GAME DAY ADVICE FOR COACHES

Prepared by Sierra Valley Soccer Referee Association

*The following advice is offered to assist coaches in managing their teams on game day in accordance with the Laws of the Game (LOTG), US Soccer (USSF), CalNorth Dist VIII, and local league rules. It addresses issues which frequently arise during recreational youth soccer games and commonly misunderstood. It does not discuss all of the Laws of the Game. Coaches can find a summary of the Laws at www.footballrules.com and the full text at www.theIFAB.com and all age group modifications can be found on the league website, California North Soccer Assn. (CalNorth) website, US Soccer Federation (USSF) website, NorCal Premier League Handbook, or in coaching materials provided by your league. This advice includes changes contained in the LOTG **effective 1 July 2026**. Changes are highlighted.*

Pre-Game Preparation

Arrive early at the field. Please understand that late starting games may result in reduced playing time in order to keep later games on schedule.

Bring all player and coach passes, official team roster, and medical releases as required by the league.

- If you have a paperwork or pass problem see a league board member before checking in with the referee.

Make sure all players have required equipment. Currently each team must have a captain on the field with a captain's armband if the league or tournament choses to use this rule. Captains will be required in all competitions beginning 1 July 2027.

Make sure all of your players and coaches are listed in GotSport so they appear on the preprinted game card. Names cannot be added by the referee to NorCal Premier game cards. +

At check-in confirm with the referee length of game, number of players, substitution procedures, and whether hydration or cooling breaks are being given.

Make sure your team's spectators are located properly according to the local league rules and any canopies or umbrellas are 3 feet from the touchline and not overhanging the field. Spectators are not allowed in the technical area (team bench area) or behind the goals. % Spectator areas may be different for tournaments or inter-league competitions.

The Field of Play (Law 1)

If portable goals are used, they must be anchored. Anchors must be to the rear of portable goals not toward the front. Be sure there are flags at each corner if you are setting up the field.

If there is a marked Technical Area all coaches and substitutes must remain in that area during the game. If there are no markings the Technical Area is 1 yard back from the touchline and extends ten yards from the halfway line. No coaches or substitutes should be standing on the touchline or within 1 yard of the touchline. * %

In U10 and U8 US Soccer has introduced a "**buildout line**" half way between the penalty area and the half line. Attacking players must retreat beyond this line when the goalkeeper is in possession of the ball, on goal kicks, and on free kicks by the defense within the penalty area. Offside is only called in U10 games between the buildout line and the goal line.

Goalkeepers may only throw, roll, or place ball on ground and kick to release ball into play. Any version of a drop kick is not allowed. Placing the ball on the ground for a kick puts the ball in play and opponents may advance beyond the buildout line. # %

The 8 second time limit for a keeper to release the ball from his hands and the 5 second time limit for a goal kick to be taken begin when all opponents have retreated beyond the buildout line.

The number of Players / Substitutions (Law 3)
Unlimited substitutions are allowed in youth games at any stoppage with the permission of the referee.

Referees are instructed to allow a substitution, provided that the request is not delayed until the ball is about to be put into play, the substitute is standing at the half-way line, and the substitute is ready. Decide who is going out and who is coming in before you call for a substitution.

Proper procedure: Substitutes are standing at half line. Referee signals for substitution to begin. Exiting player must leave within 10 seconds. If the exiting player takes longer than 10 seconds the substitute must wait until the first stoppage after 1 minute before the referee allows the substitute to enter.

Only the Referee can allow a substitution. * Neither the coach's request for a substitution nor the Assistant Referee's flag signal is permission to start the substitution.

A player who leaves the field to correct an equipment problem and who has not been replaced with a substitute may return to the field at any time with the permission of the referee. If a player returns without permission and interferes with play a direct free kick is awarded to the opposing team. *

Special notes on Injuries:

If a coach is called on to attend to an injured player, that player must go off and can be replaced. In any even the injured player must wait until the first stoppage after 1 minute before the referee allow him to reenter the field.

If the player was injured by a foul resulting in a red or yellow card to an opponent the player may be briefly treated on the field and does not have to go off.

