

MHSA Soccer Behavior Improvement Plan

The MHSA Executive Board has implemented the following additional administrative penalties for soccer. These penalties are in addition to the ejection penalties outlined in the MHSA By-Laws, Article VIII, Section (2) — General Penalties and do not contradict the published NFHS Soccer Rules.

Component 1: Cards per Individual

A player or coach who receives a yellow card in two separate games for any of the Rule 12-5 yellow-card misconduct violations listed below will receive a one-game suspension. The following yellow cards are currently considered “team cards”:

Misconduct	NFHS Citation
Dissent	12-5-1d (yellow)
Attention seeking / taunting	12-5-1g (yellow)
Unsporting conduct*	12-5-1g (yellow)

**Only behavioral acts of unsporting conduct are subject to the Behavior Improvement Plan. Tactical or playing-rule violations, including Denying an Obvious Goal-Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO), Stopping a Promising Attack (SPA), persistent infringement, illegal equipment, delaying the restart for tactical reasons, or other cautions or disqualifications that result from the normal application of the playing rules rather than inappropriate behavior, are not considered qualifying unsporting behaviors under this plan.*

Interpretations

- If a player who already has one yellow card receives two more yellow cards in a single game, they serve a one-game suspension. This clears only two of the three cards; the third yellow card remains on their active count.
- After the first suspension, receiving a behavioral yellow card in two separate games, receiving a behavioral yellow card in two separate games (excluding cards issued to a coach for an illegally equipped player) results in a one-game suspension. Yellow cards accumulated during the regular season do not carry into the postseason. However, a suspension incurred in the final regular season game must be served in the postseason.
- In postseason play, any student or coach who receives a yellow card in two separate games for any reason (excluding cards issued to a coach for an illegally equipped player) serves a one-game suspension.

Rationale: Provides a mechanism for addressing major behavioral cards given to individual students or coaches.

Definition of a One-Game Suspension (Component 1)

- A student or coach who participates only at the sub-varsity level serves the suspension at the sub-varsity level.
- A student or coach who participates at both the sub-varsity and varsity levels serves the suspension at both levels, regardless of which level the yellow cards were issued at.
- A student or coach who participates only at the varsity level serves the suspension at the varsity level and may not participate in any sub-varsity contest until the varsity suspension is served.

Component 2: Cards per Program by Gender

If a program (boys or girls) accumulates ten cards for any of the violations listed below, the head coach will serve a one-game suspension at the varsity level. The violations include those identified under NFHS Soccer Rules 12-4 (Misconduct), 12-5 (Caution), and 12-6 (Ejection):

Misconduct	NFHS Citation
Dissent	12-5-1d (yellow)
Inappropriate or offensive language / gestures	12-5-1e (yellow) and 12-6-1c (red)
Attention seeking / taunting	12-5-1g (yellow) and 12-6-1e (red)
Unsporting Conduct*	12-5-1g (yellow)
Violent conduct	12-6-1g (red)
Spitting or biting	12-6-1e (red)
Fighting	12-6-1f (red)
Serious foul play	12-6-1d (red)

Rationale: This penalty provides a means of addressing systemic issues within an entire program. It makes the head coach accountable for behavior, regardless of the individuals who are receiving cards. In addition, it ensures that the administration is informed of violations that are largely preventable and often have little to do with playing rules.

Definition of a One-Game Suspension (Component 2)

The head coach will serve a one-game suspension at the varsity level and may not assist in a sub-varsity contest in any way until the varsity suspension is served.

Component 3: Cards per Game

If, during any single game, four or more yellow and/or red cards are issued to students and/or coaches from the same team for any reason (excluding a coach receiving a card solely for an illegally equipped player), the school will be required to submit a written response to the game report filed by the official. The report and the school's response will be reviewed by the Executive Director, and the school will be subject to penalties at the discretion of the Executive Director.

***Rationale:** This component provides a means of addressing those game situations in which regard for behavior becomes secondary to regard for winning. While unusual, there have been games in which one team has accumulated four or more cards issued because of behavior or playing-rule violations.*

Component 4: Sideline Barriers

Rules and Regulations, Section (34) – Crowd Control, item L, requires schools to install sideline barriers at all soccer contests. Except when contests are played in a stadium, barriers must be placed a minimum of fifteen (15) feet from the touchline on the spectator side of the field. If the facility layout or site conditions do not permit a fifteen-foot setback, the barrier shall be placed as far from the touchline as reasonably possible. A painted line on the grass does not satisfy this requirement and is not considered an acceptable sideline barrier.

***Rationale:** In consideration of spectator behavior as well as safety of the assistant referee, a standard minimum distance between the field and the spectators should be consistent for all high school contests (whenever feasible).*

Component 5: MOA Commissioner Action

The MOA Commissioner will establish officiating directives that promote consistent enforcement of the NFHS Soccer Rules while reinforcing the educational values of interscholastic athletics. These directives will emphasize proper application of the rules, sportsmanship, respect for all participants, and the educational purpose of school-sponsored competition. To support these objectives, certain behaviors that are inconsistent with the expectations of high school athletics will be prohibited. For example, officials, coaches, and students are expected to address one another professionally and should not address one another by first name while on the field of play.

***Rationale:** Reinforcement of the education-based message is key to the success of the previous components.*