

J.LEAGUE FOOTBALL GUIDELINES 2026/27



J.LEAGUE

FOOTBALL GUIDELINES 2026/27

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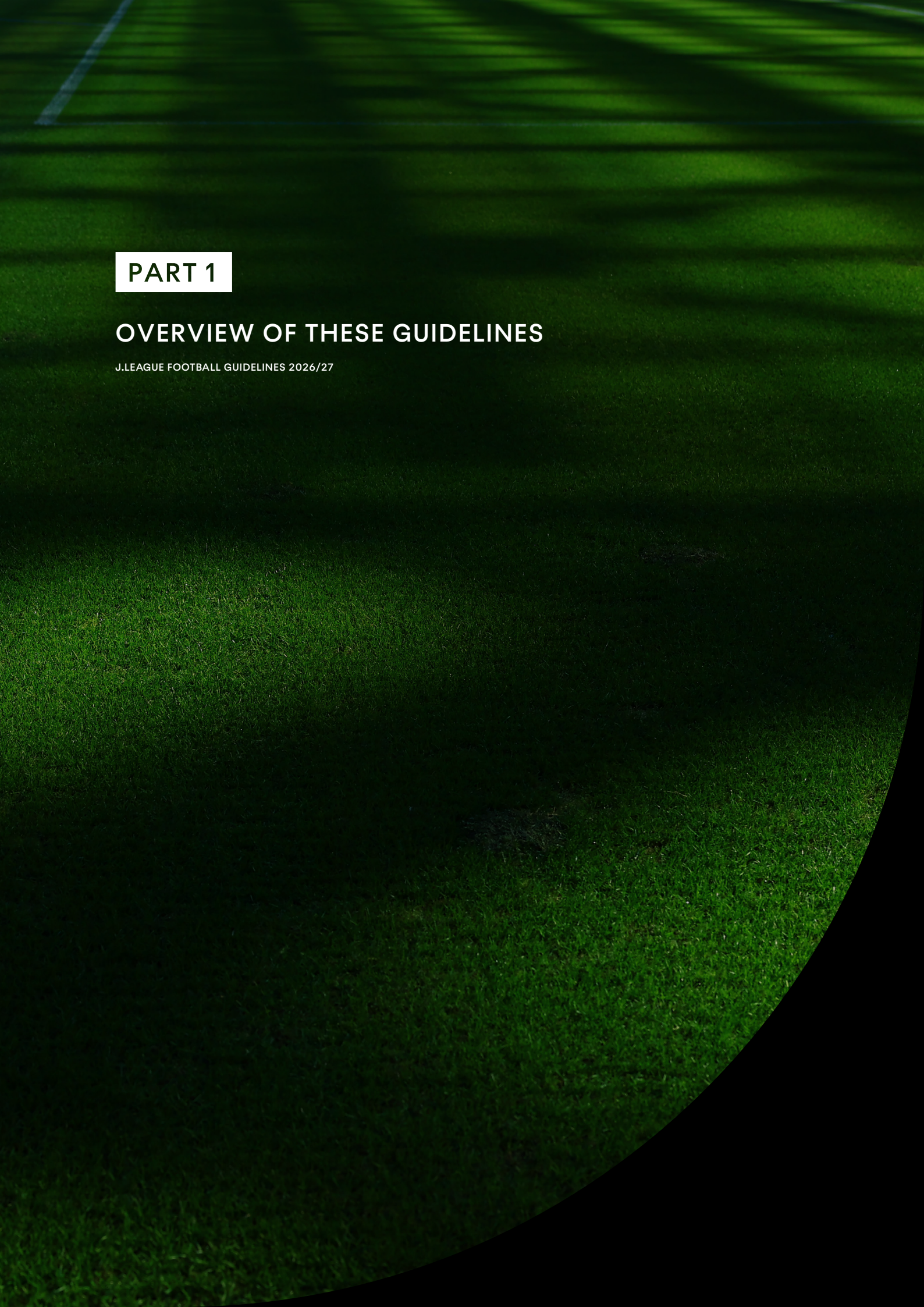
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PART 1

OVERVIEW OF THESE GUIDELINES

J.LEAGUE FOOTBALL GUIDELINES 2026/27



The role of these Guidelines ①

Football has a set of Laws of the Game that applies worldwide, established by The International Football Association Board (IFAB).

