



## MERCY RULE AND GUIDELINES FOR UNBALANCED MATCHES

Mercy Rule:

In the event of a game becoming significantly unbalanced where one team has a lead of five or more goals the Mercy Rule will be applied at this point and the score will be recorded with a 5-point differential. This rule is in place to prioritise sportsmanship, fairness, and the well-being of young players. It's important to focus on skill development and enjoyment rather than lopsided competition. This rule aims to prevent demoralising experiences for young players and encourages a more positive and educational environment in youth soccer.

If a game is unbalanced (for example at a 3-point differential early on) implement the following guidelines:

- Switch players into unfamiliar positions (defenders into attack and vice-versa).
- Provide more playing time to players who pose less of a scoring threat (while still allowing all players to play at least one half).
- Require multiple passes before a goal can be scored (for example, three or more consecutive passes must be completed before a shot can be attempted).
- Allow players to shoot only with their non-dominant foot.
- Allow players to shoot only from outside the penalty area.
- Allow players to shoot only on a volley or with a head ball (suitable for older teams)

Remember that children can learn from adversity and recognize that lopsided games are teaching moments. Coaches do not have complete control over their players' attitudes and behavior but do have the ability to create a positive atmosphere in a game. All these measures must be introduced in a subtle way. Shouting instruction such as, "Stop scoring!" may humiliate the opposing team. Therefore, instructions should be passed quietly to your soccer players. For example, substitutes entering the field can quietly pass messages to the rest of the team.

It is not easy for a youth soccer player to be told "don't shoot" or "try not to score" when that is the fundamental key to the game they are learning and playing. Therefore, effective techniques to control the game should include skill challenges for the players requiring them to complete assigned tasks prior to shooting and scoring.

It is unfair to take talented players out of the game for succeeding, encourage the players to challenge themselves. Depending on the situation, these challenges should always make

scoring far less likely while also becoming more difficult. Finding techniques to limit big goal differentials also helps athletes to have a positive attitude toward soccer.

### **Don't Embarrass the Losing Team**

To provide all of the players with a worthwhile experience, youth soccer coaches, officials, and parents must all work together. Cooperate with the coach of the opposing side when conditions are less than ideal; a few words between the coaches can go a long way to prevent misunderstandings and to remedy the problem. In the end, how you play the game matters more than whether you win or lose.