

The survivor's guide:  
U7 (5&6) Youth soccer rules addendum  
**Revision 2.1 – July 12, 2006**

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### **Introduction**

Congratulations! You are a coach or referee for the best kid's soccer league in the world! We are glad you can be with us to serve God's children this year – this will be the best season ever!

Soccer can seem like a daunting game – so much action, so many players, such quick ball movements! The rules must be extremely complicated, right?

Wrong! Actually, soccer rules are brilliant – there are only 17 LAWS (“Laws” is what soccer fans call rules) to the game, and they are very short and simple – they serve only to make sure that every player has the opportunity to make a fair play for the ball without undue interference from others, and also to give each team an equal footing.

The Laws for developmental youth games (U-7) are very simple – yet, it is important that the coach or referee understands even these simple guidelines, in order to make sure that the players enjoy the game, and look forward to coming back for more!

Let's take a look at the role and responsibilities of the coach, referee, players, and spectators during the game.

### **The coach**

One coach from each team is allowed on the field with their players. They are there to reinforce fundamental skills and protect players from fatigue / injury, so that the game is enjoyable for everyone. The coach may verbally communicate with their own players, and may gently guide players to their position (or off the field); however, they may not physically assist or lift players on the field. The coach must take care to stay away from the “goal area” on both sides of the field – that's too close to the goals! The players will get confused – it is better to stay out of the way of active play.

### **The referee (2 Options)**

1) One person – designated prior to the game, and agreed upon by both coaches – shall serve as a volunteer referee for the entire game.

2) Two persons – designated prior to the game, and agreed upon by both coaches – shall serve as volunteer referees with each doing the first 2 or last 2 quarters of the game.

The referee shall be equipped with a whistle – so that when play needs to stop, all the players can hear the whistle blow! The referee shall ensure that everyone is playing fairly and safely – and shall stop play when someone is not.

The referee also makes sure that teams are awarded free kicks when fouls are committed against one of their number, and shall determine when the ball has

completely crossed out of play (over the goal line or touchline), and award a throw-in, goal kick, or corner kick to the appropriate team.

The referee also acts as the official scorekeeper – and the official peacekeeper!

### **The players**

The players are the center of the action! They are responsible for having a good time – and that means making fair and safe plays at the ball, ultimately attempting to score a goal on the opposing team.

The most basic principles of the game apply here: Players should play the ball with any part of their body (except their hands and arms!), and with several children around, it is very likely that they will trip and fall over each other, and the occasional bruise will occur.

These things are okay – as long as they happen when the challenge is being made for the ball, and not directed towards the other player. When kicking the ball, if a player misses and kicks his opponent in the shins, this is not a foul – but when a player *carelessly or recklessly* kicks his opponent, without due consideration for the ball, this is a foul.

Players, therefore, should not trip, kick, push, hit, or jump on top of one another. However, vigorous and spirited attempts to play the ball are highly encouraged.

### **The spectators**

Mom, Dad, Grandma, Grandpa, and everyone else will come to see their little hero play! It is important that the spectators also enjoy the game – and this means that they will want to see safe and fair play, as well. In order for everyone to have maximum appreciation for the game, spectators should only say positive things on the sidelines – whether directed towards their own team, the other team, the coaches, the referee, or anyone else. It is important to maintain the right atmosphere for the children!

To avoid confusing players, spectators – or anyone else except the coach, for that matter – is not allowed any closer than six feet from the touchline, and also not allowed any closer than ten yards from either goal line. This prevents children from getting confused and distracted by cheering fans that are standing far too close to the action!

### **The rules**

Okay! Time to play some soccer! Remember, as mentioned previously, the referee's job is to maintain fair and safe play – not to blow the whistle at every opportunity. Consequently, soccer can be a physical game – the coach and referees should all work together to make sure the kids are having fun – but not getting hurt or upset, also!

### **The ingredients**

The Field, The Ball, and The Players – the First Three Soccer Laws, respectively! The league shall provide the field and the ball. The players – well, that's the team's job! There are seven (7) players allowed on the field for either team, one of which must be the goalkeeper. During any stoppage of play (ball goes out of play, for example), the coach may substitute players on and off the field.

The coach is given the authority to make any number of such substitutions; however, they are cautioned to do this as little as possible during game play – instead, try making changes during the breaks between periods. That will make the game move considerably faster. The only exception should be when one of the players is experiencing fatigue, is injured, or just plain doesn't want to play right now!

The referee, if absolutely necessary, may request that a coach limit substitutions during the course of game play, in the event that the game is being substantially slowed down as a result of all the substitutions.

### **The gear**

What would soccer be without the colorful jerseys? Each player must wear their team uniform, soccer shorts, socks, shin guards, and soccer cleats. In cold weather, sweatshirts / sweatpants can be worn underneath the standard uniform. Shin guards must be covered by the socks. Soccer cleats must be safe – no metal spikes, only molded rubber.

