

# SOUTHWESTERN YOUTH ASSOCIATION (SYA)

## RECREATIONAL SOCCER MODIFICATIONS TO THE IFAB 2025/26 LAWS OF THE GAME – UNDER 16 (U16) AGE GROUP – NATIONAL CAPITAL SOCCER LEAGUE (NCSL REC)

Updated: March 31, 2026

SYA recreational league soccer for the National Capital Soccer League recreational program (NCSL REC) Under 16 (U16) age group is played in accordance with the [International Football Association Board \(IFAB\) 2025/26 Laws of the Game](#), except as modified in this document. Some modifications have been made to the Laws for consistency with [NCSL REC rules](#). In case of conflict, NCSL REC rules should be followed.

### LAW 1 – THE FIELD OF PLAY

1.1. Dimensions. The field shall be 100-130 yards in length and 50-100 yards in width.

1.2. Markings. The field shall be marked as follows (see Figure 1).

- a. Distinctive lines not more than five (5) inches wide.
- b. A halfway line and center mark as defined in the Laws of the Game.
- c. A center circle with a ten (10) yard radius from the center mark.
- d. A goal area marked by two lines perpendicular to the goal line, ten (10) yards from the center of the goal (20 yards wide) and six (6) yards into the field of play, connected by a line parallel to the goal line.
- e. A penalty area marked by two lines perpendicular to the goal line, twenty-two (22) yards from the center of the goal (44 yards wide) and eighteen (18) yards into the field of play, connected by a line parallel to the goal line.
- f. Four (4) corner arcs with a one (1) yard radius.

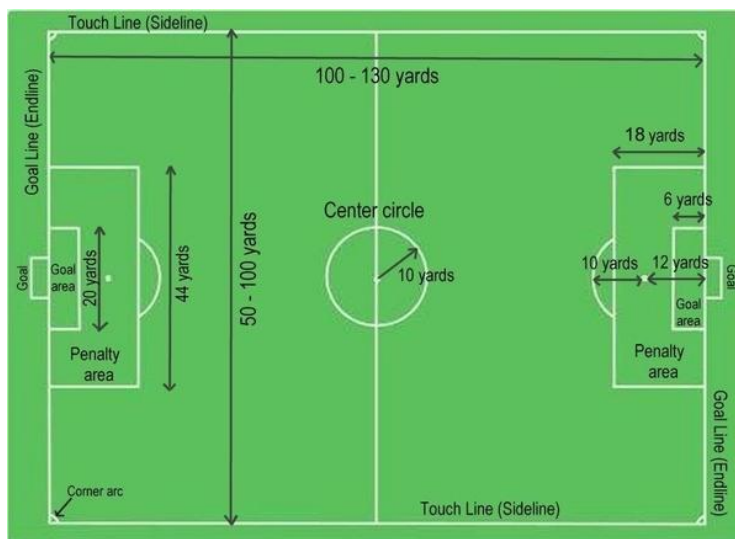


Figure 1. U.S. Soccer Field Standards and Markings for 11V11 Play

- 1.3. Goals no larger than seven (7) feet high and twenty-one (21) feet wide.
  - a. Goals must be inspected before every game to ensure they are properly secured, anchored, and/or counterweighted.
  - b. No game shall be allowed to start or continue if the goal is or becomes unsafe.
  - c. No one shall be allowed to hang on goal frames.
- 1.4. Spectator Areas. During the game, spectators must remain at least three (3) yards away from the field boundary lines (touchlines and goal lines). No spectators are permitted directly behind the goals. Wherever possible, players, coaches, and team officials should be on one side of the field and spectators on the opposite side (home team chooses side). The referee may adjust these restrictions in the best interest of the game, based on weather, heat, sun, shade, field conditions, safety, or other mitigating factors.

## **LAW 2 – THE BALL**

No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game.

