

I.R.F.U. Referee Department – Front Row Players - Law Aide Memoire

Updated 1st August 2022

Law 3.8

The table indicates the minimum number of front-row players by squad size and the minimum replacement obligations. The match organiser may amend this to suit certain levels of the game.

Squad Size	Min. FR Players	Must Replace
15 or less	3	N/A
16/17/18	4	P or H
19/20/21/22	5	P and H
23	6	LH, TH and H

With a starting front row plus one available front row replacement a team may name up to 18 players in their match day squad provided they are able to replace at the first time of asking a hooker **OR** a prop. Therefore, in order to comply with Law, the team must be able to cover the first injury to any position in the front row.

With a starting front row plus two available front row replacements a team may name up to 22 players in their match day squad provided they are able to replace at the first time of asking a hooker **AND** a prop. Therefore, in order to comply with Law, the team must be able to cover the first injury to a hooker **AND** the first injury to either loose head **OR** tight head prop.

Team Sheets

The team sheet must identify front row players and possible replacements and the position(s) in which they can play (Law 3.10). Only these players may play in the front row when the scrums are contested and only in their designated position(s).

Referees should thoroughly check the team sheets in advance of the match to ensure they comply with Law. Any discrepancies should be addressed with team management **BEFORE** the match.

For the avoidance of doubt, in a match where up to seven replacements are permitted the team sheet must identify the replacement hooker, loose head and tight head. These players can come from the starting XV or the substitutes.

A player may be nominated to cover more than one position so long as the total number of front row players complies with Law and competition regulations.

Uncontested Scrums

Uncontested scrums will be ordered if a team cannot field a suitably trained front row or if the referee so orders under safety concerns.

All uncontested scrums must be played with 8 players per side.

In certain competitions Law 3.17 applies. Referees should check in advance if Law 3.17 applies to the match in question.

Under Law 3.17 a player whose departure will cause the scrums to be uncontested cannot be replaced. The exceptions to this are for **blood injuries**, **injuries caused by foul play which have been verified by the match officials**, and where **a player is going off under 'Recognise and Remove' protocols**. In these instances a player may be replaced even if their departure causes the scrums to be uncontested.

Even when the scrums are uncontested both teams must use front row players in the scrum. As per Law 3.18 only when there are no front row players available may another player play in the front row.

When a front row player is sent to the sin bin or sent off;

- If a team still have cover for that position the replacement is made at the next scrum unless otherwise permitted in Law e.g. rolling substitutes.
- If there is a scrum during the sin bin period and the team in question are unable to continue with contested scrums they **do not** have to further reduce in number. This only applies in elite rugby with squads of 23 players.

When changes are being made in the front row during the course of the match the referee should confirm if they are tactical or injury replacements. Unlike tactically replaced players, injured players are not permitted to return to play. See table below for step-by-step process for deciding if a player can be replaced under Law 3.17.

IRFU – Application of Law 3.17 in the Club and School Game

In matches where Law 3.17 applies*, see the table below to decide if the player whose departure has caused the referee to order uncontested scrums can be replaced.

*Law 3.17 does not apply at all matches/levels. It is essential to check the relevant competition regulations before the match.

IRFU Domestic Game - Application of Law 3.17	
Can a player whose departure has caused the referee to order uncontested scrums be replaced?	
Reason for Departure	Can the player be replaced?
Foul Play Injury	Yes
Blood Injury	Yes
Recognise & Remove	Yes
General Injury	No
Yellow Card	No
Red Card	No

Notes

- In the club and school game, the exceptions allowing a player to be replaced under Law 3.17 (foul play, blood and recognise & remove injuries) **only** apply to the player whose departure is causing the referee to order uncontested scrums, and not to players that have previously been replaced.
- Players going off for the following reasons can **always** be replaced:
 - ◇ Injured as a result of foul play verified by the match officials.
 - ◇ Blood injury.
 - ◇ Recognise and Remove (suspected concussion).
- In the club/school game, where uncontested scrums will be ordered due to a front row player being temporarily suspended or sent off, there is no obligation on the team to further reduce their number at the next scrum. This only applies in the elite game.