the ground perimeter. Any small sided or portable goals must be stored outside the pitch perimeter barrier in an area which does not affect spectator access, flow or egress.

The pitch must be level and have a good playing surface with only 11-a side football markings in white permitted.

ARTIFICIAL PITCHES

Any artificial grass pitch must comply at all times with FIFA Quality standards or a comparable testing standard that certifies the pitch for football in terms of playing performance, safety, durability and quality assurance.

A valid, current field test certificate (pass) must be on file with the Irish Football Association at all times.

Any artificial grass pitch must be green in colour with only 11-a side football markings in white permitted. No lines other than football ones, as defined in the IFAB Laws of the Game, may be visible on the field of play.

FOOTBALL GROUND BOUNDARY AND ENVIRONS

A boundary wall and/or fence and/or natural boundary must surround the football ground. The boundary wall and/or fence must be permanent, secure and of sound construction, with a recommended minimum height of 2m (measured from the exterior of the perimeter) and designed to obscure viewing into the ground from publicly accessible areas.

Where any side of the ground is bounded by private land/ property, the fixed boundary of that private land/ property may be acceptable as the boundary of the ground. Any such natural boundary must provide an adequate safeguard that the football ground is ordinarily not accessible for entry to or viewing into the ground by the public via that boundary.

Where a gate is used to form part of the permanent football ground boundary, it must be locked and remain unopened for at least 60 minutes prior to kick off, the duration of the match and 30 minutes following the completion of the match. The exceptions to this are clearly identified entry points to the spectator viewing areas and the entry point for players/ officials.

The football ground boundary (or part thereof) may be formed by the facilities enclosed within the ground.

FOOTBALL GROUND BOUNDARY AND ENVIRONS (CONTINUED...)

The boundary wall and/or fence and/or natural boundary must be located within the club environs of the field of play i.e. the football ground boundary must not surround/ enclose areas, buildings or facilities which are non-football/ non-club facilities that would ordinarily not be present within a stand-alone football club facility.

Shared multi-pitch/ multi-team/ multi-changing room/ multi-user facilities may only be considered for Intermediate football if:

- the two Intermediate teams (home and visiting team), club and match officials have exclusive access to and exclusive use of the entire dressing room complex for at least 60 minutes prior to kick off, the duration of the match and 30 minutes following the completion of the match
- OR**
- a dedicated external entrance to/ exit from the Intermediate football dressing room area exists exclusively for the two Intermediate teams (home and visiting team), club and match officials and permanent internal segregation arrangements are in place to separate from other teams or facility users.

Appropriate signage must be in place to clearly identify the dedicated external entrance to the dressing room complex be used by the two Intermediate teams (home and visiting team), club and match officials and the areas which are to be accessible by only the two Intermediate teams (home and visiting team), club and match officials.

FOOTBALL GROUND BOUNDARY AND ENVIRONS (CONTINUED...)

For the avoidance of doubt, a moveable partition, partial barrier or match day club personnel are not considered appropriate means of internal segregation or appropriate means of forming the football ground boundary.

A permanent pitch perimeter barrier must be put in place to enclose the field of play and must be between 0.8 and 1.2m in height. Such barriers are not required in front of spectator seating areas. An appropriate number of access gates (opening onto the playing area) must be in place at regular intervals in the pitch perimeter barrier.

It must be possible for spectators to view the match from at least the full length of two sides of the playing area, excluding any sterile area where spectator access may be prohibited. Measures must be in place to provide access to all spectator viewing areas without spectators having to enter the field of play. Where any side is designated as spectator-free, measures must be in place to ensure there is no unauthorised access. The minimum width of spectator passageways on each available side of the pitch is 1.1m for existing constructions or 1.2m for new constructions.

It is recommended that spectator standing areas should be accommodated by hard-standing such as tarmac, concrete or concrete paving.

RUN OFF AREAS AND DUGOUTS

It is recommended that a minimum distance of 2.25m, of natural grass or artificial grass, must be in place between the field of play touchlines to any fixed point (e.g. pitch perimeter fence/wall or dugout). The run off areas must be level and free from surface depressions, excessive undulations or any obstructions (e.g. raised manholes or raised sprinklers/ hydrants).

A covered dugout for each team must be provided to accommodate a minimum of eight persons. Where bench seating is utilised, each person should be allocated a minimum of 50cm of linear space. A technical area must be clearly marked.

Where a dugout is incorporated into a stand, a permanent infilled barrier must be in place to ensure that players, management and other team staff in the dugout are securely separated from spectators in the stand.

ACCESS TO FOOTBALL GROUND

Clubs must provide a recognised entrance(s) and demonstrate their ability to collect gate receipts.

The club must provide written confirmation (via a local authority, if relevant) that it has sole control of the ground and its environs on match days and that only a referee's inspection can be used to declare the pitch unplayable.

All facilities (including playing facilities and changing rooms) must be available to both competing clubs and referees on match days at least 60 minutes prior to kick-off and 30 minutes following the completion of the match.

ACCESS TO FOOTBALL GROUND (CONTINUED.....)

For a ground that has more than one pitch located within the permanent defined football ground boundary, it is mandatory when the Intermediate match is being played that the teams and officials shall have exclusive use of the playing facilities i.e. no other match or pitch activity can take place whilst an Intermediate match is being played. This will preclude the hosting of any other matches or pitch activities during the three-hour time period identified above.

The above paragraph should be read in conjunction with the section titled football ground boundary and environs.

EXITING GROUND

For existing constructions, the minimum exit route width is 1.1m.