## **LAW 3 – THE PLAYERS**

- 3.1. Rosters. Coaches are required to provide a paper copy of the official NCSL REC Team Roster to the referee before the game. Electronic copies of team rosters are not acceptable. If a team is unable to provide a paper copy of the roster to the referee, it is an automatic forfeit. If it is determined that the roster presented by a coach is not a roster generated by the NCSL REC, it is an automatic forfeit, regardless of whether all the information on the roster is correct.
  - a. Player Check-In. The referee conducts check-in using the official NCSL REC Team Roster. Each player is validated by stating their name and birth date. Players not listed or incorrectly listed on the roster are ineligible to play unless a NCSL REC official has validated the player as eligible to play. Coaches cannot interact with players during player validation.
- 3.2. Number of Players. Each team shall have eleven (11) players on the field, including the goalkeeper. Each team must have at least seven (7) players on the field, including the goalkeeper, to start or continue the game.
  - a. Grace Period. NCSL REC rules do not specify any grace period after the scheduled kickoff time for a team to have the minimum number of players ready to play. In such cases, referees may consult with both head coaches to see whether the game can be played within five (5) minutes of the scheduled kickoff time. If necessary, referees can shorten each half by equal amounts to play the game within the allotted time. If a team is unable to play, the opposing team has the right to request a forfeit or have the game rescheduled by the NCSL REC. If a forfeit is accepted, the teams should leave the field and the game shall not be played.
  - b. Play shall be temporarily paused by the referee when either team has fewer than seven (7) players on the field, for example, when a player is off the field being treated for an injury, having equipment issues, or any other reason. The clock shall remain running during any such pause, and the time shall not be added back to the total game time. The referee shall terminate the game if either team can no longer field at least seven (7) players.

- c. **NCSL REC Play Down Rule.** No team shall have more than two (2) additional players on the field than their opponent (see table below). The play down rule also applies when player(s) from the team with the lesser number of players temporarily leave a game due to injury, illness, or to correct equipment issues.

Team A (playing short-handed) # Players on Field (incl. GK)	Team B (must play down) Max. # Players on Field (incl. GK)
10	11
9	11
8	10
7	9
6	Game terminated*

\* or play is temporarily paused until Team A fields 7 players

- 3.3. **Goal Differential (Extra Players on the Field).** If any team scores four (4) goals more than its opponent, the leading team must remove one (1) field player prior to the ensuing kickoff. The leading team must continue to remove one (1) field player for each subsequent goal that increases the goal differential above four (4) goals, until the minimum number of players required to continue the game is reached (see table below). The leading team has the option of playing at full strength once the goal differential falls below four (4) goals.

Goal Differential	Leading Team # Players (incl. GK)	Trailing Team # Players (incl. GK)	Mercy Rule in effect?
0-3	11	11	No
4	10	11	Yes
5	9	11	Yes
6	8	11	Yes
7	7	11	Yes
8+	Game can be continued if both coaches agree AND both teams can field at least 7 players		Yes

- a. **NCSL REC Mercy Rule.** The trailing team coach has the option to terminate a game without penalty when the leading team has a four (4) or more goal lead. The game is terminated once the referee has been notified by the trailing team's coach that the mercy rule is being invoked. The game report shall state that the game was terminated early due to the mercy rule.
- b. The player removal process continues for every goal that increases the goal differential until the leading team reaches the minimum number of seven (7) players to continue the game. When the minimum number of players is reached, the leading team coach is allowed to terminate the game without penalty.
- c. If the game is not terminated and both coaches agree to continue the game and the goal differential continues to increase, either coach may inform the referee and opposing coach at any time that the game is being terminated without penalty to either team. For example, Team A leads 8-0. Team B wants to continue playing. At any time, either Team A or Team B can terminate the game if Team A continues to score more goals.

- d. The game is automatically terminated if either team can no longer field the minimum number of players (7).
- 3.4. Participation. All players in good standing should play at least 50 percent of the game. The club is responsible for defining what is considered good standing.
- a. SYA players must also be in good standing with Item 15 of the “Additional SYA Soccer Club Rules, Policies, and Procedures.” No SYA player shall play the entire game unless each eligible player has played at least 75% of the total game time. Coaches, not the referee, are responsible for enforcing participation rules.
- 3.5. Special-Needs Players. The referee shall not prevent any special-needs player from participating in a game unless there is a safety issue (for any player, not just the special-needs player). Special-needs players are subject to the Laws of the Game and SYA Soccer rules and policies, although the referee may provide special consideration if it is in the best interest of the game. There shall be no protest by any coach as to whether a special-needs player can play. Any concerns will be referred to SYA Soccer after the game has been completed.
- 3.6. Team Captains. Teams are not required to designate a captain. If they choose to designate a captain, the captain is not required to wear an identifying armband.

