



AFL Switzerland Rules Directive 2026

Key Swiss variations and match-day interpretations based on AFL Europe 2024

1. Status of this directive and rule hierarchy

This directive is a practical match-day guide for AFL Switzerland players, coaches, umpires and officials. It does not replace a full lawbook.

AFL Switzerland domestic matches are governed first by the AFL Switzerland Rules & Regulations, AFL Switzerland published amendments, and this 2026 directive.

Where AFL Switzerland materials are silent, AFL Switzerland should use the AFL Europe 2024 Rules & Regulations as the primary 9-a-side reference, adapted where necessary for Swiss domestic league conditions.

Where the AFL Europe 2024 Rules & Regulations are silent, the Laws of Australian Football apply, except where expressly varied by AFL Switzerland.

AFL rule changes introduced after the AFL Europe 2024 Rules & Regulations do not automatically apply in Switzerland unless adopted by AFL Switzerland. For 2026, only the newer AFL interpretations listed in this directive should be treated as Swiss match-day guidance.

2. One-page summary

| Area | AFL Switzerland 2026 position | Match-day note |
|--------------------------|--|---|
| Base reference | AFL Switzerland rules and this directive apply first. AFL Europe 2024 is the main 9-a-side reference where Swiss rules are silent. | Do not rely on AFL Europe 2021 as the main reference. |
| Standard format | 9-a-side unless both teams and the umpire agree otherwise. | Minimum and maximum player rules remain subject to Swiss domestic rules. |
| Playing surface | Use AFL Europe 2024 guidance where practical: 90-120m long and 70-90m wide. | Venue variations are permitted if safe and agreed by the umpire. |
| Boundary | No boundary throw-ins in ordinary 9-a-side without boundary umpires. | Field umpire restarts with a ball-up 5m in from where the ball crossed, unless a free kick applies. |
| Deliberate out of bounds | Applies in the AFL Europe 9-a-side format. | Genuine skill error means ball-up, not a free kick. |
| Penalties | All 50m penalties are reduced to 25m. | Player must wait until the umpire has advanced the mark and signalled before playing on. |
| Kick-ins | No kick to self required after a behind. | The mark is 5m from the centre of the kick-off line. |
| Timing | Swiss match durations apply as running time. | Clock stops only if the field umpire specifically stops time. |
| Concussion | Suspected concussion means no return that match day. | Player safety overrides match convenience. |
| Cards | Yellow card: 10 minutes, replacement allowed. Red card: remainder of match, no replacement. | Serious incidents must be reported for review. |

3. AFL 2026 changes: Swiss application

The AFL has introduced changes for the 2026 AFL season, including last disposal out of bounds, centre ball-up contest rules, aligned kick-in timing, ruck nominations, shrugging in the tackle, stronger stand rule enforcement and removal of the goalsquare starting-position requirement. These do not automatically override the AFL Europe 9-a-side framework or the Swiss domestic rules.

| AFL 2026 item | Swiss position | Reason |
|------------------------------|-------------------------------|---|
| Last disposal out of bounds | Not adopted for 2026. | Use AFL Europe 2024 deliberate out of bounds, with ball-up for genuine skill error. |
| Centre ball-up contest laws | Adopted only as guidance. | Players must not set up behind or interfere with the field umpire. |
| Ruck nominations | Use where needed. | If unclear, each team nominates one ruck. The umpire should not allow delays. |
| Shrugging in the tackle | Adopted as umpiring guidance. | A player who contributes to high contact should not automatically be rewarded. |
| Stand rule enforcement | Adopted in 9-a-side format. | A player in the protected area must stand if directed or leave immediately. |
| Aligned kick-in timing | Adopted in principle. | Umpires should encourage prompt restarts after behinds. |
| Goalsquare starting position | Not applicable. | Swiss 9-a-side uses centre and arc starting positions, not an AFL goalsquare requirement. |