If the injured player is the goalkeeper, he/she does not have to go off.

If both the goalkeeper and another player are injured, neither one has to go off.

Suspected Head Injury

If it appears to the referee that a player may have suffered a head injury or concussion that player may not return to the field until he is evaluated by a medical professional. Only a medical professional identified to the referee before the game begins can provide this evaluation during the game. # +

Myth: You can substitute a player who is sent off upon getting a second yellow card.
Fact: You may not substitute and must play one player down for the rest of the game.

The Referee and Assistant Referees (Laws 5 & 6)
Authority of the referee begins before the game and continues post-game until the referee leaves the field.

"*The decisions of the referee regarding facts connected with play … are final. The decisions of the referee and all other match officials, must always be respected.*" Law 5, paragraph 2.

Decisions are made based on LOTG, the "spirit of the game" and opinions of the referee. Previous FIFA guidance was that referees not call "trifling or doubtful" fouls and this is still within the "spirit of the game." A referee may change a decision made during a game but only before play is restarted.

The referee controls who may enter or exit the field during the game.

- **Make sure your assistants and parents understand that they may not enter the field without the permission of the referee.**
- In the case of an injury the referee will stop play if the injury appears serious and will signal the coach to come onto the field.

The referee may take action against coaches and substitutes who "fail to conduct themselves in a responsible manner" to include cautioning or sending off a team official.

- Coaches and team officials can be shown yellow and red cards for inappropriate behavior. If the responsible team official cannot be identified the head coach will be shown the card. Coaches will not be sanctioned for misconduct by an unidentified player.
- Coaches sent off must leave the field before the game is restarted and may not communicate with anyone at the field directly or by electronic means for the remainder of the game.
- **Coaches will be held responsible for the behavior of their spectators** and will be requested to deal with their fans who do not behave in a responsible manner. The referee may stop play while the coach handles the problem and time lost for this will not be added. Repeated instances of irresponsible spectator behavior my result in the coach being shown yellow or red cards.
- ***Law 12*** *contains a listing of conduct by team officials that normally should result in a warning, a caution, or a send-off. Coaches should review this list on the IFAB website listed above.*
- ***US Soccer*** *announced a Referee Abuse Policy (RAP) effective March 1, 2025, that applies to all youth and amateur games.* **There are enhanced penalties for verbal or physical harassment or abuse of game officials and penalties are tripled if the official is a minor (green referee patch).** Coaches should review this policy in the material on the league website before the season.
- ***CalNorth District*** *VIII* ***has a referee protocol that prohibits coaches, players, and spectators from approaching referees during or after games to discuss decisions made by the referees during a game.***

Start/Restart of Play (Law 8)

Kickoff – Team winning the coin toss has a choice to kick off or to select the goal to defend in the first half. The ball is in play when kicked and "clearly moves" (does not need to move forward except for a penalty kick). Also, the player taking the kick may be on the opponent's side of the half line in order to take the kick.

Goal Kick/Free Kick in Penalty Area (Laws 13 & 16) – Ball does not need to leave the penalty area to be in play. Opponents must be outside penalty area until ball is in play. If kick is taken too quickly for opponents to leave the penalty area play continues.

"Trickery" may not be used between keeper and field player on goal kick or free kick to allow the keeper to handle the ball. *

Dropped Ball - Used to restart after an injury, infant running on the field, other stoppages not covered in LOTG, or when a ball strikes a referee and results directly in a change of possession, a promising attack, or enters a goal.

Ball is dropped by referee where the ball was when play was stopped and is in play when it hits the ground.

- If in the penalty area ball is always dropped for the goalkeeper.
- Elsewhere the ball is dropped for one player of the team that had possession or was about to gain possession if that is clear to the referee. Otherwise, the ball is dropped for one player of the team that last touched the ball before play was stopped.
- All other players must be 4.5 yards away and shall be cautioned for a violation.