#### **LAW 4 – THE PLAYERS’ EQUIPMENT**

- 4.1. Uniforms. Players are expected to wear the approved SYA Soccer uniform (shirts, shorts, and socks). In the event of a color conflict, home team will change shirts or wear “pinnies.”
- a. Unique numbers on the uniform shirt are required for each player. Tape is not allowed to be used for uniform numbers unless explicitly stated on the NCSL REC Team Roster. Teams are allowed to make up to three (3) changes in the Jersey Number column on the NCSL REC Team Roster to address any uniform number issues. The opposing coach may agree to allow more than three (3) uniform number changes. Uniform numbers are not required on alternate shirts (for example, when one team must change shirts to avoid a color conflict).
  - b. Uniform exceptions may be granted by the referee, with the consent of both teams’ coaches.
  - c. Any player with blood on the uniform is permitted to change into an alternate shirt (as well as shorts and/or socks) that is distinct from the opposing team’s shirt color.
- 4.2. Footwear. Players must wear shoes that are safe and provide sufficient protection for the player’s feet. Examples include: soccer shoes with or without soft/molded plastic or rubber cleats, fitness/running/walking shoes, or similar types of athletic shoes. Shoes with metal cleats are prohibited. Toe cleats near the front of the shoe are prohibited. Open-toe or open-heel shoes are prohibited.
- 4.3. Shinguards. All players must wear shinguards as prescribed by the Laws of the Game. Shinguards must be worn inside the socks, and the socks should completely cover the shinguards.
- 4.4. Jewelry. Unless specifically approved by the NCSL REC for medical or religious reasons (Rules 4.5.e and 4.5.f), players must not wear anything that is dangerous. All items of jewelry (necklaces, rings, bracelets, earrings, rubber bands, watches, fitness trackers worn on the wrist, etc.) are forbidden and must be removed. Using tape or similar material to cover or conceal jewelry is not permitted.

#### 4.5. Other Equipment.

- a. Casts. A cast may be worn if it is wrapped in soft, protective material or other comparable types of covering (e.g., cushioning foam, plastic bubble wrap, etc.). The referee shall determine whether any such covering is safe and provides sufficient protection against injury to any player. The referee must ensure no player wearing a cast uses it in a manner that endangers the safety of any player.
- b. Orthopedic or protective devices such as leg/ankle/knee braces or stabilizers, finger splints, and intraoral devices (mouth/teeth guards), are permitted provided they are deemed to be safe by the referee.
- c. Eyewear. Players may wear eyeglasses or goggles for vision correction. Eyewear should be secured by a strap around the head and have unbreakable lenses and frames. The referee shall not disqualify a player wearing eyewear solely due to the lack of a strap and/or unbreakable lenses or frames, provided the eyewear is otherwise deemed to be safe. Players are not permitted to wear sunglasses unless required for vision correction and prescribed by a medical professional.
- d. Head and face coverings. Players may wear head and face coverings (e.g., hats, protective headgear, religious head coverings, molded face masks, etc.) that are permitted by the Laws of the Game and deemed to be safe by the referee. Exceptions may be made for inclement weather (e.g., soft hats during cold weather).
- e. Medical bracelets and necklaces are permitted provided they are deemed to be safe by the referee. Medical jewelry shall be taped to the skin with the medical information being clearly visible.
- f. Religious clothing/items. A player who is required to wear an item of clothing for religious reasons shall be allowed to play provided the item has been approved by the NCSL REC and is deemed to be safe by the referee. Religious jewelry is governed by the Laws of the Game just like any other jewelry.
- g. Items of adornment worn in the hair (e.g., ribbons, hair bands, headbands, "pre-wrap," etc.) are permitted provided they are deemed to be safe by the referee. Wood, plastic, metal, or glass beads, clips, barrettes, bobby pins, or any other similar device worn in the hair, woven into the hair, or used to cover the hair are strongly discouraged (unless otherwise allowed for religious reasons). The referee has the final say as to what items of adornment are safe and can be worn during the game.
- h. Body or facial make-up that taunts, demeans, incites, or degrades any person is prohibited.

### **LAW 5 – THE REFEREE**

5.1. Behavior of Coaches and Team Officials. The head coach (or assistant coach, when acting as head coach) is responsible for the sideline behavior of all players, team officials, and spectators before, during, and immediately after the game.

- a. The NCSL REC supports the SYA policy that the referee shall show yellow and red cards to coaches and team officials for inappropriate behavior. The referee does not have to show a red card before dismissing any coach or team official.