4. Playing surface, posts and safety

- Where practical, AFL Switzerland 9-a-side matches should use the AFL Europe playing surface guidance: a rounded-rectangle playing surface of approximately 90-120m in length and 70-90m in width.
- The preferred markings are a 25m centre square, 3m centre circle, 10m outer circle, 10m interchange area, goal squares, goal and behind lines, and 30m arcs.
- Local variations are permitted where required by venue conditions, provided the field umpire considers the playing surface safe and suitable.
- Where existing rugby or football goals are used, the field umpire should confirm before the match how goals and behinds will be judged.
- Padding should be used on permanent goal and behind posts where reasonably available.
- The host club is responsible for providing a safe playing surface and surrounding area. Sharp objects, glass, metal objects, holes and other hazards must be removed or made safe before play starts.
- Spectators, benches and equipment should be kept safely back from the boundary. If the umpire considers the ground unsafe, the match must not start or continue until the issue is resolved.

5. Match format, player numbers and team sheets

- The standard AFL Switzerland competition format is 9-a-side unless both teams and the umpire agree otherwise before the match.
- AFL Switzerland varies the AFL Europe tournament squad-size rules for domestic league matches. For Seniors matches, the maximum permitted squad remains 14 players, plus up to two medical substitutes, unless otherwise determined by AFL Switzerland.
- The medical substitutes must be listed on the team sheet before the match and may replace a player who, due to serious injury or illness, is unable to continue.
- Once replaced by the medical substitute, the replaced player may not take any further part in that match.
- All players, including top-up players and medical substitutes, must be listed on the team sheet before the match starts.

6. Match timing

- Seniors matches are played in two halves of 20 minutes. Half-time breaks are six minutes.
- Reserves matches are played in four quarters of 15 minutes. Quarter-time breaks are five minutes and half-time is 10 minutes.
- Women's matches are played in four quarters of 10 minutes. Quarter-time breaks are five minutes and half-time is five to 10 minutes.
- These durations are running time. The clock does not stop for scores, out of bounds, ball-ups or ordinary stoppages unless the field umpire specifically stops time.
- The field umpire may stop time for serious injury, suspected concussion, a player count, a report, loss of the football, unsafe conditions, or another exceptional delay that would make continued running time unfair or unsafe.

7. Boundary and out of bounds

- In standard 9-a-side matches without boundary umpires, there are no boundary throw-ins. When the ball is out of bounds, the field umpire restarts play with a ball-up five metres in from the point where the ball crossed the boundary.
- Deliberate out of bounds applies in the AFL Europe 9-a-side format. A free kick should be awarded where a player kicks the football out on the full, fails to demonstrate sufficient intent to keep the football in play, or where the player's primary purpose was to take the football out of bounds.
- Where the field umpire considers that the ball went out of bounds due to a genuine skill error, play restarts with a ball-up five metres in from where the ball crossed the boundary.
- Players must immediately hand the ball to the field umpire once it is out of bounds. Failure to do so may result in a free kick.
- The AFL 2026 last disposal rule is not adopted in AFL Switzerland for 2026 unless separately notified.

8. Centre starts and restarts after a goal

- At the start of each quarter and after each goal, play restarts with a centre ball-up.
- Three players from each team are permitted in each area defined by the boundary line and the 30m arcs.
- Three players from each team are permitted in the centre square. Of those three, one player from each team is the ruck and starts within the 10m circle in their defensive half.
- Where a team has fewer than nine players on the playing surface, these numbers may be reduced but not exceeded.
- Players must not set up behind the field umpire at a centre ball-up. Where there is uncertainty about the designated ruck, each team must nominate one ruck to the field umpire.

9. Kick-ins after a behind

- A player bringing the ball back into play after a behind does not need to kick the ball to themselves before playing on from the goal square.
- The same football used to score the behind should be used for the kick-in unless the field umpire instructs otherwise.
- For Swiss 9-a-side matches, the mark is set five metres from the centre of the kick-off line towards the centre of the playing surface.
- Players from the attacking team must not delay the kick-in, block the player bringing the ball back into play, or remain in the protected area without making every effort to leave.