The goalkeeper must wear a jersey that is a different color from both teams. They may wear gloves to protect their hands.

Players cannot wear anything dangerous on the field of play – this includes any jewelry (watches, earrings, necklaces, etc.), any sort of splint / cast, or anything else the referee thinks could potentially harm the player – or other players!

### **Men in black**

No, Volunteer referees are not required to wear black uniforms – but they should still be treated with the utmost respect! They are out there to make the game safe and enjoyable for everyone!

The referee is responsible for supervising all aspects of the game, with an emphasis on timely start / finish times, maintaining safe and fair play, and keeping the game moving.

The referee is equipped with a whistle – when an important event occurs (foul, goal, etc.), the referee can blow the whistle to draw attention, stop play, and so forth. The whistle is the “voice” of the referee – soft and short whistle blows say “begin” or “kick”, while louder and longer whistle blows say “Stop!” or “Foul!”.

The referee should take care not to blow the whistle any more than absolutely necessary – even hand gestures are a viable alternative to certain calls, such as indicating when a throw-in may take place. Whenever the whistle blows, the game slows down, and an excess of delay can turn a lively match into a boring game in a hurry.

### **The clock is ticking**

Coaches, it is up to you to make sure you start the game on time!

One of the coaches may pray before the game starts. Then, the home team will be given notice that they will be allowed to kick-off first, and the visiting team will get their choice of goals to defend.

At the kick-off, each team is on their own half of the field, and the defending team (the team that is not kicking-off) is outside the center circle. When the attacking team kicks the ball forward, the fun begins! Now, each team tries to put the ball into their opponent's goal.

The game is divided into four quarters of twelve minutes each. Once the game is started, the referee will be responsible for keeping time and ensuring that the game moves along smoothly. The clock does not stop during quarters of play, except in the event of injury. The clock continues to run when a goal is scored, when the ball goes out of play, and during a goal kick or corner kick. There is a two-minute break between the first / second and the third / fourth quarters, and there is a five-minute halftime break between the second / third quarters. The referee will signal the end of the each quarter (and therefore, the beginning of the break), and signal the beginning of the next period (and therefore, the end of the break). A complete game, from beginning signal to the final whistle, should last no more than one (1) hour.

Each quarter begins with a new kick-off, and the teams shall exchange back and forth the chance to kick-off. At the beginning of the third quarter (first half), the home and visiting teams shall switch goals with one another, and play the rest of the game defending that goal.

If a player does not kick the ball forward during the kick-off, or if a defending player crosses into the center circle before the ball is kicked, the referee shall blow the whistle, explain to the players the right way to do it, and the kick will be retaken.

A goal cannot be scored directly from a kick-off – at least, not at this age division!

### **So many lines – so little time**

The touchline is the long sideline on each side of the field. The goal line is the shorter line on either end of the field, upon which the goal rests. The centerline is the line that divides the two sides in half. The center circle is the area that the defending team needs to keep out of before the kick-off. The goal area is the box attached to the goal line, in which the goalkeeper may use his / her hands to play the ball. The corner arc is the small wedge-shaped mark on each corner of the field.

Clear as mud, right? Don't worry – they all have their uses, and you'll get used to them.

They all have a special meaning. First, remember that the ball is not considered to have officially crossed over any line until the entire ball has completely traversed over the line. Therefore, even a ball that appears to be resting on the “out of bounds” side of the touchline may still be hovering over it, even if it is just one little piece of the ball!

When one team plays the ball completely over either touchline, the other team is awarded a throw-in. When the attacking team plays the ball completely over their opponents' goal line, the defending team is awarded a goal kick. When the defending team plays the ball completely over their own goal line, the attacking team is awarded a corner kick. These balls were all put out of play – this is how you “restart” play.

Throw-In: The throw takes place at the place where the ball went out of play. The throwing player must have both feet on the ground and outside the field of play. The player must deliver the ball over his / her head – with both hands – back on to the playing field. The player must face the field while doing so.

Goal Kick: The kicking player may place the ball anywhere inside their goal area (although the ball is normally placed on the line in a corner toward the field of play). The attacking team can stand anywhere they want; however, the defending team must stand outside the goal area, and at least five yards away from the ball. The ball is in play when it is kicked outside the goal area back into the field of play.

Corner Kick: The kicking player may place the ball anywhere on / inside the corner arc. The attacking team can stand anywhere they want; however, the defending team must stand at least five yards away from the ball. The ball is in play when it is kicked into the field of play.

Easy! The referee signals for throw-ins, goal kicks, or corner kicks by blowing the whistle and/or gesturing which side shall take the throw / kick. Since children at this age are still very unfamiliar with the rules, it is recommended that the referee verbally announce the decision and the team to take the throw / kick, and perhaps assist the player with placing the ball or finding the right place to throw from.

If the player does not take the throw-in correctly (only uses one hand, lifts feet, etc.), the referee shall stop play, instruct the player in what has gone wrong, and allow the player another chance. A second incorrect throw-in will result in a change of possession and a throw-in awarded to the opposing team.