- b. If the referee determines the behavior of any coach or team official is inappropriate either by action or word or is detrimental to the orderly conduct of the game, the referee has the authority to dismiss the offending individual from the game. A prior warning is not necessary.
- c. If a coach or team official is dismissed, the game shall not be restarted until the offending individual has left the vicinity of the field. In practice, this means the individual must be far enough from the field to be “out of sight and sound” and unable to influence or further disrupt the game.
- d. Coaches or team officials who are dismissed shall have no further contact with the team (players or other team officials), either directly or indirectly (including using cell phones or other electronic devices).
- e. Exception: If there is no other responsible adult available to remain with the team, a dismissed coach will be allowed to stay in the vicinity of the team. In such cases, the dismissed coach is not allowed to communicate with players, team officials, spectators, or any other persons, just as if the coach had been “out of sight and sound.” Failure to comply with these restrictions may result in the referee terminating the game.
- f. The referee has the authority to terminate any game where a dismissed coach or team official returns to the field before the game is finished.

## 5.2. Behavior of Spectators.

- a. The referee shall not show yellow or red cards to spectators.
- b. The referee has the authority to dismiss any spectator from the vicinity of the field if their behavior is considered inappropriate either by action or word, or is detrimental to the orderly conduct of the game.
- c. The head coach, not the referee, is responsible for ensuring any dismissed spectator leaves the vicinity of the field in a timely manner. Spectators who are dismissed do not have to be “out of sight or sound” but must be sufficiently removed from the vicinity of the field and unable to cause further disruptions.
- d. The referee has the authority to suspend a game if order needs to be restored, or terminate a game if order cannot be restored, to eliminate any safety concerns for the players, team officials, or match officials.
- e. The referee has the authority to terminate any game where a dismissed spectator returns to the field before the game is finished.

5.3. Referees must file a complete report with the SYA Soccer Referee Commissioner, to include full details of any cards shown to coaches and team officials, within 24 hours after the game has been played. Details of any suspended or terminated games due to disorderly conduct must also be reported, regardless of whether any cards were shown. The referee may also be asked to provide information for reports submitted by SYA Soccer to the NCSL REC disciplinary committee.

## **LAW 6 – THE OTHER MATCH OFFICIALS**

6.1. Club Linesman. If requested by the referee, the home and away team coaches may provide “club linesman” to assist the referee with the ball “in and out of play” decisions. If requested by the referee, club linesman may also indicate which team has possession and the direction of the restart. Club

linesman shall not indicate whether a goal is scored, offside, fouls or misconduct, or any other decision not specifically authorized by the referee.

## **LAW 7 – THE DURATION OF THE MATCH**

- 7.1. NCSL REC U16 games shall be played with two equal halves of forty (40) minutes, for a total game time of eighty (80) minutes. The clock shall remain running during the game, with no time added to either half.
- 7.2. Halftime is five (5) minutes.
- 7.3. If the game begins after its scheduled kickoff time, the referee will reduce the length of each half accordingly so that there will be two equal length halves and the game ends on time. This includes games delayed due to weather, field preparation issues, unsafe playing conditions, players not arriving on time, or any other reason.
- 7.4. The referee, in consultation with both coaches, may shorten the length of each half due to weather, adverse playing conditions, poor lightning/darkness, or similar reason.
- 7.5. The referee may add a water/hydration break generally no more than one (1) minute long, or a cooling break generally no more than three (3) minutes long, to either half. The clock shall remain running during any such break and the time will not be added to either half. Throwing water/fluid containers to players on the field is prohibited.
- 7.6. Thunder and Lightning (30-Minute Rule).
  - a. Any time thunder is heard or lightning is observed, the referee shall immediately suspend the game and direct all people to leave the field and proceed with haste to the nearest shelter. There are no exceptions to this policy.
  - b. All people should remain in a sheltered location (e.g., cars, buildings, etc.) for thirty (30) minutes before resuming soccer activities.
  - c. The 30-minute waiting period begins each time thunder is heard or lightning is seen.
  - d. If field conditions become safe (e.g., thunder and lightning are no longer present), the referee should let coaches know if and when a game may be resumed.
  - e. Play should not be resumed after a weather-related suspension if doing so would cause the game to be finished after its scheduled time slot, unless resumption does not interfere with any subsequently scheduled game.

## **LAW 8 – THE START AND RESTART OF PLAY**

No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game.

## **LAW 9 – THE BALL IN AND OUT OF PLAY**

No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game.

## **LAW 10 – DETERMINING THE OUTCOME OF A MATCH**

No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game.

## **LAW 11 – OFFSIDE**

No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game.

