

## **Modified Field Hockey Rules for Lehigh Valley Youth Field Hockey League** **(updated 7/15/2025)**

**We ask you to use good sportsmanship and NOT to run up the score of your game. If your team is up by 3 goals, please use coaching strategies to slow down your team's scoring opportunities. See Power Down Strategies.**

**All PIAA Field Hockey rules according to the NFHS rulebook apply unless modified below in order to make the game more age-appropriate and safe. Please make sure your coaches understand the PIAA rules, as they may not all be highlighted below and should still be followed (unless otherwise stated).**

**We highly suggest each program purchase a current NFHS rulebook: <https://www.nfhs.org/activities-sports/field-hockey/>**

### **LEAGUE SPORTSMANSHIP EXPECTATIONS**

This league was created with the desire to grow the game of field hockey in the Lehigh Valley, while also providing an age-appropriate competitive environment for our athletes.

It is suggested the teams focus on learning and progressing as players and teams, more than the score of the game. We strongly suggest that the score is not kept at the first and second grade levels and the focus is on having fun.

1. Coach Behavior (See additional Coach and Spectator expectations document for additional details)
  - a. Keep the play fun and focus on learning.
  - b. For 1st and 2nd grade, only 1 coach allowed on the field at a time.
  - c. For all other ages, the coach should remain on the sideline (behind the 5 yard markers).
  - d. Role model and teach respect for officials.
  - e. Do not question an official's call, please speak to the official after the game if you have questions.
2. Spectator Behavior (See additional Coach and Spectator expectations document for additional details)
  - a. No smoking or vaping is permitted on or near the fields where children and families are playing or watching games.
  - b. No weapons are permitted around the playing field area.

- c. No grills or alcoholic beverages are permitted.
- d. No dogs are allowed at many of the fields - see individual field rules for specifics.
- e. No air horns, sirens, whistles or other loud items may be used on the sideline as the players cannot hear the official's whistle.
- f. Spectators may not yell/shout/question the coaches, refs, or players. If this occurs, the team who is associated with said spectator will be penalized.
- g. A 5 foot line should be made between the sideline and the spectators so that they can't be closer than 5 feet from the field – this can be created with the use of cones. No spectators are permitted behind the end line and goal area.

## **ELIGIBILITY AND ROSTERS**

- 1. It is highly encouraged for players to participate within the grade level that they are currently enrolled in school. If a team is short in numbers, a player may play up a grade level to assist, but it is never permitted for players to play down a grade level.
- 2. Anti-stacking rule - If a program has more than one team at an age level, those teams must be equally skilled and equally aligned according grade level (eg. no “all 5th grade teams” and “all 6th grade teams”). We highly encourage programs to use an evaluation process to create evenly skilled teams at each grade level.
- 3. This is a co-ed league, so both boys and girls are eligible to play.
  - a. In line with the FIH and NCAA rules, up to two male players may be on the field at the same time.
- 4. Players should get equal playing time, unless extenuating circumstances exist, such as injury. This is a recreational league and is meant to be inclusive of all skill levels.
- 5. Roster Sizes:
  - a. Grades  $\frac{1}{2}$  ,  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{5}{6}$  teams will play with 6 per side with no goalkeepers (no players should attempt to play as a goalkeeper or be in the cage). Optimal roster size is 8-10 players.
  - b. Kindergarten - to be determined by coaches but 4v4 is optimal

## **UNIFORMS AND EQUIPMENT**

- 1. Each program needs to supply their teams with a white colored and dark colored option for socks and uniform tops.
- 2. Home is always listed first on the schedule.
- 3. The Home team will wear white colored socks and uniform tops. The Away team will wear dark colored socks and uniform tops.
- 4. If you do not have different uniform colors, you must provide your own appropriate colored pinnie for your games, regardless of the other team's color. The socks

must always be the appropriate color.

5. In the event of adverse weather, the uniform top and socks must be visible over any undergarments.
6. No loose hanging jewelry or hats with brims will be allowed. If an official deems the jewelry or apparel to be unsafe, a player who is wearing these items will be removed from the game until the situation is corrected.
7. All Players are REQUIRED to have shin guards and a mouth guard that at least covers all of the upper teeth. Mouth guards must be visible - no clear mouth guards will be allowed.
  - a. Players should not play with or take mouth guards out of their mouth while on the field.
  - b. If a players mouth guard does not meet the above specifications (ie. The player has chewed it apart or it is hanging out of their mouth) they will be asked to leave the field for their own safety.
8. If a player wishes to use goggles, they must be certified specifically for field hockey.

