

2026 FOOTBALL RULES & INTERPRETATION CHANGES



Following key stakeholder consultation, AFL Central Victoria has confirmed a number of on-field rule changes that will apply across all competitive age competitions for the 2026 season. A summary of the on-field rule adjustments to be implemented next season is outlined below:

CHANGES IMPLEMENTED FOR SEASON 2026 (all competitions)

SHRUGGING IN THE TACKLE

A shrug in a tackle will now be deemed 'prior opportunity' i.e. an attempt to evade or fend an opponent.

A field Umpire shall award a Free Kick if that Player does not Correctly Dispose of the football immediately when they are **Legally Tackled**.

ALIGN KICK IN TIME

Umpires currently allow 'reasonable time' for a kick-in, which is deemed at around 12 seconds. However, 'reasonable time' for a mark or free kick paid around the ground is deemed at eight seconds.

From 2026 onwards, **both of these will align to be eight seconds**.

RUCK NOMINATIONS

Rucks must nominate as per season 2025, however the umpire may restart play without a nominated Ruck present.

The intent is to get play starting again as soon as possible once the area is clear.

CHANGES NOT IMPLEMENTED FOR SEASON 2026

INSUFFICIENT INTENT (LAST DISPOSAL BETWEEN 50m ARCS)

NO CHANGE - Boundary umpires will continue to throw the ball in once the ball is deemed out of bounds. 'Insufficient intent' may be paid as per season 2025

CENTRE BALL UP CONTESTS

NO CHANGE - At all centre ball-ups, a competing Ruck must start in the centre circle, but can continue to contest as per season 2025

STAND RULE

NO CHANGE - Remains as per officiated in season 2025

6-6-6 STARTING POSITIONS

NO CHANGE - AFL Central Victoria competitions do not implement 6-6-6 starting positions at local community level