The Laws of the Game

▶▶▶ <https://www.theifab.com/laws-of-the-game-documents/?language=en&year=2026%2F27>

The Laws of the Game cannot address every situation that may arise.

IFAB asks referees to make their decisions in accordance with the spirit of the game and of the Laws.

“The philosophy and spirit of the Laws” in the Laws of the Game

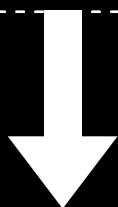
▶▶▶ <https://www.theifab.com/laws/latest/about-the-laws/>

These Guidelines set out the J.LEAGUE’s way of thinking and the direction we are aiming for in relation to matters that the Laws of the Game do not cover.



The role of these Guidelines ②

What actually happens on
and around the field of play



Universal Guidelines

Laws of the
Game

The rules that apply worldwide,
established by IFAB

J.LEAGUE's own Guidelines

J.LEAGUE
FOOTBALL
GUIDELINES
2026/27

The J.LEAGUE's own statement
of its way of thinking and the
direction it is aiming for



How these Guidelines were formulated ①

The Guidelines were formulated together with, and through discussion with, the stakeholders involved on and around the field of play in the J.LEAGUE



Purpose of the Guidelines ①

For the stakeholders involved to define together “the J.LEAGUE’s way of thinking and the direction we are aiming for” on and around the field of play, and to work towards it together.

Purpose of the Guidelines ②

For all the football family, including fans and supporters, to understand “the J.LEAGUE’s way of thinking and the direction we are aiming for” on and around the field of play.

This 2026/27 season edition is the first edition to be published.
We will publish an updated edition once a year going forward, while drawing on the views of everyone in the football family.



How these Guidelines were formulated ②



Vice Chairman, Japan Pro-Footballers Association (JPFA) / Kashiwa Reysol

SACHIRO TOSHIMA

Football does not happen because of players alone. It takes managers and coaches, referees, club staff and many others besides. When everyone involved shares the same ambition and the same perspective, better matches follow. These Football Guidelines are an important set of guiding principles that serve as a common language for producing better matches. Sharing a common picture of what football should be and what we are aiming for creates an environment in which every player can challenge themselves with confidence, and I believe that will raise the quality of matches and the value of fair play still further. We, the JPFA, will also make sure we understand the thinking behind these Guidelines, and, by building up practical experience alongside our fellow players, we will help the J.LEAGUE develop into an even more attractive league.



Vice Chairman, JPFA / FC Machida Zelvia

YUTA NAKAYAMA

The appeal of football lies in players giving everything they have in pursuit of victory until the very end, and in the way their performances move so many people. To make that appeal even greater, it is critical that the whole league share a common sense of where we should be heading. These Football Guidelines are guiding principles that will help every player make better decisions and produce better play, and I believe they will be a major step towards raising the value of the J.LEAGUE as a whole. We as players will also embody these Guidelines in our day-to-day play, and we will keep working to deliver higher-quality, more appealing football to our fans and supporters. And in doing so, we will help drive the further development of Japanese football.



Chairperson of the Referees Committee, Japan Football Association (JFA)

KENJI OGIYA

Taking part in the process of putting the football the J.LEAGUE aims for into words as these Football Guidelines has been deeply meaningful to me. Referees are there to apply the Laws of the Game, but our role is not simply to judge fouls. Our mission is to work in accordance with the spirit of the Laws, ensuring that matches are fair and that players are safe, while cultivating an environment in which players can bring out their skill and creativity to the full. The direction of “the football the J.LEAGUE aims for” set out in these Guidelines is an important set of guiding principles for referees too. As well as applying the Laws accurately, we will work to understand the thinking behind them and, valuing the flow of the match and the continuity of play, we will aim to create an environment in which players and teams can challenge themselves. We are not perfect. But we will keep learning, keep improving and never lose our commitment to doing our best, and in that way we will support attractive football.