10. Marks and free kicks deep in defence

- Where a defending player takes a mark or is awarded a free kick within nine metres of their own goal, the player on the mark is brought in line with the top of the goal square.
- If the defending player crosses the goal line or behind line after playing on, they must re-enter the playing surface through the same line and in one direction.

11. Protected area and stand rule

- The protected area after a mark or free kick is a practical five-metre corridor around the mark and the player with the football, in line with the AFL Europe 9-a-side framework.
- A player who is within the protected area when a mark or free kick is paid must either immediately exit the area or, if directed by the umpire, stand.
- Once told to stand, the player may not move off the mark, jump sideways, retreat out of the area, delay the player with the ball, or otherwise impede play until play on is called or the ball is disposed of.
- A breach should result in a 25-metre penalty.

12. 25-metre penalties

- All 50-metre penalties are reduced to 25 metres in AFL Switzerland.
- A 25-metre penalty may be imposed for delaying play, moving off the mark, entering or failing to leave the protected area, failing to return the ball directly, disputing an umpire decision, misconduct, or any other conduct for which a free kick would ordinarily be awarded after a mark or free kick.
- When a 25-metre penalty is awarded, the player with the football must wait until the field umpire has advanced the mark and signalled play to recommence. The player may not play on while the mark is being advanced.
- If the opposition delays or impedes the player while the mark is being advanced, a further 25-metre penalty may be imposed.

13. Holding the ball, prior opportunity and shrugging

- The AFL Europe holding-the-ball framework applies, subject to Swiss match-day interpretations in this directive.
- A ruck who takes possession directly while contesting a ball-up or boundary restart is not automatically treated as having had prior opportunity merely because they are the ruck.
- A player who shrugs, ducks, lifts the arm, drops the knees or otherwise contributes to high contact should not automatically receive a high-contact free kick. Umpires should consider whether the player had prior opportunity or contributed to the contact.

14. Mixed competition tackling rule

- The following additional rule applies where a male player tackles or blocks a female player. It does not apply to one-on-one contests between opposing female players.
- Wrapping tackles and blocking are permitted. A female player may be restrained by the jumper, but must not be thrown, slung or dragged to ground by the jumper.
- A player may be taken to ground only after a wrapping tackle has been applied and only without excessive force.
- In mixed matches, male players must take particular care when tackling female players. For clarity, forceful takedowns, sling tackles, spear tackles and dangerous shoulder hits are not permitted against any player, male or female.
- No free kick should be awarded to a female player who, in the umpire's opinion, deliberately or incidentally goes to ground during an otherwise legal tackle by a male opponent.

15. Top-up players, own players and forfeits

- AFL Switzerland permits approved top-up players before the commencement of a Seniors match in order to avoid a forfeit and allow a competitive match to proceed. This is a Swiss domestic variation from the AFL Europe tournament position.
- For Seniors matches, if a team has fewer than 11 of its own players available, it may use top-up players from another team to bring its list up to a maximum of 11 players, plus one listed medical substitute where permitted.
- A team must have at least seven of its own players for a Seniors match to count as a valid competition match. If it cannot field seven of its own players, the match is forfeited unless AFL Switzerland approves an exception.
- Own players should mean players who are active members of the team, shown by club membership, recent matches played, training attendance, social participation, or place of residence and connection to the club.
- Top-up players must be agreed before the match by both coaches and the League Chief Executive Officer or another nominated AFL Switzerland committee representative. All top-up players must be listed on the relevant team sheet before the match starts.
- Top-up players must be used to allow a match to proceed safely and fairly. They must not be used to artificially strengthen a team or manipulate the result.

- For Reserves matches, there are no restrictions on top-up players other than agreement by both coaches and inclusion on the team sheets. If a Reserves team cannot field seven players in total, including top-ups, the match is forfeited.
- In the event of a Seniors forfeit, the non-forfeiting team receives four premiership points and a score of 100-0. In the event of a Reserves forfeit, the non-forfeiting team receives four premiership points and a score of 75-0.