If a goal kick / corner kick does not occur properly (defending team gets closer than five yards prior to the kick, defending team enters goal area prior to kick, attacking team kicks ball right back out of play, etc.), the referee shall stop play, instruct the players in what has gone wrong, and the kick is retaken. This will continue to occur until such time as the kick is properly taken. A goal cannot be scored from a throw-in, goal kick, or corner kick – at least, not at this age division!

### **But what happens if .... ?**

Of course, the above examples are not the only way play can be stopped. There are also goals, fouls, and ... the miscellaneous category, when four-year-old siblings run onto the field and aimlessly wander about, or Rover breaks free of his leash and charges after the ball, determined to do some scoring of his own!

We'll cover goals and fouls. For the other times – including when play must be abruptly stopped due to injury – the “drop ball” technique is used. This occurs at the point closest to where the ball was when play was stopped, but cannot occur inside a goal area.

One player from each team is allowed to compete for the ball. The referee drops the ball, and when it touches the ground – it is live!

### **He shoots – he scores!**

A goal is scored when a player fairly plays the ball completely across the goal line inside his opponents' goal area. The referee can blow the whistle to indicate a goal (or a hand gesture will also work), tallies the goal, and places the ball back at the center mark, where the team that was scored upon will now have the opportunity to kick-off.

A goal cannot be scored directly from a throw-in, corner kick, goal kick, or a kick-off.

In addition, a goal cannot be scored directly from a player taking a free kick.

Speaking of which ...

### **The Ten Commandments**

Oddly enough, there are ten particular fouls / violations that the Laws cover. In keeping with the theme – Thou Shalt Not: Kick, Trip, Ram, Push, Hit, or Jump On Thy Opponent.

The above six fouls call for some discretion from the referee. Again – we're dealing with a children's game at this level. The most important aspect of understanding the fouls is simply to make sure the game is safe and fair. Player's will no doubt fall and trip over other players in their attempts to get to the ball. This is normal and expected. The only time a foul should be called is when it is clear that a player did one of the above in a manner that is careless, reckless, or involving excessive force.

Careless means not looking where they were going, sticking their foot blindly to try to get to the ball (and tripping a player as a result), or similar behavior. They are probably playing the ball – they are just not being safe about it.

Reckless means being rough about playing the ball, kicking excessively hard at the ball for no apparent reason (and kicking a player as a result), or similar behavior. They may be vaguely attempting to play the ball – but they are placing the other player in danger, and they are not being safe or fair about their play.

Involving excessive force is easy enough to spot. This is absolutely no attempt to play the ball, and a blatant aggressive move against a player that will likely place them in considerable danger of getting hurt.

When one of the six fouls occurs in any of these three manners, the referee should blow the whistle to stop play. If the foul was careless, a brief word with the offending player to let them know what they did is all that is necessary. If the foul was reckless, the referee should address the player more formally, perhaps making sure the coach is there to assist the player in understanding what they did wrong. If the foul involved excessive force, the referee should draw the attention of the coach and request that the player be substituted out to take a "time-out" to calm down. The player should be told in no uncertain terms that what they did was not appropriate.

The other four fouls: Slide Tackling, Holding, Spitting, and Playing Ball With Hands – these are always a foul, as they are all considered intentional. NOTE: The "Handball" is only a foul when the player reaches out with the hand / arm to play the ball. It is

never a foul when the ball strikes the outstretched hand / arm by pure chance. REMEMBER: The goalkeeper can only play the ball with his / her hands inside the goal area – if they do so outside the box, they are committing a “Handball”, and will be penalized.

The referee has the authority – if absolutely necessary – to ask the coach to bench a player for any duration (including the rest of the game) for gross or repeated fouls and misconduct. The referee may request help from nearby NCSL Leadership, as well.

In any event: A free kick is awarded to the team upon which the foul was committed.

Free Kick: The kick takes place at the point where the foul was committed, except the attacking team may never take a free kick inside the defending team’s goal area. The ball is placed stationary, and the defending team must keep at least five yards away until the ball is kicked. A goal cannot be scored from a free kick directly – it must be touched by another player first.

A free kick is also awarded to the opposing team when a goalkeeper commits any of the following actions: Goalkeeper takes excessive time (ten seconds or more) to put the ball into play when holding with his hands, goalkeeper plays ball with his hands after having just released it from his hands (before having touched another player), goalkeeper plays ball with his hands after having received it directly from a throw-in.

A free kick is also awarded to the opposing team when a team commits any of the following actions: Dangerous play (this classifies as anything that looks dangerous – including kicking close to an opponent’s face, charging at ball with head lowered, etc.), preventing goalkeeper from releasing ball into play, preventing throw-in from being released into play, or anything else deemed “unsporting” by the referee.

### **Have fun!**

If you don’t, they won’t! Make it a great season with great memories for all! The success of the league depends upon you!