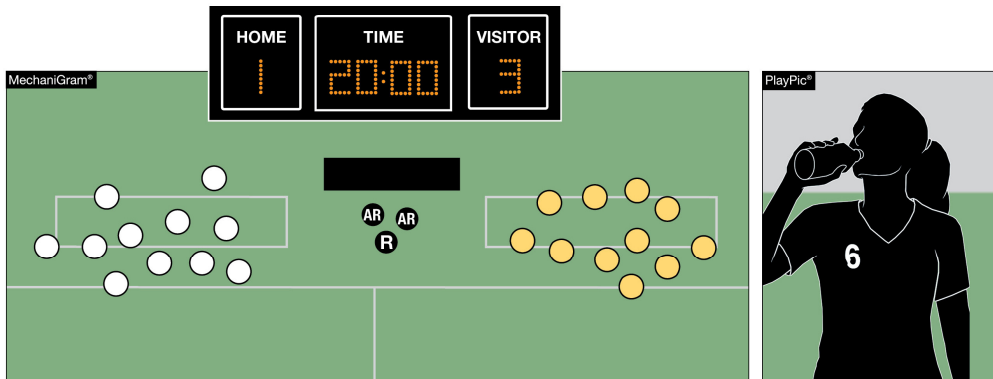




2025-26 NFHS Soccer Rules Changes

SUBSTITUTIONS

RULE 3-3-2c



In addition to being able to substitute players after a goal is scored or when a player is injured, teams may substitute players **when a game is temporarily suspended**.

Rationale:

The rule change eliminates redundant language and allows substitutions during a temporarily suspended game. In hot weather, state associations often authorize stoppages within a half for water breaks. Under this change, teams would now be permitted to make substitutions during these stoppages.

SUBSTITUTIONS RULE 3-3-2b2



Amended language clearly states that **once the appropriate health care official is beckoned by the referee**, an injured player (including a goalkeeper) must leave the game.

Rationale:

The rules change clarifies that if an official beckons a coach or appropriate health-care provider for any injured player, including the goalkeeper, that player must leave the field regardless of the reason the clock is stopped.

The coach may play shorthanded or substitute for the player. If the team elects to play shorthanded and it is deemed the player who came off the field, can play, then that player may re-enter at the next dead ball.

If the goalkeeper comes off the team must have a goalkeeper on the field. They can play shorthanded, but a member of the team must put on the goalkeeper jersey or there can be a substitute made.

REQUIRED UNIFORM RULE 4-1-2

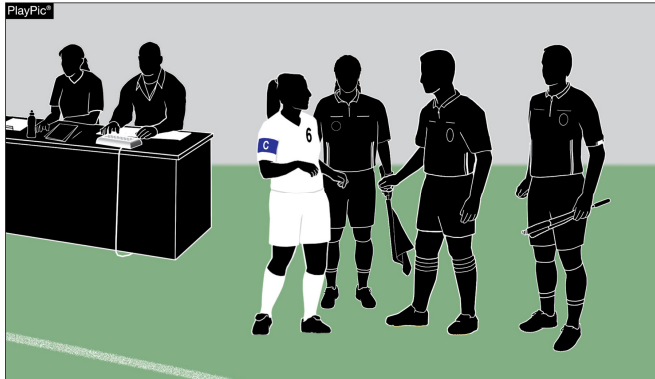


Amended language clarifies a player's number may be placed on the **front of the jersey and/or shorts** in addition to the back of the jersey.

Rationale:

This language supports the rule prior to the reorganization of Rule 4 and adds clarification to the overall interpretation that a number is required on the front of the uniform which may be on the jersey and/or the shorts.

INTERVALS BETWEEN PERIODS RULE 7-2-4



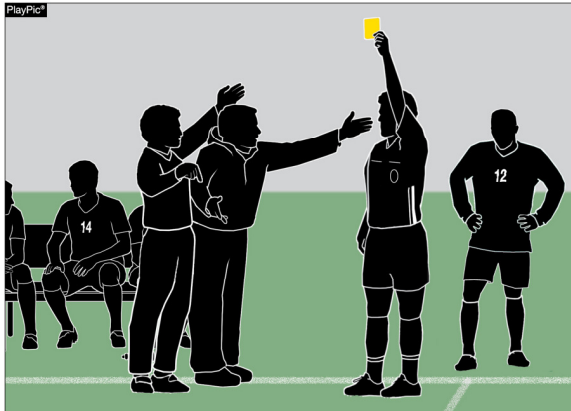
This time is for officials to talk amongst themselves and for coaches to work with their players.