A goal may not be scored directly from a dropped ball. *

Myth: Play starts or restarts at the referee's whistle.
Fact: Play starts when the ball is kicked and clearly moves, when it enters the field on a throw-in, or when it touches the ground on a drop ball. The whistle is merely permission to start play. *

Ball In/Out of Play (Law 9)
A team official, substitute, player temporarily off the field should not touch a ball while it is in play even if it is clearly heading out of bounds

- IFK awarded to opposing team, no other sanction

Offside (Law 11)
There are two components to an offside violation:
a) Position at the time the ball is played by a teammate
b) Involvement in active play

Offside Position
It is not an offense to be in an offside position. A player is in an offside position if at the time the ball is played by a teammate:

- He is nearer to his opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second to last opponent.

A player is not in an offside position if:

- He is in his own half of the field (except when he has come back across the half line from an offside position)
- or he is level with the second-to-last opponent
- or he is level with the last two opponents
- or he is behind the ball.

Involvement in Active Play means:

- Playing the ball
- Interfering with play
- Interfering with an opponent's attempt to play the ball (i.e. challenging for the ball)
- Gaining an advantage by being in an offside position (i.e. coming from an offside position to play the ball)

There is no offside offense if the player receives the ball directly from:

- A goal kick
- A throw in
- A corner kick

Myth: You have to touch the ball to be called offside.

Myth: If the ball is deflected or saved by a defender, you can't call offside on that play.
Fact: Offside may be called when a player in an offside position plays a ball that has been saved by a defender or has deflected off a player, match official, or the goal.

Fouls & Misconduct (Law 12)
A referee can issue a caution (Yellow Card) or ejection (Red Card) for certain fouls committed during play and misconduct that occurs when the ball is not in play and in some circumstances is required to issue a caution or ejection. Yellow and red cards can be given to players, substitutes, and team officials.

When a player commits a foul that denies an obvious goal scoring opportunity and a penalty kick is awarded:
The offender is cautioned (yellow card) if the foul was in an attempt to play the ball;
The offender is sent off (red card) in any other circumstance (e.g. holding, pushing, no possibility of playing the ball).

When two fouls are committed at the same time the referee is to punish the foul deemed more serious. This does not prevent cards from being shown for misconduct by any player involved.

When two cautionable offenses are committed close in time, even by the same player, both yellow cards must be shown.

An indirect free kick is the restart if a player is guilty of dissent, using offensive, insulting or abusive language and /or gestures or other verbal offenses. A player may also be cautioned or sent off as appropriate.

An offense committed off the field against a teammate or team official is punished by an indirect free kick on the boundary line nearest the location of the offense.

Throwing or kicking an object at an opposing player or team official is punished with a direct free kick.

Pushing should not be penalized unless it affects the movement of the player being pushed.

Handball - *Deliberately playing the ball with the hand or arm is a foul*, including handling by the goalkeeper when the ball is outside the penalty area. *Accidentally touching the ball with the hand or arm is a foul in the following situations:*

- ball goes into the goal "immediately" from hand or arm of an attacking player
- arm is in a position to make the player's body unnaturally bigger
- arm is not in a position justified by the position or movement of the player's body

The shoulder may be used to play the ball. The "arm" extends up to the bottom of the armpit.

Goalkeeper Handling Offenses

An indirect free kick is given at the spot of the foul (i.e. inside the penalty area) when a goalkeeper
- handles the ball a second time before another player has touched it
- handles a ball deliberately kicked to the keeper by a teammate
- handles a ball directly coming from a throw in by a teammate

A ball rebounding from a goalkeeper's attempt to catch or hold the ball or a failed attempt to clear the ball from the penalty area may be handled by the keeper a second time without committing an offense.

A corner kick is given when the keeper holds the ball for over 8 seconds. Time begins when the keeper has control of the ball. In U10 games time begins when the last attacking player retreats beyond the build-out line. The referee will us a hand and arm signal as the last 5 seconds are expiring. *

A corner kick is awarded when a goal kick is delayed over 5 seconds. The referee will use a hand and arm signal to show the five second time limit. Time starts when the ball is available to the keeper.

Free Kicks (Law 13)

Fouls and other violations of LOTG are punished by either a direct or indirect free kick taken at the spot of the violation. If the offense occurred off the field of play the restart is on the boundary line nearest the location of the offense. If the restart is a direct free kick on the boundary of the offender's penalty area a penalty kick is awarded. If a wall of 3 or more defenders is set all attackers must be 1 yard from wall until ball is in play.