How these Guidelines were formulated ②



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Chairman, JPFA

MAYA YOSHIDA

I find it deeply significant that Football Guidelines are being established in the J.LEAGUE from the 2026/27 season. These Guidelines are common guiding principles through which players, managers and coaches, referees and everyone else involved, including the clubs, can share the direction of the football the J.LEAGUE aims for. When we as players understand that philosophy and put it into practice on our own initiative, I believe it will raise the quality of matches still further and help us build a more attractive J.LEAGUE. To compete with the best in the world, it is important to share not just a level of play but a way of thinking about football and a set of values. I hope these Guidelines will drive the growth of Japan's football as a whole and become the cornerstone of building a league that can stand proudly before the world.



President, JFA

TSUNEYASU MIYAMOTO

The J.LEAGUE is an important stage. It reflects where Japan's football stands today and gives us the foothold from which to open up its future. The intensity of play built up in league matches week in, week out, the ability to make split-second decisions, matches that are fair and full of appeal, and a rock-solid football environment rooted in local communities—all of this becomes the unshakeable underlying strength of Japanese football.

If the Japan national team is to stand on equal terms with the world's strongest sides and achieve our goal of winning the FIFA World Cup, it is essential that the J.LEAGUE keeps evolving into a league of the world's top level.

As our players identified as a challenge at past tournaments and again at the FIFA World Cup 2026, it is important that we sharpen the "individual quality" that players can display in tough matches. That requires raising the quality of every element that supports Japan's football—the league, the clubs, the coaches, the referees, the environment and the culture. In other words, we must raise the overall strength of football across the country.

These Guidelines are guiding principles for sharing the direction of the football J.LEAGUE aims for with everyone involved, and for raising the quality of every individual piece of play and every decision on the field of play. Valuing the spirit of respect that encourages players to challenge themselves and protects the fairness and safety of the match, let us have the league, the clubs, the players, the coaches, the referees, the staff and the JFA share the same ambition and move forward together as one.

We will pursue the world's top standards while refining still further a style of football that is distinctively Japanese and that captivates those who watch it. We want to take that challenge forward together with everyone involved in the J.LEAGUE, and to build a Japanese football that stands preeminent in the world.



Chairman, Japan Professional Football League (J.LEAGUE)

YOSHIKAZU NONOMURA

If the J.LEAGUE is to grow further from here, it is important that we make clear what kind of football we are aiming for and that everyone involved in the league shares that way of thinking. These Football Guidelines do not simply indicate a direction of play. They are common guiding principles that allow players, managers and coaches, referees and clubs each to raise the value of the J.LEAGUE from their own position. This is the first edition, and we will refine the content each year in light of the views of those involved. By carrying these Guidelines through into our matches and our work day by day, and by increasing the amount of football on the field of play that is higher in quality and that moves those who watch it, we want to grow the J.LEAGUE into a league that can stand proudly before the world.

PART 2

THE FOOTBALL J.LEAGUE AIMS FOR, AND THE POLICIES FOR MAKING IT A REALITY

J.LEAGUE FOOTBALL GUIDELINES 2026/27





Our Mission and vision for the next 10 years

OUR MISSION

To raise the level of Japanese football and promote the diffusion of the game through the medium of professional football.

To foster the development of Japan's sporting culture, and to assist in the healthy mental and physical growth of Japanese people.

To contribute to international friendship and exchange.

OUR VISION FOR THE NEXT 10 YEARS

*Set in 2023, embodying what we aim to be in 2033

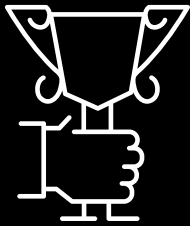
J.LEAGUE that can win titles in Asia and take on the world

Japan National Team players from European League clubs and J.LEAGUE clubs

Boost total J.LEAGUE sales 1.5 to 2-fold

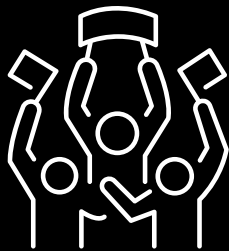


The football J.LEAGUE aims for



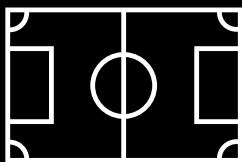
FOOTBALL OF THE WORLD'S TOP LEVEL

To become a league that plays football of the same level as the current top level, namely Europe's five major leagues and the UEFA Champions League.



