Understanding of the Laws of the Game 2025/2026 on the Quality of Football Referees in the Semarang City PSSI

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Abstract

Football is the most popular sport in the world, with more than 250 million active players spread across more than 200 countries according to the IFAB Annual Report. The purpose of this study was to determine the level of understanding of football game rules (Laws Of The Game) among football referees of the Semarang City PSSI Association for the 2025/2026 season. This study used a descriptive quantitative approach. Data collection techniques used questionnaires/surveys. The population in this study consisted of 50 referees, and the sampling technique used total sampling with a sample size of 50 referees. The results of the research data analysis show that the level of understanding of the Laws of the Game among football referees of the Semarang City PSSI Association in 2025/2026 was 28 people (73.38%) in the good category, 17 people (16.11%) in the moderate category, and 5 people (10.51%) in the poor category. This study can be concluded that the understanding of the 2025/2026 Laws of the Game regarding the Quality of PSSI Semarang City Football Referees is in the high category with a total of 28 people (73.38%).

How to Cite

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INTRODUCTION

Football is the most popular sport in the world, with more than 250 million active players spread across more than 200 countries according to the IFAB Annual Report (2024). This popularity not only reflects high public participation, but also demonstrates football's significance as a global cultural phenomenon and an industry sector that influences the economy, media and even sports diplomacy. In this context, the quality of match organisation is a fundamental factor in maintaining the integrity of the competition (Setiawan et al., 2018). One critical element in match organisation is the role of the referee as the enforcer of the rules and the controller of the dynamics of the game. Without competent and credible referees, the quality and credibility of the competition will decline, creating potential conflicts between players, coaches, spectators and football institutions (Setiawan & Ragil, 2023).

The 2025/2026 edition of the Laws of the Game (LOTG) introduces a number of significant updates, including a reinterpretation of the offside rule, restrictions on goalkeeper handling, and stricter procedures for the use of Video Assistant Referee (VAR) technology (IFAB, 2025). These updates are in response to the trend of fast-paced play, the development of modern pressing strategies, and the need to minimise human error through technological support (Setiawan et al., 2024). However, the adoption of these new rules requires not only cognitive competence, but also adaptive and situational competence, as referees' decisions must be able to accommodate changes without causing uncertainty on the field (Alfindana, 2024; Mustofa & Priyono, 2025; Permadi, 2023).

According to the IFAB Annual Report (2024), approximately 65% of association-level referees worldwide experienced difficulties understanding the new rule changes in the first six months after their publication. This situation highlights the challenges in the formal learning process and regulatory updates, especially when adaptation takes place during the competition period (Lestari, 2022). The inability to comprehensively understand the new rules can lead to inconsistent decisions and potentially trigger match controversies. Therefore, periodic evaluation of referees' level of understanding of the Laws of the Game (LOTG) is a strategic necessity in maintaining the credibility of modern football.

A similar phenomenon also occurs in Indonesia. According to the National Referee Committee Report (2023), more than 38% of regional referees reported difficulties in understanding regulatory changes, particularly regarding the interpretation of handball and the implementation of VAR. These obstacles often lead to incorrect decisions that affect the dynamics of the match and create a negative perception of the referees' professionalism (Setiawan & Faza, 2019). In the long term, this issue could hinder the national referee development programme aimed at producing internationally licensed referees (Anwar, 2023; Nova, 2021). This situation is also reflected in a number of real match cases, one of which was an international match involving the Indonesian national team, where decisions on extra time and fouls drew widespread protests from players, coaches, and the public because they were deemed inconsistent with the principles of Law 7 and Law 12 in the Laws of the Game (Doewes & Hendarto, 2024; Prabowo et al., 2021).

A study (Abdula & Marulin, 2025) in Portugal further reinforces these findings, stating that referees with a high level of understanding of the Laws of the Game (LOTG) make 18% more correct decisions than those with a low level of understanding. These findings underline that cognitive competence is a dominant factor in referee performance, especially when faced with high-risk situations that require quick and accurate decisions (Marlina, 2025). Thus, improving understanding of the rules is an effective developmental strategy for improving match quality (Rachman, 2023).

Field experience also plays a supporting role in referee competence. (Nurcahya, 2021) explains that referees with more than five years of experience have a 15% higher level of understanding of the Laws of the Game (LOTG) compared to novice referees, although the difference is not significant without training. The findings indicate that experience alone is not sufficient without formal educational intervention. In the context of the annual regulatory updates by the International Football Association Board (IFAB), continuous learning is a mandatory requirement for all referees, including those at the Semarang City association level. In addition to formal training, innovative learning approaches have also proven to be effective (Mcewan & Arthur, 2024) revealed that video-based learning increased referee decision accuracy by 22% by providing visual simulations that resembled match situations. This approach is relevant in the digital age, allowing referees to deepen their situational understanding flexibly and efficiently (Prabowo et al., 2021; Suwardi, 2024).