## **FIELDS**

1. Field Set-up: See Field Diagram pdf
  - a. Field size: Length: 50 - 60 yds, Width: 25 - 30 yds.
  - b. All fields should have a team area and separate spectator area indicated by cones.
  - c. Parents should not be seated behind the team.
  - d. All teams must leave 5 yards between the field and any coaches or players - make sure all equipment is located behind the players
  - e. Use of lines, or cones, is necessary to provide the boundary between the field and the players/coaches. This should also be on the other side of the field where spectators are located - no one should be closer than 5 yards from the field.
  - f. Use of cones to show the substitution area is necessary
  - g. See field diagram at the end of this document for field dimensions and lines.
  - h. Smaller sized fields can be used for Kindergarten.
2. Cage Size: Mouth opening should be between 65 and 75 inches, no full sized cages.

## **GAME LENGTH & SUBSTITUTIONS**

1. Game Length: (subject to change)
  - a. Grades  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{5}{6}$ , games will play 10 minute quarters, 5 minute half-time, 2 minutes between quarters 1 & 2, 3 & 4.
  - b. Grades  $\frac{1}{2}$  will play 8 minute quarters, 5 minute half time, 2 minutes between

quarters 1 & 2, 3 & 4.

c. Kinder timing is TBD

d. \*This 2025 change in timing allows a built in break for coaches to substitute and speak to their team. Intended to limit amount of coaching from the side line.

e. The clock shall run continuously in all games - no time outs are permitted.

## 2. Substitutions

a. Unlimited rolling substitutions through the midfield substitution area are allowed, as well as at any break in the action, with the exception of penalty corners.

b. No substitutions are permitted on penalty corners, except for injury (injured player may leave on a corner; new player cannot enter until the corner is completed).

c. In the event of an injury, even during normal play, the oncoming player must wait for the other player to leave the field.

d. Substitutions must occur in the 5 yards from the 50 mark - fields should have cones to show where this is located. A player must not enter until the other player leaves the field.

e. Do not attempt to substitute a full team at the same time as this causes a delay in game. It is optimal to sub 1 to 2 players at a time, and go in shifts if you have a lot of subs.

## **GAME RULES**

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**Please make sure your coaches understand the PIAA rules, as they may not be highlighted below and should still be followed (unless otherwise stated). We highly suggest each program purchase a current NFHS rulebook: <https://www.nfhs.org/activities-sports/field-hockey/>**

1. Self-start will be used for all levels. Five-yard rules all still apply.

a. For self-start, where a player carries the ball, the ball must first come to a complete stop.

b. Restarts must take place where the foul occurred.

c. Players should pick up the ball when moving to where a free hit should be taken (they should not hit it to their friend).

d. All defenders should be 5 yards from the ball on free hits. If the defender is unable to get 5 yards prior to the free hit, then they must not make a play for the ball until the ball has moved five yards.

2. Long hit - The attacking team will be awarded a free hit 5 yards outside of the circle instead when a defender unintentionally causes the ball to go across the

end line. Play will be re-started with the ball 5 yards outside the circle that is in line with where it crossed the end line, and all procedures for taking a free hit will apply. If a defensive player intentionally hits the ball out of bounds, over the end line, a corner will be awarded.