For new constructions, the minimum exit route width is 1.2m.

In the event of an incident which renders the usual exit route unusable, spectators should be able to use an alternative exit route or routes.

ACCESS TO PITCH FOR PLAYERS AND OFFICIALS

A permanent barrier with a minimum height of 1.2m must be in place to safeguard the access from the changing room building to the field of play for players and officials. For the avoidance of doubt, temporary arrangements put in place on match days such as crowd control barriers will not satisfy this requirement.

This is a sterile area for players and officials only and must be secured for the 60 minutes prior to kick-off, the halftime interval and after the match until all players and officials have reached the changing rooms.

Spectators or other users must not view the match from this area.

Spectators or other users must not pass through the sterile area unless outside of the times detailed above.

CHANGING ROOM ACCOMMODATION

The changing facilities for players and officials must be within the boundary of the football ground. The distance to the field of play from exiting the dressing room building must be no more than 55m.

There must be separate changing rooms for both teams, each with a minimum surface area for changing of 15sqm, each equipped with usable team/ coaching staff seating and clothes hanging facilities.

Showering facilities must be integral to each dressing room and there must be a minimum of 4 working showerheads for each team.

There must be adequate toilet facilities in the changing room complex.

Showering/ toilet facilities within the changing room will not be considered for the purposes of calculating the minimum surface area for changing.

The referee must have a separate changing room with a minimum surface area of 3sqm. There must be a shower within the room. The room must be used solely as a referee dressing room.

Dressing rooms for players and officials must have adequate heating, be ventilated to outside air, be capable of being secured and be clean and tidy.



FIRST AID

A first aid kit and stretcher must be available at all times.

It is also recommended that a defibrillator is available within the football ground.

FOOTBALL GROUND CAPACITY & SPECTATOR ACCOMMODATION

The football ground must have as a minimum permanent covered accommodation (covered seating/ covered terracing/ covered hard standing) for 50 persons.

All spectator accommodation (covered seating/ covered terracing/ uncovered terracing/ covered hard standing/ uncovered hard standing) must be of sound construction of timber/ steel/ brick/ concrete/ tarmac or any combination of these materials. All spectator accommodation must be clean, functional and in good condition and should at all times afford a clear view of the pitch.

Physical alterations to existing spectator accommodation should, where possible, follow the Northern Ireland (Red) Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds

NEW SPECTATOR ACCOMMODATION – AT ALL GROUNDS, CERTIFICATED OR OTHERWISE

Any NEW spectator accommodations (i.e. seated stands or standing terrace stands, permanent or otherwise) should be constructed in line with the Northern Ireland (Red) Guide to Safety at Sports Grounds. Whilst this guidance has no statutory force, it ensures best practice.

Such accommodation must at all times hold the necessary planning permission, building control approval and satisfy any other relevant legislation.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS/ EXCEPTION REQUEST

The above are the minimum requirements and are subject to change in line with Intermediate football infrastructure requirements. Clubs should consult the Irish Football Association and the IFA Intermediate Cup Committee when undertaking ground improvements and modifications to any facilities located within the ground.

Where an approved venue's existing physical infrastructure may temporarily not meet all of the criteria detailed above due to ground improvements, modifications or any other reason outside the control of the venue owner/ user, an application may be made in writing for an exception request.

Any exception request can only ordinarily be granted on the basis that matches can continue to be played at the approved venue. In the event that this is not possible, then another approved venue must be used.

MINIMUM REQUIREMENTS/ EXCEPTION REQUEST (CONTINUED...)

This application from the venue owner/ user should be directed to the Chief Executive of the Irish Football Association and should detail the following:

1. The reason for the exception request
2. The duration which the deviation is required (must be no longer than 6 months)
3. The alternative arrangements to be proposed
4. All other relevant information.

For the avoidance of doubt an exception request will not be considered to facilitate promotion.

SPOT CHECKS

The Irish Football Association and/or its appointees reserve the right to conduct spot-checks on any match day in order to ensure that the minimum mandatory Intermediate football infrastructure requirements (as defined in this document) are being fully implemented.

Non-observance of the minimum mandatory Intermediate football infrastructure requirements will result in the following sanctions:

- First instance - formal written warning and fine of £250.
- Second instance within the same 12 month period – expulsion of club from Intermediate football.

Should there be a further instance of non-observance of the minimum mandatory Intermediate football infrastructure requirements outside of this 12 month period, it shall be treated as a first instance breach.

DISCLAIMER/ EXCLUSION OF IFA LIABILITY

For the avoidance of doubt, the scope of the Joint Ground Criteria is restricted to detailing the physical infrastructure and technical specification required, from a football perspective, to be in place at the respective levels of football identified. It remains entirely the full and sole responsibility of the club and/or venue owner to ensure that their facilities meet all relevant statutory, regulatory and/or common law standards of health and safety and that appropriate safety confirmations are in place at all times for all facilities in use on a match day. It is further recommended that clubs/venue owners arrange regular safety reviews conducted by independent persons with the appropriate expertise.

Clubs/venue owners should note that the Joint Ground Criteria should not in any circumstances be construed as overriding or replacing clubs/venue owners legal, regulatory and/or other obligations, as set out in, inter alia, the Safety at Sports Grounds (NI) Order 2006, the stadium General Safety Certificate or the club's contingency plans. Except in cases where by law liability cannot be excluded or limited, the Irish Football Association excludes all liability in respect of the contents of the Joint Ground Criteria, and the use of same, howsoever arising and whether in contract, tort, or otherwise.