No coach, player, substitute or other team personnel other than the team captain shall approach or speak to the officials during an interval between periods, unless beckoned by an official.

Rationale:

The time between periods of play is designated for rest for all participants, not for engaging with officials. This rule change introduces specific language and penalties for coaches or players who confront officials during these intervals, aiming to reduce unnecessary disputes and maintain a respectful game environment.

MISCONDUCT RULE 12-4-4b



The head coach is responsible for conduct of their team, inclusive of all bench personnel in the team area. The head coach may be warned, cautioned or ejected for misconduct committed by bench personnel.

Rationale:

To encourage and support sporting and positive bench decorum, the rule change reinforces the head coach's responsibility for the conduct of their team and bench personnel within the team area. It provides officials with additional tools, allowing them to warn, caution, or eject the head coach if any bench personnel engage in misconduct.

DEFINITIONS

RULE 18



Rule 18, which previously contained the rulebook's definitions, has been eliminated. The terms and definitions have been relocated to their respective rules sections within the rulebook. They also remain accessible via the index for quick reference. This change aims to reduce redundancy.

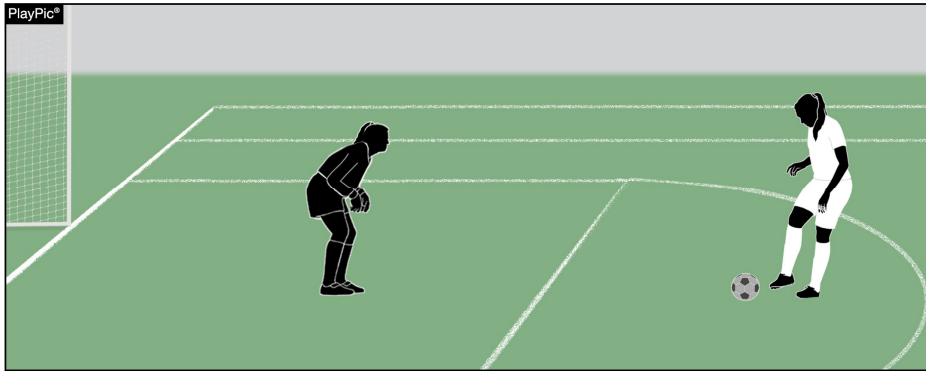
Rationale:

This change relocates definitions into their corresponding rules, streamlining the rules book by reducing redundancies and contradictions. The expanded index at the back of the book continues to serve as a helpful quick reference tool, while definitions were updated and aligned in context with appropriate rules



2025-26 EDITORIAL CHANGES

3-3-7 Substitutions



If a player is being replaced during a penalty kick situation, the substitute may not take the penalty kick.

Rationale:

Similar language was duplicated in four articles that outline the same restriction on a substitute's ineligibility to take the penalty kick if they entered the game before a penalty kick situation. All those provisions were moved and combined into a single article. Additionally, an exception in Rule 13 was also updated to be more generic as this principle applies to any substitute entering the game during a penalty kick situation.

REQUIRED UNIFORM

RULE 4-1-1c



A school's nickname and/or mascot are permitted on a uniform, in addition to the school's name, logo and/or player's name.

Rationale:

This language aligns all NFHS rules books language as to what may appear on a players uniform.



5-1-2 Officials

SECTION 1 GENERAL

ART. 2 . . . The jurisdiction of the officials shall begin on arrival at the field of play and its immediate surroundings (to begin official responsibilities), which shall be no later than 15 minutes prior to the start of the game and end with the officials leaving the field of play and its immediate surroundings.

- a.** The officials shall enforce the rules, and their decisions on points of fact are final.
- b.** The officials can only correct a decision so long as the game has not been restarted.
- c.** The officials retain clerical authority over the contest through the completion of any reports, including those imposing ejections, that are responsive to actions occurring while the referees had jurisdiction.
- d.** State associations may intercede in the event of unusual incidents that occur before, during or after the officials' jurisdiction has ended or in the event that a contest is terminated prior to the conclusion of regulation play.
- e.** Protests of NFHS rules are not recognized.
- f.** The officials shall not use any form of alcohol, tobacco, or controlled or illicit substance(s) for non-medicinal purposes beginning with arrival at the competition site until departure following the completion of the contest.

