

# 2026 Foam v6 vs 2024 Combined Rulebook

## Part 1: Definitions and Interpretation Standards

### Interpretation Standards

- **New in 2026.** A formal “Interpretation Standards” layer was added. 2024 did not have a hierarchy or enforcement philosophy section.
- **Practical difference.** 2026 explicitly pushes rules toward observable and binary application, and sets expectations for when warnings are required before penalties.

### Definitions. General restructure

- **Changed.** 2024 had a short definitions list (Live Ball, Dead Ball, Dead Object, Active Player, Live Player, Out Player, Entering/Exiting Player, Possession, Control, Short-handed).
- **2026 expands definitions significantly** to support timed-set administration and reduce ambiguity.

### New or expanded definitions in 2026 (not present in 2024)

- **Half Clock.** New in 2026. 2024 did not define it as a term.
- **Set Clock.** New in 2026. 2024 explicitly said “set clock only used in cloth,” which is no longer applicable in foam-only 2026.
- **Start Signal.** New in 2026. Useful because 2026 has more restart scenarios.
- **Activation and Opening Rush logic.** 2026 ties “Live Ball” status to activation requirements during Opening Rush.
- **Willful Manipulation.** New in 2026, introduced to make Burden enforceable without pure “intent guessing.”
- **Queue, Penalty Area, Team Bench.** 2026 tightens these as operational match areas and uses the terms more consistently.

## Definitions that were rewritten for meaning (not just wording)

- **Control.**
    - **2024:** “Control” was basically “held by a live player.”
    - **2026:** “Control” is defined in a more “catch-completion” way, meaning stable possession without relying on other support.
    - **Change impact.** 2026 makes Control do the job it should do. It decides catches and catch-completion, not Burden.
  - **Possession.**
    - **2024:** “Possession” was essentially “ball on a team’s half,” including outside the boundary lines.
    - **2026:** “Possession” is tied directly to Burden determination and includes rules for balls stationary inside/outside boundaries and balls exiting the playing area.
    - **Change impact.** Possession becomes a **team-level burden mechanic**, not a synonym for Control.
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## Part 2: Facilities and Equipment

### 1. Facilities

This part is mostly the same content as 2024 Rule 1, but reorganized and made more “foam operational.”

- **Queue definition moved and changed slightly.**
  - **2024:** Queue Area had explicit dimensions (5m by 1m) and placement requirements.
  - **2026:** Queue placement requirements remain (same-side of center, positioned away from sideline, rear edge aligned with back line), but **the explicit 5m length callout is no longer stated in the same way.**
- **Penalty Area is more explicitly operationalized.**
  - 2026 describes penalty area positioning and interaction with bench/queue more clearly, aligned to the 3-minute penalty concept.

- **Terminology cleanup.**
  - **2024:** “Substitution Area” existed as a defined facility area.
  - **2026:** This is effectively replaced by **Team Bench** as the non-active player holding area.
  - **Change impact.** Cleaner. Fewer marked zones required.

## 2. Equipment

- **Changed.** 2024 included mixed-format references (cloth and foam ball handling).
  - **2026 collapses to foam-only requirements** and aligns equipment language with the updated match administration sections.
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## Part 3: Participants and Roles

### 3. Players

- **Mostly consistent.** Roster sizes and “6 active players per set” are the same conceptually.
- **2024:** non-active players remain in “substitution area.”
- **2026:** non-active players remain in **Team Bench**.
- **Why it matters.** It removes one extra marked area and reduces confusion.

### 4. Ball Retrievers

- **Reorganized, more explicit.** 2024 had retrievers embedded under Team rules.
- **2026 separates it as its own role section** and later adds clearer penalty authority over retrievers.

### 5. Team Leaders

- **Clarified.** 2026 tightens who can request timeouts and who can initiate challenges, and makes timing requirements less format-dependent (because it’s foam-only).