3. Grades  $\frac{3}{4}$  and  $\frac{5}{6}$ , free hits into the circle (this includes any hit past the midfield line, on the offensive side of the field): Ball must be placed 5 yards outside of the circle and must move a full 5 yards prior to being hit into the circle - this could be done through a pass to another player outside the circle or through carrying the ball five yards. **No direct play or direct shots into the circle will be allowed.**
4. Grades  $\frac{1}{2}$  and  $\frac{3}{4}$ : There will be no driving (with hands together) permitted. The ball may be moved with a hard push or slapshot. Dangerous sticks (above the waist in the front or back) will be called.
5. Grades 5/6: Driving will be allowed as long as it is controlled and not dangerous. (A stick raised high in front or back when players are approaching will be considered dangerous.)
6. **Reverse chips will not be allowed at any age.** A reverse sweep, where the players stick is not dangerous, will be legal as long as it stays on the ground.
7. An advanced skill, such as a lift dodge, aerial, or flick is allowed as long as they are not considered dangerous by the official (and follow PIAA rules for play), and follow all applicable rules. This includes shots on goal. The defender should make sure they do not put themselves in a dangerous position with regards to a lifted ball.
8. Defenders are not to put themselves in a dangerous position. Coaches should teach their players not to put their body in front of the other player's stick or ball, and how to defend in the defensive circle correctly.
9. **Penalty corners:**
  - a. The defending team shall place 4 players completely behind their own end line and outside the cage opposite of the ball for the purpose of defending the corner attempt. The remaining 2 players are placed completely behind the midfield line. They may advance forward once the ball is struck.
    - i. Any players defending the corner that move prior to the ball being struck, will be sent to the midfield line and cannot be replaced on the corner.
  - b. The offensive team shall place 5 players outside the circle and 1 player shall insert the ball from the hash mark 1 yard from the edge of the circle on the endline. The ball must leave the circle in order for play to continue.
    - i. The player inserting the ball must wait for the umpire to blow their whistle before inserting the ball.
    - ii. The ball can only be touched once on an insert by the inserting player.
    - iii. Any offensive players that move prior to the ball being released will be sent to the midfield line.
  - c. **A penalty corner will be considered over once the ball moves 5 yards outside of the circle (or dotted line if the field has one).**

- d. A penalty corner that occurs prior to the finish of the prior penalty corner, continues the existing penalty corner.
    - i. And all existing rules apply regarding substitutions, etc.
  - e. Penalty corners will be played out after the final whistle.
  - f. Please note: no penalty corners for Grades 1/2 or Kinder play. Free hits going into the circle will be awarded for those situations.
    - i. Free hits for those age groups can go directly into the circle.
10. There will be no goalie. No defensive player is allowed to act as a goalie or camp squarely in front of, or obstruct, its own team's goal. A player positioned in front of the goal that is not actively marking a player (within a stick's length) or actively playing the ball will be considered as playing goalie. A warning will be issued first. For each subsequent infraction, a penalty corner will be awarded. This is for the safety of the players.
11. The ball must be under control before passing or shooting. Wild swings at rolling balls will be considered a foul for dangerous play. Multiple occurrences can be a card, especially if causing a dangerous environment.
12. Stick interference will be called if a player hits, holds, hooks, or slashes to an opponent's stick. This includes tackling a player from behind. After a warning this could result in a card as it is considered a flagrant foul.
13. **Unsportsmanlike conduct will not be tolerated at any time by players, coaches, or spectators. If this occurs, the official will warn the offending team's coach verbally. If the offense occurs again, the team causing the problem will be issued a penalty card as outlined in the NFHS rulebook. Please note, this will result in removing a player from the field for the designated amount of time. If a coach is red carded by an official, they must leave the playing area and cannot coach again that day. Please note, League repercussions may follow a coach red card.**
  - a. **Additional details regarding consequences are outlined in the Coaches and spectator rules.**
14. All rules are subject to change before the beginning of the season. We will notify the coordinators of each program of any changes.
15. Any rules surrounding safety will be at the discretion of the official on the field.

## **POWER DOWN STRATEGIES**

Beating a team by 5 goals in field hockey is sufficient to prove that you are the winning team. If you have a lead of 3 goals, it is time to implement power down strategies in order to slow down your team's scoring opportunities and emphasize higher level skill components. Please utilize the following strategies:

1. Substitute lead scoring players and place them in a more defensive position - please explain to them that they need to look to pass rather than score at this

point. Encourage leading scorers to pass to your less skilled players. They do not need to stay out the remainder of the game but shouldn't be in the position of scoring goals.

2. Rotate your more offensive minded players to defense and move your more defensive minded players to attacking positions. Learning to "hold" position, especially when you are uncomfortable there, is part of becoming a team player. At this age players should be learning all positions so this is prime opportunity to capitalize on learning.
3. Utilize a pass on free hits - no more self-start. This gives the other team the opportunity to intercept on a free hit and encourages the winning team to cut and get open for a pass. This is a great opportunity to practice a back pass to create space and switch direction.
4. Institute a 3 pass per possession rule. Must have 3 passes in the offensive half of the field before a shot is taken.
5. Utilize passes to switch sides of the field. This is an important skill that is not used enough and this is an ideal time to use it to increase passing.
6. You do not need to play down a player or take playing time away from your better players, just have them play a different role on the field.
7. Mandate Passing - Tell players they may not dribble, but instead must only pass the ball - this is ideally what we want anyway, but now is a good time to work on it!