FOOTBALL THAT CAPTIVATES THOSE WHO WATCH IT

As entertainment delivered by professional players, to aim for football that captivates the fans and supporters watching in the stadium and on television and the internet.



FIELD OF PLAY WITH A DISTINCTIVE J.LEAGUE CHARACTER

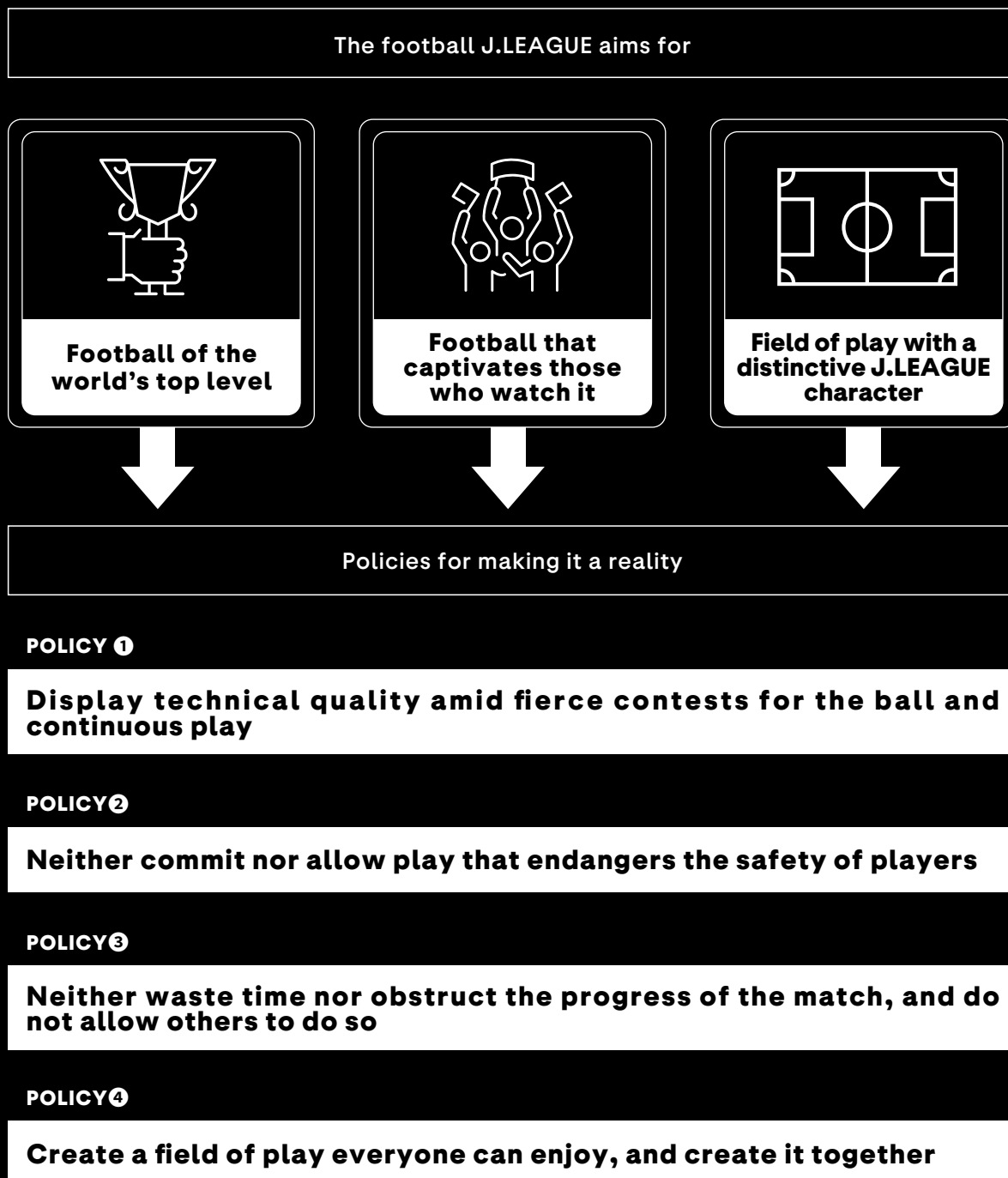
Passion and respect can go hand in hand. Amid the passion, to act, speak and conduct ourselves with respect and gratitude towards everyone involved: team-mates, opponents, staff, fans and supporters, and all those who support us.