## 6. Officials

- **2024 language trend:** “Officials are final authority and may enforce rules to their absolute discretion.”
  - **2026 direction:** still final authority, but now constrained by Interpretation Standards and more “procedure-first” administration.
  - **Why it matters.** Less personality-driven officiating, more consistency.
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## Part 4: Match Format and Timing

### 7. Timing

- **Set duration changed for foam.**
  - **2024 foam:** sets were **not time-restricted**.
  - **2026 foam:** each set is **up to 3 minutes**, then transitions to No-Blocking.
  - **Impact.** Strategy changes. Pace changes. End-of-half behavior becomes more predictable.
- **End-of-half behavior changed.**
  - **2024 foam:** end-of-half transitioned into “sudden death” and blocking no longer applied.
  - **2026 foam:** end-of-half is administered through **explicit No-Blocking transition rules**, plus specific “last 60 seconds” and “last 5 seconds” administration.
- **Tie-breaking set duration changed for foam.**
  - **2024 foam:** tie-break set was **4 minutes**.
  - **2026 foam:** tie-break set is **3 minutes**, then No-Blocking after time expiry.
  - **Impact.** Tie-breaks are faster and more consistent with the normal set structure.
- **Timeout rules simplified for foam-only.**
  - **2024:** timeout timing differed by format (cloth restrictions, foam anytime).

- **2026:** timeout logic is written cleanly for foam play and integrates with the Half Clock/Set Clock definitions.

## 8. Scoring

- **Change type.** Mostly clarifications plus alignment with timed sets and the refined tie-break structure.
- **Forfeits.** Updated and redefined for standings integrity.
  - **2024 approach:** Forfeit handling did not define a standardized standings recording method that accounts for timed-set play and variable number of sets played.
  - **2026 change:** Introduces a Forfeit Standings Score on a 12-point scale for standings/tiebreakers only. The 12-point scale is explicitly not a cap on sets played.
    - Pre-match forfeits: recorded 12-0.
    - In-progress forfeits: completed sets remain as recorded.
      - If combined set wins at forfeit  $<12$ , the final standings score is 12-B (B = forfeiting team's set wins at forfeit).
      - If combined set wins  $\geq 12$  and not tied, record the score at the moment of forfeit (no normalization).
      - If tied at forfeit, award one additional set win to the non-offending team for standings to ensure the forfeit produces a winner.
    - Removal from format: remaining scheduled matches recorded as pre-match forfeits, 12-0.

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## Part 5: Set Start Procedures

### 9. Starting the Match

- **More explicit than 2024.** 2024 had “be lined up at scheduled time” and “be on court 5 minutes early.”
- **2026 keeps that concept** but ties it to standardized start procedures and Start Signal.

## 10. Ball Placement

- 2024 defined cloth vs foam ball marks.
- 2026 is foam-only and directly defines the foam placement pattern.

## 11. Opening Rush

- **Clarified.** 2026 more explicitly defines:
  - required starting position,
  - constraints on touching or crossing center line,
  - when a player must be “fully within boundaries” before first ball contact,
  - which balls may be retrieved first.

## 12. False Starts

- 2024 used warnings then “player starts in queue.”
- 2026 retains the ladder and ties it more clearly to half resets and Start Signal logic.

## 13. Ball Activation

- 2024 had activation as part of opening rush rules.
  - 2026 isolates activation as its own section, and ties it to Live Ball definition.
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## Part 6: Live Play Rules

### 14. Throwing

- **Valid vs Invalid attempts tightened.**
  - 2024 had attempts and invalid attempts, but the foam book in 2026 tightens the definition and adds a clearer warning-first structure.

- **“Intent” problem addressed.**
  - 2026 is written to discourage burden manipulation, but requires observable criteria plus warning ladders rather than immediate punishment for accidental slips.

## 15. Burden

- **Burden assignment logic is now explicit and ordered.**
  - 2024 burden logic existed, but the possession logic was much looser and more likely to create judgment calls.
  - 2026 spells out the priority order and ties it to Possession definition.
- **Balls outside the boundary lines and balls leaving the playing area are explicitly handled.**
  - 2024: possession was “team half,” even outside boundaries.
  - 2026: adds detail for stationary outside, and “exit side of center line” rules.
- **Countdown administration is clearer.**
  - 2026 formalizes the “10 seconds, then audible 5-second countdown” structure.

## 16. Live Ball and Dead Ball status

- 2024 had shorter definitions and then relied on gameplay sections to infer transitions.
- 2026 centralizes “how a ball becomes dead,” including ball-to-ball collisions, blocked-ball status, dead objects, and catch outcomes.

## 17. Hits

- **Clarifies sequencing.**
  - 2026 cleans up edge cases like “hit while catch in progress,” and separates “ball status” logic from “player out” logic.

## 18. Traps

- 2024 trap logic existed but was less cleanly isolated.

- 2026 makes it easier to enforce consistently.

## 19. Blocking

- **Clarifies blocked-ball live status vs dead triggers.**
  - 2024 blocking and disarming existed as separate rules.
  - 2026 integrates disarming outcomes into a clearer block framework.

