
Law 3

3-A Umpires as final judges of fitness of ground, weather and light

The umpires pronounced the pitch unfit but, when the captains insisted, allowed play to take place under Law 3.9 (b). How can the umpires be the final judges of the fitness of the ground, weather and light for play as stated in Law 3.8, if Law 3.9 allows the captains nevertheless to decide whether play is to take place or not?

There are three levels of fitness of the condition of the ground (which includes the pitch), weather or light. The umpires have to recognise the three levels:

1. Suitable - perfectly acceptable. Play *has* to take place
2. Unsuitable - not ideal for play but not actually dangerous. Play may or may not take place depending on agreement by the captains
3. Unreasonable or dangerous - any reasonable person could foresee the likelihood of injury to those on the field of play. The umpires will in no circumstances allow play to take place

Notice that although the phrases ‘fitness of ground, weather and light’ and ‘fitness of the pitch’ are used in a general way, the Law no longer uses the words ‘fit’ or ‘unfit’ to describe *categories* of fitness. The wording of this Law in the 2000 Code was very carefully considered after taking legal advice on the repercussions should a player or umpire be injured in adverse conditions. There is now no such thing in Law as ‘an unfit pitch’.

Law 3.9(b) covers **unsuitable** conditions. If the umpires consider that conditions are **unsuitable** the captains have the right to insist on play, but only if there is agreement by the two captains that **both** wish play to take place. This is not a decision by the captains that conditions are suitable. That is solely the umpires’ decision. It is an agreement by the captains that, notwithstanding the unsuitable conditions, they wish to play.

Law 3.9(d) covers **unreasonable or dangerous** conditions. If the umpires consider that conditions are so bad that there is obvious and foreseeable risk to the safety of any player or umpire, so that it would be **unreasonable or dangerous for play to take place**, then they will not allow any play while they are of that opinion.

The captains have no say in the matter at all. They cannot agree to play in such conditions.

In summary The umpires **are** the final judges of the fitness of the ground weather and light for play. At no time do the captains have the power to decide on the suitability of the conditions for play. It is the **umpires** who decide in each case which of the three categories applies to the conditions. If they consider that conditions are at level 1 (suitable) the captains have no choice; they have to play. If the umpires decide that conditions are at level 3 (unreasonable or dangerous), the captains have no choice; they will not be allowed to play. It is only when the umpires decide that conditions are at level 2 (unsuitable), that the captains have any powers. The total extent of the captains’ powers is to have the choice of whether to play or not in conditions classed as ‘unsuitable’, and then only if they agree that they both wish to play. It should be noted that in the case of unsuitable *light* conditions, agreement between the captains is not required. The captain of the batting side alone has the option of deciding independently whether play should take place, and again this option is available only when light conditions are classed as ‘unsuitable’.

Although the question does not require it, it might be appropriate to add this further comment on the implementation of this Law.

In general, conditions do not change abruptly from one level to another. Nearly always they gradually get worse or gradually improve. Conditions are to be considered as remaining at their previous level until the umpires (only the umpires, on their own) **together** agree that the conditions have changed to a new level. They have to come to their verdict on the conditions without reference to the captains and without taking into account either the state of the match or the bearing that the result of the match may have on competition standings.

If the umpires have forbidden play because conditions are unreasonable or dangerous, then they will not give the captains the option of agreeing to play until they - the two umpires - agree between themselves that conditions have improved to level 2 (unsuitable but not dangerous)

If the umpires agree together that conditions are 'unsuitable', and the captains have **not** agreed that they both wish to play, then play will not take place until

either the two captains do agree that they wish to play in those conditions,

or the umpires decide together that conditions have become 'suitable'. At this point they - the two umpires - will order play to take place.

[Law reference: 3.8, 3.9]

3-B Fitness of conditions for play

If there has been an interruption of play because of rain, can play be resumed while it is still raining? Could a match be started in rain?

The major consideration for the umpires will be the condition of the surface, especially for the bowler's run ups and the batsmen's footholds, but also in the outfield. Whatever their judgment of that, it is unlikely that they would regard playing in the rain as suitable conditions. If, however, both umpires consider that the conditions of the ground, of the weather or of the light are neither unreasonable nor dangerous, there is no reason **in Law** to forbid play, even in light rain, if both captains agree that they wish play to resume or to commence.

[Law reference: 3.8, 3.9]

3-C Captain disapproves of batsmen accepting offer to go off in unsuitable light

The umpires offer the light to the batsmen who accept it and leave the field. The captain in the dressing room is agitated and wants play to resume immediately. Where does the Law stand on the captain's request to resume play?

Law 3.9(b)(ii) makes it clear, in the context of the surrounding text, that while conditions of light are unsuitable umpires will not allow play to recommence **unless** the captain of the batting side wishes it to recommence. The power of the actual batsmen to deputise for their captain in expressing wishes on such matters is **while they are at the wicket**. Once the players are off the field, it is the captain himself who must do so. If conditions became dangerous, then the umpires could - and should - forbid play. If, however, the captain of the batting side indicates that he wishes play to recommence, the umpires cannot forbid it unless they (the two umpires) agree that conditions are dangerous.

[Law reference: 3.9]
