

STANDPOINT

THE times they are a-changing in the world of the soccer — but not that much.

Were you really expecting the FA Premier League to be very different? Referees may be wearing green, the old First Division may have more money, a new name and new bosses, but for 90 per cent of football fans; that's about it, for now.

The rest, around 1.5 million viewers, may be seeing the game presented differently as they stew in their armchairs for five hours on a Sunday afternoon.

Boresville, if you ask me.

I have yet to meet a fan who's keen on BSkyB's nauseous offerings: we're relishing a snappy hour of Match of the Day's highlights.

The major change throughout the game is the change in the backpass law. It certainly speeded up the first game of the season I saw, at Harrow on Tuesday night. In one incident, Andy Kerr — partly because he was tripping over the shorts flapping around his knees — bungled as the last defender put under pressure by nippy Gippy.

Said Andy: "It's going to create more incidents. From a defender's point of view, it's pathetic. The forwards might enjoy it. Teams are going to close each other down much more, and it's going to be good for the teams who play more direct football."

One bonus for spectators — if teams start

By PETE LANSLEY

wellying the ball over the last defender's head, vying for 'line-out' possession — could be that defences may play deeper. This in turn would encourage less off-side interruptions. Good for the game, say I, although it will take time to bed down. Until it does, I'm sure more goals will be scored.

A potential law change of the future is the introduction of the 'sin bin', as used in ice hockey, and practised at Dover this pre-season. I would welcome the development of dismissing a guilty player from the field for a short period of time.

Sometimes a player just needs to calm down, to have a few moments talking to his manager; he doesn't always deserve expulsion and suspension.

Violent conduct or dissent would still earn these ultimate punishments.

With the sin bin, the offended team would still benefit from numerical advantage for ten minutes.

Welcome back, football!