Referees at the city level, such as ASKOT

PSSI Semarang, play a strategic role in coaching local competitions, which are the foundation for the development of players, coaches, and match equipment towards the professional level. Good referee performance provides competitive certainty for competition participants and improves the overall quality of. Therefore, research is needed to objectively explain how the level of understanding of the Laws of the Game contributes to the quality of refereeing. With the advancement of video technology and electronic devices for match monitoring, the referee's role has become increasingly complex. The implementation of VAR and electronic performance tracking systems has heightened the demand for referees to interpret the rules with precision. Understanding the Laws of the Game (LOTG) is an absolute requirement so that this technology does not actually cause new errors. This makes updating knowledge a requirement of professionalism, not just a formality of certification (Nurhidayat, 2022).

Refereeing errors can trigger significant social dynamics. (Nurcahya et al., 2025) It should be noted that negative public perceptions often arise from misinterpretations of the rules, rather than because of them. This shows that understanding the rules of the game not only affects the technical aspects of the match, but also the social legitimacy and public trust in football institutions. In Indonesia, refereeing errors are often the subject of public debate and controversy in various media outlets (Cleland & Gorman, 2017). Using a quantitative approach, this study seeks to identify the objective relationship between the level of understanding of the Laws of the Game (LOTG) and the quality of performance of ASKOT PSSI Semarang City referees. This research model will involve a rule comprehension test instrument and referee performance assessment through a standardised questionnaire. Thus, the research results will describe the empirical conditions of local referees' competence in facing the 2025/2026 Laws of the Game (LOTG) update.

The reality on the ground, particularly in Semarang City, shows that there is a potential gap between the rules and their implementation. Based on initial observations and reports from various internal competitions organised by Askot PSSI Semarang City, such as the U13 Inter-Club League, U15 and U18 competitions, early age competitions (under 12 years old) and senior and youth tournaments between clubs in Semarang City, controversial referee decisions are still found, such as errors in assessing fouls, disproportionate card giving, or confusion in handling special situations, such as handball, offside, handling injuries, external disturbances during matches or protests from the coaching team. This indicates a possible lack of in-depth understanding of the latest Laws of The Game for the 2025/2026 edition. In addition, the referee training process at the ASKOT PSSI Semarang City level often faces challenges, such as limited access to training materials, low frequency of rule socialisation, and a lack of periodic evaluation of the competence of referees assigned to a match.

Based on the above explanation, the researcher is interested in examining the quality of ASKOT PSSI Semarang City referees from the perspective of their level of understanding of the Laws of the Game (LOTG), as the smooth running of a match is a reflection of the harmony between the referee's strong understanding of the application of football rules and their physical fitness when officiating a match. The researcher is a native of Semarang City and a licensed football referee who will have an educational impact on improving the human resources (HR) of ASKOT PSSI Semarang City football referees.

The novelty of this research lies in its empirical focus on the level of understanding of the latest 2025/2026 edition of the Laws of the Game (LOTG) among city-level football referees (ASKOT PSSI Semarang City) using a descriptive quantitative approach based on actual field data. Unlike previous studies that generally used older LOTG editions, focused on national or international referees, and emphasized psychological, physical, or performance perception aspects, this study specifically examines referees' cognitive adaptation to the latest IFAB regulation changes, which have not been widely studied in the context of Indonesian football. The purpose of this study was to determine the level of understanding of football game rules (Laws Of The Game) among football referees of the Semarang City PSSI Association for the 2025/2026 season.

METHODS

This research is a quantitative study with a descriptive approach and a survey method using a questionnaire as the main instrument for data collection.

Populasi dalam penelitian ini adalah The population in this study consisted of all football referees officially registered under the Semarang City PSSI Association (Askot) during the current competition season. This population includes novice referees, C3, C2, and C1 licensed referees who are actively serving in various local competitions organised by Askot. In this study, samples

were taken using total sampling techniques with a total of 50 referees from Askot PSSI Semarang City.

Data Collection

Observation: This technique was used to observe the actual behaviour of referees on the field, such as the accuracy of their decisions, their positioning and movement, their communication with players, and how they applied the 2025/2026 edition of the Laws of the Game in match situations. Observations could be conducted either participatively or non-participatively using observation sheets that had been compiled based on referee quality indicators.

Interviews: Interviews may be conducted with referees, referee instructors, or administrators of the Semarang City PSSI Referee Committee. Questions may cover understanding of the latest rules, challenges in implementing them, and how training or socialisation of rule changes is carried out.

Survey: The survey is designed in the form of a Likert scale or multiple-choice questions containing statements or questions related to the content of the regulations, case interpretations, and aspects the quality of referee leadership.

Documentation: This documentation method is used to obtain various information from sources related to research variables that have not been obtained from the research results.

Data analysis techniques are methods for processing data into information. In this study, the following data analysis techniques were used: Data analysis in this study was conducted to determine the relationship between the level of understanding of the Laws of the Game 2025/2026 edition (Variable X) and the quality of football referees (Variable Y) among referees under the Semarang City PSSI Askot.