Direct Free Kick (DFK) – goal can be scored directly from the kick. A DFK is given for handball and fouls involving contact with a player.

Indirect Free Kick (IFK) – ball must touch another player after being kicked in order to score a goal. An IFK is given for fouls not involving player contact and other technical offenses such as violations of the buildout line rules in U10 games or deliberately heading the ball in a game where heading is not allowed. The referee signals an indirect free kick by holding his arm straight up until the ball touches a second player or goes out of play.

An IFK may be given inside an opponent's penalty area in which case the defense may form a wall at the taking of the kick. If the IFK is taken from the 6 yard line the defense may form a wall on the goal line.

Myth: In order to score from an indirect free kick, the kicking team must touch the ball twice.
Fact: The second touch can be by a player on either team.

Myth: A teammate tapping or stepping on the ball allows the kicker to be the second touch and a goal can be scored.
Fact: The ball is not in play until it is "kicked and clearly moves". A teammate tapping or stepping on the ball so it wobbles but does not move from its place of rest does not put the ball in play and does not allow a goal to be scored directly by the kicker.

Myth: If the referee does not have his arm raised to indicate an indirect free kick, a goal can be scored directly from the free kick.
Fact: The kick must be retaken if the referee failed to give the indirect free kick signal and the ball directly entered the opponent's goal.

Penalty Kicks (Law 14)
Penalty kicks must be kicked forward. The kicker may "feint" during the run up until the ball is reached. The goalkeeper must have one foot on, even with, or behind the goal line, must not be touching posts, crossbar, or net, and net and posts must not be moving at time kick is taken. Goalkeeper must not delay or distract the kicker. Encroaching field players are only penalized if they affect the kicker, the goalkeeper, or if they challenge for the ball.

Penalty Kicks to Determine a Winning Team (Law 10.3)
Additional rules apply to a penalty shoot out to determine the winner of a drawn game, including:
- Kick is complete when ball stops moving, crosses goal line, or referee stops play.
- Kicker may not touch the ball twice.

If your team is in a tournament game that requires a winner, review the rules with your team before the game.

Throw-In (Law 15)
Player impeding thrower, including by being within 2 yards of thrower, is cautioned.
- IFK if throw has already been taken

Throwing ball to rebound off opponent without excessive force is not an offense
A throw-in is given to the opponent when the throw is delayed for over 5 seconds. The referee will use a hand and arm signal to show the five second time limit. Time starts when the ball is available for a throw.

SVSRA Referee Mentors

SVSRA has a number of experienced referees who serve as mentors to help train and provide advice to referees. They are also there to assist coaches and league officials and should be your point of contact if you have concerns about the referee program, the particular referee team working your game, or questions about the LOTG. You will be able to identify mentors on the field because they will normally be wearing a shirt or hat with the USSF Referee Program badge.

When present at a venue, a referee mentor will do the following:

I. Monitor the performance of referees and serve as the principal contact for coaches and all LEAGUE officers and staff regarding referee issues;

II. Change referee assignments as necessary to provide referees for scheduled games;

III. Serve as a Fourth Official under the Laws of the Game to advise referees of matters they may not have observed during the course of play, matters relating to the safety of the players and referees, and issues pertaining to persons in the technical area;

IV. Provide advice about the Laws of the Game to referees, coaches, players, and LEAGUE staff;

V. Serve as a referee or assistant referee when deemed necessary by the referee mentor.

Please Note: While a referee mentor may provide advice about the LOTG or game procedure to the referee team, in accordance with Law 5 a mentor will not change any decision of the assigned referee made during the course of play.

SVSRA is always looking to recruit new referees. The minimum age for referees is 13 and adults are also welcome. Classes for new referees consist of online instruction in the Laws of the Game and referee procedure followed by a field session. The online instruction must be completed before the field session. Adults 18 and older must also complete a background check required by US Soccer Federation. Anyone interested in becoming a referee can contact a Referee Mentor at the field for information or go to www.cnra.net/new-referee for information, class dates and locations, and class registration.