Rationale:

Breaks up the large paragraph of officials' duties and jurisdiction into bite size bits.



2025-26 POINTS OF EMPHASIS

HIGH SCHOOL ATHLETICS ARE EDUCATION-BASED



- High school athletics play a vital role in the overall growth of student-athletes, providing opportunities to develop physically, mentally, and emotionally.
- Soccer serves as a platform for building essential life skills such as teamwork, discipline, leadership, and resilience.
- Coaching priorities focus on fundamental skills, strategic gameplay, and decision-making while instilling respect for opponents, officials, and teammates.
- As the game evolves, a strong understanding and application of the rules are essential to maintaining fair and safe competition, making rule education a key responsibility for players, coaches, and officials.

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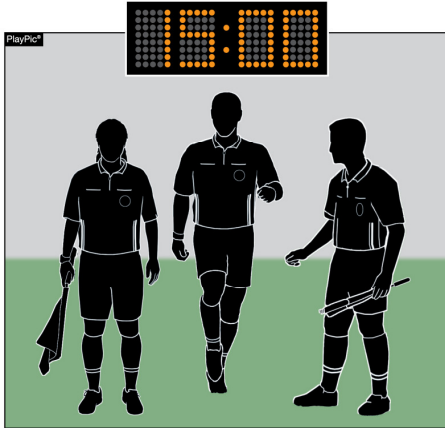
- A well-rounded high school soccer program should emphasize both athletic and academic development, reinforcing the importance of discipline, time management, and perseverance.
- Education-based athletics prepare students not only for success in sports but also for their future endeavors by teaching valuable life lessons through competition.
- Schools, coaches, and administrators must work together to ensure that high school soccer fosters growth, responsibility, and leadership, creating a positive experience that supports student success both on and off the field.

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COURAGE, CHARACTER AND CONSISTENCY



It is important for contest officials to conduct themselves in a professional manner that upholds the dignity of the position. This includes arriving on time, conducting the proper pregame, knowing and applying the **NFHS rules** properly, speaking to players and coaches in a professional manner, and completing any necessary postgame reports.

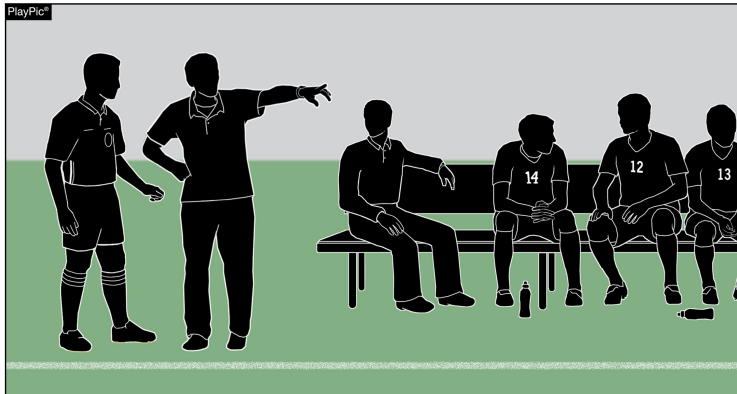
These qualities encourage the game to be managed fairly, effectively, and with integrity. Officials must have the courage to make difficult decisions, calling fouls equally for both teams without fear of backlash from players, coaches, or spectators. This courage extends to maintaining authority on the field, recognizing and firmly addressing any attempts to challenge their control or interfere with the game.

Character is reflected in professionalism and the official's personality they incorporate into their management philosophy, fostering cooperation and mutual support within the officiating team. By maintaining composure and a focused attitude, officials uphold the integrity of the game, ensuring their decisions are based on the rules within the spirit of the game, rather than external pressures or emotions.

Consistency ties these attributes together, ensuring officials apply the rules uniformly and fairly throughout the game. Players and coaches expect predictability from officials in decision-making, which reinforces trust in the official's authority. An official who applies the rules consistently, while managing interactions with confidence and conviction, fosters a controlled and respectful environment. An official who successfully combines these attributes bolsters acceptance when managing dissent and conflicts, while emphasizing calmness, direct communication, and resolution without unnecessary escalation.

Ultimately, courage, character, and consistency define an official's ability to manage the game effectively, uphold fairness, and maintain order, ensuring a positive experience for all participants.

TEAM AREAS AND BENCH DECORUM



Effective communication and game management are essential. Recognizing and addressing dissent early is crucial — public, provocative and/or persistent complaints must be dealt with decisively.