PART 2

THE FOOTBALL J.LEAGUE AIMS FOR, AND THE POLICIES FOR MAKING IT A REALITY

The policies for making it a reality





The policies for making it a reality

POLICY ①

Display technical quality amid fierce contests for the ball and continuous play

All the stakeholders involved aim together for football of the world's top level.



- Play of the world's top level
- Intensity and strength of contact at the world's top level
- Play that generates continuity and a quick tempo, and the technique displayed within it
- Playing on until the whistle blows



- Having the courage to let play continue rather than stopping the match excessively
- Intensity and strength of contact at the world's top level
- Distinguishing between fair play and dangerous or malicious play
- Applying decisions consistently, so that intense matches can be properly controlled

The policies for making it a reality

POLICY ②

Neither commit nor allow play that endangers the safety of players

In the play of the world's top level and intensity, draw a clear distinction between legal contact and play that endangers the safety of players.



- Not engaging in dangerous or malicious play that injures an opponent
Factors to consider: timing / part of the body / force / direction
- Not deceiving the referee, so that the referee can judge dangerous situations appropriately



- Identifying dangerous or malicious play amid fiercely contested exchanges
- Dealing strictly with dangerous or malicious play
- Stopping the match without hesitation in order to protect the safety of players



The policies for making it a reality

POLICY ③

Neither waste time nor obstruct the progress of the match, and do not allow others to do so

From the standpoint of both the standard and the appeal of the football, aim to keep the match moving appropriately and to increase actual playing time.



- Reasonable communication with the referee is permitted, but persistent dissent is not
- Leaving the field of play when in physical pain
When able to continue playing, getting back up promptly
- Not taking excessive time over set plays
- Making substitutions promptly



- Communicating appropriately with players so that the match can proceed smoothly
- Taking a firm approach when players or staff obstruct the progress of the match



- Not engaging in excessive dissent that obstructs the progress of the match

The policies for making it a reality

POLICY 4

Create a field of play everyone can enjoy, and create it together

**“Generating passion” and “respect” can go hand in hand.
Aim for a field of play free of discrimination and abusive language.
Show respect in every action, every word and every aspect of
conduct.
Make it a place that would cause no embarrassment if children
saw or heard it.**



- Not engaging in any action, language or conduct that lacks respect towards opposing players, staff or referees

*This applies not only on the field of play but also around the field of play (the technical area and the warm-up area) and in dealings with media outlets, on social media and elsewhere



- Taking a firm approach to any action, language or conduct that lacks respect



- Not engaging in any action, language or conduct that lacks respect towards opposing players, staff or referees

*This applies not only on the field of play but also around the field of play (the technical area and the warm-up area) and in dealings with media outlets, on social media and elsewhere

- Observing the rules for the areas around the field of play (the technical area, the warm-up area and so on)



PART 3

KEY POINTS OF THE LAWS OF THE GAME

J.LEAGUE FOOTBALL GUIDELINES 2026/27



PART 3

KEY POINTS OF THE LAWS OF THE GAME

Key revisions to the Laws of the Game for the 2026/27 season

NEW LAWS FROM THE 2026/27 SEASON

The main Law changes approved by the IFAB in order to improve fairness, prevent time-wasting and promote a smooth tempo to the match are as follows.

1 1 RED CARD FOR COVERING THE MOUTH



A player who deliberately covers their mouth with a hand, an arm or their shirt when communicating with an opponent in a provocative or inflammatory situation may now be sent off. The aim is to prevent discriminatory or insulting remarks from going undetected by the referee.

2 LEAVING THE FIELD OF PLAY IN PROTEST



A player who leaves the field of play of their own accord in protest at a decision of the referee will now be sent off. Team officials who instruct or encourage players to act in this way are also liable to be punished. If a whole team abandons the match, the match will be forfeited by that team.