## **LAW 12 – FOULS AND MISCONDUCT**

12.1. Any player may use their hands or arms for protection if the referee decides they are shielding their face, head, neck, or chest from impact with the ball. Referees should consider the speed, distance, and trajectory with which the ball approaches the player, as well as whether the player could have, but chose not to, avoid the ball. The referee has the final decision as to whether any such action is legally executed.

## **LAW 13 – FREE KICKS**

No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game.

## **LAW 14 – THE PENALTY KICK**

No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game.

## **LAW 15 – THE THROW-IN**

No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game.

## **LAW 16 – THE GOAL KICK**

No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game.

## **LAW 17 – THE CORNER KICK**

No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game.

**SYA U16 (NCSL REC) SOCCER MODIFICATIONS TO THE IFAB 2025/26 LAWS OF THE GAME  
MARCH 31, 2026**

Law 1	The Field of Play	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Field Dimensions: 100-130 yards long by 50-100 yards wide</li> <li>- Center Circle: 10-yard radius</li> <li>- Goal Area: 6 x 20 yards</li> <li>- Penalty Area: 18 x 44 yards</li> <li>- Penalty Mark: 12 yards from goal line</li> <li>- Penalty Arc: 10-yard radius from penalty mark</li> <li>- Corner Arc: 1 yard radius</li> <li>- Corner flags are not mandatory; substitute items must be safe if used</li> <li>- Goals: 7 x 21 feet</li> </ul>
Law 2	The Ball	Size 5
Law 3	The Players	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 11 v 11 – 10 field players plus 1 goalkeeper</li> <li>- Minimum of 7 players to start/continue game</li> <li>- No team captains are required on the field of play nor any player wear a qualifying armband</li> </ul>
	Team Rosters	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Coaches must provide <u>paper copy</u> of official team roster to referee before game can begin; electronic rosters are not acceptable. No roster = forfeit</li> <li>- <u>Referee must perform player check-in</u> using paper copies of each team's roster. Players not listed or incorrectly listed on roster cannot play unless NCSL REC validates eligibility</li> <li>- Uniform number changes on roster are governed by NCSL REC rules</li> </ul>
	Grace Period	None. Referees should use common sense for late-arriving players to determine whether a game can be started within 5 minutes of scheduled kickoff time
	Substitutions	Unlimited in accordance with NCSL REC rules
	Participation Rule	Every player must play at least 50% of game
	Play Down Rule	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- No team shall have more than 2 additional players on field than their opponent</li> <li>- Also applies when players are temporarily off the field due to injury or equipment issues</li> <li>- Does not apply when players are sent-off (red card)</li> </ul>
Law 3	Goal Differential (Mercy Rule)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 4 goals – leading team must remove 1 field player for each goal above 4-goal differential (until minimum number of 7 players to continue game is reached)</li> <li>- <u>NCSL REC Mercy Rule</u>: trailing team coach can ask referee to terminate game at any time if team trails by 4 or more goals. Both coaches can agree to continue game even if goal differential reaches 8 or more goals</li> </ul>
Law 4	The Players' Equipment	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Uniform numbers are required and must be indicated on shirt</li> <li>- Each player must have a unique number (not required for alternate shirts)</li> </ul>
Law 5	The Referee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- Head coach is responsible for behavior of all players, team officials, and spectators</li> <li>- Referees can show yellow/red cards to coaches/team officials but not to spectators</li> </ul>
Law 6	The Other Match Officials	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- If requested by the referee, home and away team coaches may provide "club linesman" to assist referee with ball in and out of play decisions</li> <li>- Club linesman may indicate possession/direction of restart at referee's discretion</li> </ul>
Law 7	The Duration of the Match	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- 2 x 40-minute halves (no added time) (total game time = 80 minutes)</li> <li>- 5-minute halftime</li> <li>- Referees can incorporate up to 3-minute water/hydration/cooling break in any half</li> </ul>
Law 8	The Start and Restart of Play	No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game
Law 9	The Ball In and Out of Play	No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game
Law 10	Determining the Outcome of a Match	No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game
Law 11	Offside	No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game
Law 12	Fouls and Misconduct	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>- All female players may use their hands or arms for chest protection</li> <li>- Any player may use their hands or arms to protect their head, face, or neck from impact with the ball (at referee's discretion)</li> <li>- Slide tackling is permitted</li> </ul>
Law 13	The Free Kick	No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game
Law 14	The Penalty Kick	No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game
Law 15	The Throw-In	No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game
Law 16	The Goal Kick	No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game
Law 17	The Corner Kick	No SYA modifications to the Laws of the Game