16. Minimum age

- The minimum permitted age to play in AFL Switzerland Seniors, Reserves or Women's matches is 14.
- Players aged 14-16 must have consent from a parent or legal guardian and must be approved by their club. AFL Switzerland may refuse or withdraw approval where participation is considered unsafe.

17. Umpires, goal umpires and officials

- AFL Switzerland should aim to appoint two field umpires where possible. A match may proceed with one field umpire where no suitable second field umpire is available.
- Each team should provide or assist in providing a goal umpire where official goal umpires are not appointed. A match should not start without two goal umpires unless the field umpire and both teams agree on a practical alternative.
- Boundary umpires are not required for ordinary 9-a-side domestic matches.
- Team runners and water carriers must be clearly identifiable. Runners may enter the playing surface only to deliver a message and must leave immediately.
- Water carriers may enter to deliver water, but must not deliver coaching messages. Medical staff may enter as reasonably required to assist an injured player.
- Officials must not interfere with play and must leave the playing area when directed by an umpire.

18. Concussion and serious injury

- Player safety takes priority over match continuity and match result.
- Where a player is suspected by an umpire, coach, trainer, official or medical person to have suffered concussion, the player must leave the playing surface and must not return for the remainder of the match day. This applies regardless of the player's own view or the importance of the match.
- A player who requires ambulance assistance, has a serious injury, or is otherwise clearly unable to continue safely must not return unless cleared by an appropriately qualified medical person.
- Play restarts according to the state of play when the umpire stopped the match: ball-up if the ball was in dispute, free kick to the player in possession, or disposal by the player who had already been awarded a mark or free kick.

19. Reports, cards and respect for officials

- All players, coaches, officials, supporters and volunteers are expected to uphold AFL Switzerland's core values of fairness, respect, responsibility and safety, both on and off the field.
- Abuse of umpires, disputing decisions, threatening language, obscene gestures, time wasting, striking, kicking, dangerous tackles, forceful front-on contact, intentional contact with an umpire, melees and serious misconduct may result in a free kick, a 25-metre penalty, a report, a yellow card, a red card, or further disciplinary action by AFL Switzerland.
- A yellow card means the player must leave the playing surface for 10 minutes of playing time. The player may be replaced immediately and may return after the timekeeper, pitch manager or field umpire confirms the 10 minutes have elapsed.
- A second yellow card to the same player in the same match results in an automatic red card.
- A red card means the player must leave the playing surface for the remainder of the match, may not be replaced, and may not sit on the bench or enter the playing surface, including during breaks.
- A player who receives a red card for a reportable offence must be reported. Field umpires may also report a player or official during or after a match even if no card was issued.
- Reports should be submitted to AFL Switzerland as soon as practicable after the match. AFL Switzerland may review umpire reports, club-submitted incident reports and available footage before determining any further action.
- Any player who refuses to leave the playing surface when directed by an umpire risks the match being forfeited by that player's team.

20. Switching teams

- Players may not switch Seniors clubs during the season. A player may play for only one Seniors team per season, except when acting as an approved top-up player under these rules.
- In 2026, Reserves players may play for another club during the first two rounds where this is necessary to help Senior teams field valid sides. Any such movement must be approved by the League CEO, recorded on the team sheet, and consistent with the top-up player rules. After Round 2, the normal switching-teams rule applies unless AFL Switzerland grants a specific exception.

References used

- AFL Switzerland website, [Rules of AFL Switzerland](#).
- AFL Europe, 2024 Rules & Regulations, Version 1.0, 28 March 2024.
- Australian Football Association Switzerland, 2022 AFL Switzerland Rules & Regulations, 27 April 2022.
- Directive from the AFL Switzerland Umpires Association, Rules for AFL Switzerland 2019, 3 May 2019.
- AFL, Laws of Australian Football 2025 and official AFL 2026 rule-change announcements.