The official's role is to keep the game safe and fair.

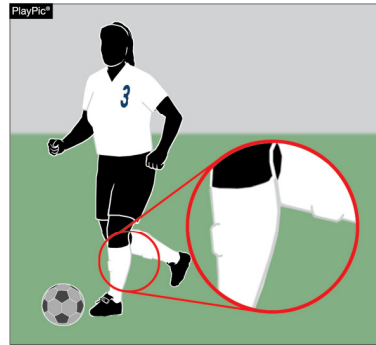
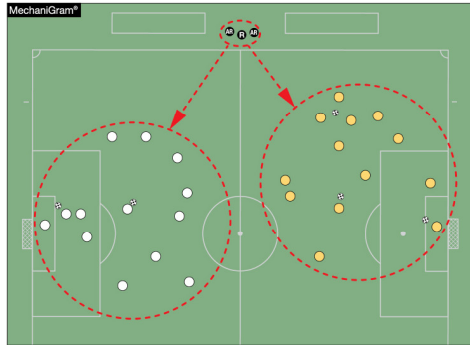
Coaches set the tone for their teams. Adult leaders must be champions of character.

Effective communication is essential for officials in maintaining control over the match, particularly when dealing with bench decorum and sportsmanship. An official's role is to keep the game safe, fair, and fun, which requires adapting to the level of play and responding to game situations as they develop.

High school soccer is an extension of the classroom, meaning officials must uphold the highest standards of professionalism, composure, and integrity. By setting a respectful tone, referees can prevent escalation and unnecessary conflict. Recognizing and addressing dissent early is crucial—while emotional reactions can be ignored, public, provocative, or persistent complaints must be dealt with decisively.

Coaches and bench personnel set the tone for their teams, and poor behavior can spread if not managed properly. In education-based athletics, adult leaders must be champions of character. Bench decorum must be actively monitored, as unchecked misconduct from the team area can quickly influence players and spectators. The head coach has an obligation to manage their team's behavior. A firm but fair approach ensures that the game remains under control while demonstrating respect for all participants. Officials have tools to warn coaches and must take action to sanction misconduct when it occurs. Ultimately, head coaches are responsible for their team area, including assistant coaches and substitutes, and must be held accountable for any misconduct occurring within it.

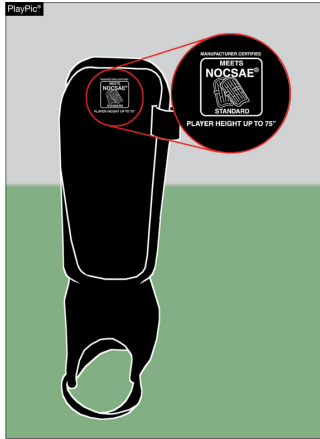
UNIFORM/EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS



Student-athlete safety is a priority, and that starts with players wearing proper uniforms and equipment. Specifically, **players are required to wear shinguards** suitable for their age and size. **This is a non-negotiable item in the NFHS**, not a player's or coach's decision.

Ensuring student-athlete safety is a top priority, and proper equipment plays a key role in maintaining a safe and fair playing environment. NFHS Rule 4 provides clear guidelines on required player equipment, including shinguards, which are essential for protecting athletes during competition. Given that high school players are still in their developmental stages, shinguards must be age- and size-appropriate, meeting NOCSAE safety standards. Each shinguard must display the NOCSAE seal, permanently marked on the front, indicating the approved height range for that model.

UNIFORM/EQUIPMENT REQUIREMENTS



Shinguards must have a NOCSAE seal and information about height requirement. The coach is responsible for ensuring their players adhere to this and referees must enforce the rule. Referees should inspect and, if needed, correct the issue in a professional manner. Officials should also be on the lookout for players with micro guards. **No one is to play at the NFHS level with illegal or improper shinguards.**

While coaches are responsible for ensuring their players are properly equipped before the game, officials take a proactive approach by observing warm-ups to identify any potential concerns. Rather than conducting formal equipment checks, referees use preventive officiating by maintaining awareness during pregame activities and addressing any noticeable issues. If a player's shinguards appear inadequately sized, officials should engage with the coach in a professional and approachable manner to confirm compliance.

By prioritizing communication and proactive observation, officials help reinforce safety standards while allowing players to focus on the game. A consistent and safety-conscious approach ensures that every student-athlete competes with the necessary protective equipment, contributing to a positive and well-regulated match experience.



Thank You

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