Analysis Descriptive Percentage Measurement of Referee Understanding of the Laws of the Game 2025/2026 edition Askot PSSI Semarang City. The criteria for determining the level of understanding of football rules are presented in the following **Table 1.**

Table 1. Understanding Criteria

Normal Curve Category	Criteria
$[\mu + 1,0\,\sigma] \leq X$	High
$[\mu - 1,0\,\sigma] \leq X < [\mu + 1,0\,\sigma]$	Medium
$X < [\mu - 1,0\,\sigma]$	Low

Explanation:

X : total responses from respondents

μ : ideal mean

σ : ideal standard deviation

Source: Anas Sudijono.

RESULTS AND DISCUSSION

The results of this study indicate the level of understanding of the Laws of the Game among C-1, C-2, and C-3 referees of the Semarang City PSSI Association. The research data is based on the results of a questionnaire on the level of understanding of the Laws of the Game, which consisted of 40 statements. The analysis of the research data used quantitative descriptive techniques. The calculation technique used percentages, which were divided into three categories: high, medium, and low.

The categorisation was based on the ideal mean and ideal standard deviation of the descriptive calculation results that had been calculated previously. The frequency calculation results can be seen in the following **Tabel 2.**

Tabel 2. Result

Category	Score Interval	Frequency	
		F(n)	%
High	$\geq 45,05$	28	73,38
Moderate	34,95 s/d 45,05	17	16,11
Low	$\leq 34,95$	5	10,51
Total		50	100%

The **Tabel 2** above shows that out of the total 50 research subjects, 28 individuals (73.38%) have a good level of understanding, 17 individuals (16.11%) have a moderate level of understanding, while 5 others (10.51%) had a sufficient level of understanding. Based on the results of the data analysis, it can be concluded that the level of understanding of referees regarding the Laws of the Game 2025/2026 is in the good category, with 28 people, and 5 people with a low level of understanding.

The purpose of this study was to determine the level of understanding of the Laws of the Game among football referees in Semarang City. Descriptive analysis showed that the level of understanding of the Laws of the Game among referees in Semarang City was very good. This can be seen from the results of data analysis which show that the majority of research subjects, namely 28 people (73.38%), have a very good level of understanding of football rules, while 17

people (16.11%) of other research subjects have a moderate or fairly good understanding of football rules and 5 people (10.51%) of research subjects have a low level of understanding.

Understanding of football rules consists of several factors, namely 1) Playing field, 2) Ball, 3) Number of players, 4) Player equipment, 5) Referee, 6) Assistant Referee, 7) Duration of the match, 8) Starting and restarting play, 9) Ball in and out of play, 10) How to score a goal, 11) Offside, 12) Fouls and misconduct, 13) Free kicks, 14) Penalty kicks, 15) Throw-ins, 16) Goal kicks, 17) Corner kicks (Mulyadi, 2024). In more details can be found in the level of understanding of referees of each of these factors.

The first rule of football is the playing field rule. The data analysis results show that the majority of the 28 research subjects had a high level of understanding, 17 had a moderate or sufficient level of understanding, and the remaining 5 had a low level of understanding. The majority of the research subjects had a good understanding of regarding the rules caused by these regulations requires difficult reasoning to make decisions.

In the sixth rule of football, namely assistant referees, it was found that all research subjects understood the rules regarding assistant referees. This rule can be fully understood by referees because it only concerns the rules for assistant referees . This contrasts with the results of the analysis of data on the fourteenth rule of football, namely penalty kicks, which showed that the research subjects had a low level of understanding (Nova, 2021). Nearly half of the research subjects still lack understanding of throw-ins. Twenty-eight people (73.38%) have a high or good level of understanding of football rules because they already have a C-1 licence certificate and are still active in their profession as referees and often discuss football rules with other referees (Alfindana, 2024). Discussions are usually held during referee and match supervisor meetings, as well as through WhatsApp groups. These discussions are very beneficial because the experience gained while officiating matches will increase the understanding of referees who do not yet understand or have not experienced certain situations and will reinforce the understanding of referees who already understand events or incidents on the field. Thus, most referees already have sufficient knowledge to understand and interpret football rules in accordance with IFAB standards.

However, the results of the study also show variations in the level of understanding, with 16.11% of referees in the moderate category and 10.51% in the low category. These variations indicate that not all referees have the same level of mastery of the rules, which could potentially lead to differences in interpretation and inconsistencies in decisions on the field.

In the fourth football rule regarding player equipment, referees have a poor understanding of presentation (10.51%). This is due to a lack of in- depth socialisation, limited technical training that focuses on the details of the rules, and a lack of updates on the latest rules received by referees. In referee training, player equipment is often considered a simple basic rule, so it is not the main focus of discussion or match evaluation. As a result, referees' understanding is not yet fully optimal in consistently communicating and applying player equipment rules in accordance with applicable regulations. In referee training practices, player equipment materials are often considered basic rules, so they are not the main focus of discussion or match evaluation.

CONCLUSION

Based on the analysis and discussion, it can be concluded that overall, the level of understanding of the 2025/2026 Rules of the Game among football referees at ASKOT PSSI Semarang City is generally good, with 28 referees having a high level of understanding. However, 17 referees still have a moderate understanding and 5 referees have a low understanding of the Rules of the Game.

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