3 FIVE-SECOND COUNTDOWN AT THROW-INS



At a throw-in, the referee will count down five seconds visually. If the time limit is exceeded, the throw-in is awarded to the opposing team.

4 FIVE-SECOND COUNTDOWN AT GOAL KICKS



Goalkeepers and teams that waste time at goal kicks will now face a strict sanction. If the kick has not been taken by the end of the countdown, a corner kick is awarded to the opposing team instead.

5 NEW TEN-SECOND SUBSTITUTION RULE



A player being substituted must be off the field of play within ten seconds of the substitution board being shown. If a player deliberately delays the substitution, the substitute may not enter the field of play until the first stoppage after one minute has elapsed. During that period, the team will temporarily play with fewer players.

6 COMPULSORY OFF-FIELD TREATMENT



Barring certain exceptions, a player whose actual or suspected injury causes play to be stopped, or who is treated on the field of play by the medical staff, may not re-enter the field of play until at least one minute has elapsed after play has restarted. In the case of a head injury or bleeding, however, the player may return without waiting for the minute to elapse, provided that it has been confirmed to be safe to do so. The aim of this new rule is to curb "tactical time-wasting," in which a player feigns injury to disrupt the tempo of the match.

7 WIDER SCOPE FOR VAR INTERVENTION



The scope for VAR intervention has been widened, and the VAR may now review the following incidents, which were previously outside its scope:

- an incorrect red card resulting from a clearly wrong second yellow card
- mistaken identity, where the wrong player is cautioned or sent off
- the correction of a corner kick that has been incorrectly awarded

8 RESTRICTIONS DURING A STOPPAGE FOR AN INJURED GOALKEEPER



While a goalkeeper is receiving treatment, other players will now be prohibited from gathering around the manager or the coaches to hold tactical discussions. The aim is to prevent an unofficial "time-out" from being created during the match.

These changes reflect the efforts of the football world to increase actual playing time, improve player discipline and create a game that is faster, fairer and more transparent.

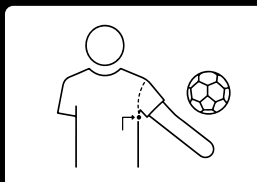


PART 3

KEY POINTS OF THE LAWS OF THE GAME

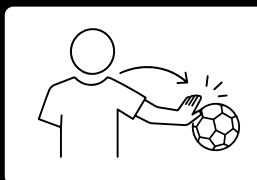
Points you should know

HANDBALL



For the purposes of determining handball offences, the upper boundary of the arm is in line with the bottom of the armpit.

Not every touch of a player's hand/arm with the ball is an offence. It is an offence if a player:

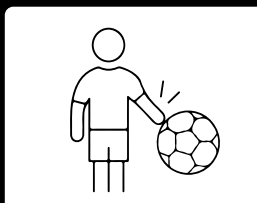


Deliberately touches the ball with their hand/arm, for example by moving the hand/arm towards the ball.



Touches the ball with their hand/arm when it has made their body unnaturally bigger.

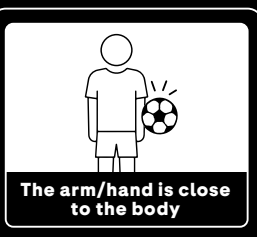
A player is considered to have made their body unnaturally bigger when the position of their hand/arm is not a consequence of, or justifiable by, the player's body movement for that specific situation. When a player's hand/arm is in such a position, they take a risk of their hand/arm being hit by the ball and being penalised.



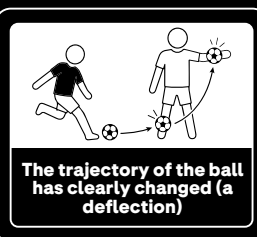
Scores in the opponents' goal:

- directly from their hand/arm, even if accidental, including by the goalkeeper
- immediately after the ball has touched their hand/arm, even if accidental

● Not a handball offence



The arm/hand is close to the body



The trajectory of the ball has clearly changed (a deflection)



The ball was kicked by a team-mate



The ball was played by the player themselves

J.LEAGUE FOOTBALL GUIDELINES 2026/27

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