## 20. Out Players

- 2026 makes “out player limitations” clearer and ties dead object interaction to out/inactive participants.

## 21. Exiting Players

- Same concept as 2024, but 2026 is stricter about “leave quickly, nearest boundary, do not affect play.”

## 22. Catching

- 2024 was simpler, with less structure around “control in air” and “valid landing.”
- 2026 ties catch validity to Control definition and fair territory / boundary requirements.

## 23. Re-entry on a catch

- **More explicit queue order logic.**
  - 2024 had re-entry rules, but 2026 makes the “front of queue enters” behavior more procedural.

## 24. Entering Players

- 2026 is stricter about how and when a player becomes live and what they may not do while entering.

## 25. Boundaries

- 2024 boundary language was functional but more scattered.

- 2026 consolidates “what counts as out of bounds” and ties it to Dead Object and territory rules.
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## Part 7: Special Resolutions

### 26. Wash resolution

- 2024 had wash logic.
- 2026 isolates it into a “special resolutions” bucket, which is closer to how professional rulebooks structure edge-case adjudication.

### 27. Simultaneous Play

- **Clarified continuation logic.**
  - 2026 formalizes “if both teams hit zero live players, same players remain and set continues until one team is eliminated.”

### 28. No-Blocking

- **2024 framing:** No-Blocking often reads like “blocking is not allowed” in sudden-death contexts.
- **2026 updated mechanic:** Blocking is permitted, but treated as being hit. The blocked ball remains catchable for a save. If it becomes dead before being caught, the blocker is out.
  - No-Blocking applies only after it is officially declared.
  - A No-Blocking block is defined as opponent thrown live ball contacting a ball in the player’s control.
  - Catching the blocked ball is a valid catch and resolves under catch rules.
  - If the ball becomes dead before being caught, the blocker is out.
  - Completion-of-action clause included. Additional-contact clause included to prevent double counting arguments.

## 29. Tie-Breaking Set

- 2024 foam tie-break was 4 minutes.
  - 2026 foam tie-break is 3 minutes, then No-Blocking.
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## Part 8: Violations and Penalties

### 30. Code of Conduct

- 2026 nests conduct expectations inside a more structured penalties system.

### 31. General Penalty Principles

- **New in 2026 as a dedicated section.**
  - 2024 had penalties, but not framed as general principles with consistent enforcement ladders.

### 32. Card Accumulation and Match Forfeiture

- **2024:** match forfeiture triggered by accumulating 4 yellows (red = 2 yellows).
- **2026:** explicitly rejects match forfeiture solely from yellow accumulation. Team Red is the immediate match-forfeit trigger.
- **Impact.** Standings won't be decided by card math unless conduct rises to the Team Red threshold.

### 33. Ball Retriever Penalties

- 2024 implied retrievers must comply, but 2026 gives officials explicit authority to remove/replace a retriever for safety/disruption.

### 34. Yellow Cards

- **Player Yellow duration changed.**
  - **2024:** 5 minutes of match time.
  - **2026:** 3 minutes of active match time (half clock running).

- **Team Yellow clarified and limited.**
  - 2026 makes Team Yellow a competitive sanction (set consequences) and explicitly avoids “automatic conversion to Team Red” unless severe misconduct warrants it.

## 35. Red Cards

- **Player Red consequences clarified.**
    - Short-handed remainder, ejection, suspension length.
  - **Team Red clarified.**
    - 2026 narrows Team Red to severe misconduct categories and makes it the match-forfeit trigger.
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## Part 9: Challenges

### 36. Challenges

- 2024 already said “misapplication only, not discretion,” but 2026 makes it more operational.
  - 2026 is clearer about when play stops, and what is non-challengeable judgment.
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## Part 10: Injuries

### 37. Injuries

- **More procedural substitution rules.**
  - 2026 is more explicit about how substitutions occur mid-set and how the queue order is preserved.
- **Blood injury tightened.**
  - Blood injury does not return to the same set after treatment.

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## Part 11: Diagrams

- New or updated presentation.
  - 2026 includes an explicit foam diagram placement that matches the updated ball placement and activation language.

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## Part 12: Officiating Guidelines

- **New in 2026.**
    - 2024 did not have a dedicated officiating-guidance appendix.
    - 2026 adds guidance to reduce discretionary interpretation, promote consistency, and standardize stoppage behavior.
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