# 2026

# Soccer Coaches Packet

# TABLE OF CONTENTS

*The Interscholastic* Soccer Program August Online

Soccer Bulletin

Rule Clinic Schedule

Rule 127-3-25 – Soccer

State Tournament Program Information (High School Only)

Entering Coaches Evaluation Online (High School Only)

Coaching Reminders

Practice Rule / WVSSAC Rule 127-2-13

Ejection Rule / Bench Clearing Policy

Soccer Rule Changes

Recruitment and Suspension Guidelines

NFHS Points of Emphasis 25-26

Spectator Support Information

# WEST VIRGINIA SECONDARY SCHOOL ACTIVITIES COMMISSION

**2875 Staunton Turnpike, Parkersburg, WV 26104-7219**

TELEPHONE: 304-485-5494 E-MAIL: wvssac@wvssac.org
WEB SITE: www.wvssac.org

# B U L L E T I N

**TO:** Soccer Coaches
**FROM:** Dan Comer, Assistant Executive Director
**DATE:** July 2026
**SUBJECT:** 2026 Soccer

**The 2026 season dates are:**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| **High School** | Season Starts | Week 5 | August 3, 2026 |
| | Date of First Contest | Week 7 | August 19, 2026 |
| | Season Ends | Week 18 | November 7, 2026 |
| **Middle School** | Season Starts | Week 6 | August 10, 2026 |
| | Date of First Contest | Week 9 | August 31 ,2026 |
| | Season Ends | Week 17 | October 31, 2026 |

1. Be sure that your principal or athletic director has completed the schedule online. Schedules will only be accepted online at WVSSAC.org (administrative page). Make changes to your schedule online and keep up to date. If you have questions, please call our office.

2. Please be advised that the required Coaches'/ Officials' Rules Clinics will be held at various locations (see enclosed sheet). **It is mandatory for all head coaches to attend one of the state-sponsored rules clinics. If your school is not represented at said clinic, there will be a $50.00 fine assessed. The WVSSAC Board of Directors has adopted a regulation that sport programs will be suspended if the head coach fails to attend the State Rules Clinic and the $50.00 assessed fine is not paid.**

3. **Coaches may submit a special report to the WVSSAC regarding issues or inconsistencies pertaining to officials.**

4. The WVSSAC will assign officials for the state tournament matches only.

5. Please make note of Rule 127-3-25.5 concerning soccer scrimmages.

6. The WVSSAC is actively involved in promoting good sportsmanship in all our sport programs. We encourage you to promote good sportsmanship by informing parents and athletes of the importance of supporting this concept and to review the sportsmanship rules located in the WVSSAC Rules & Regulations Handbook. Lead by example.

7. **NFHS Sports Medicine Regulations** –
    1) Insulin Pumps with a shunt must be padded and a physician's letter indicating the need for the athlete to wear the pump during the participation must be given to the officials prior to the start of the contest. Please contact Dan Comer, ***dan.comer@wvssac***.org

    2) Inhalers – A physician's letter indicating the need for the athlete to use the inhaler during participation must be given to the official prior to the start of the game.

8. **Mouth Guard Policy for Soccer** – The use of mouth guards is recommended for all practices and matches.

9. **Head and Neck Trauma Guidelines** – Head and Neck Trauma Guidelines – Refer to the approved Return to Play/ Concussion Protocol. RTP refers to return to play and return to practice. The appropriate health care professional will determine when a concussed athlete may return to participation.

10. **Use of Performance Enhancing Substances by Athletes** – It is the philosophy of the National Federation and the WVSSAC that students be encouraged and supported in their efforts to develop and maintain a healthy lifestyle. In promotion of safety and healthy lifestyles, the WVSSAC Sports Medicine Committee requests that coaches assume the responsibility of informing athletes that the uses of such substances should be discontinued especially during the times when dehydration may occur due to potential life- threatening consequences. The committee further encourages all athletic trainers to support coaches in promoting healthy lifestyles.

11. **Injury/ Participation Procedure at WVSSAC Championship Events** – Medical personnel (athletic trainers) will have the jurisdiction concerning the return of a player to competition after an injury. If a parent refuses to follow the determination of the authorized person, a release form must be signed. Athletic trainers will receive additional information at Rules Clinics.

12. **Suspended Game Rule** – As per Rule 7-1-3, a game suspended after completion of one complete half or more shall be an official game. If less than one-half of the game has been played, the game shall be restarted from the suspension of play.

13. Coaches are responsible for discussing the Bench Clearing Rule 127-4-3.7.7 with all other coaches and players prior to participation.

    Rule 127-4-3.8 Code for Interscholastic Athletes - Coaches are hereby notified to carefully review this rule with their athletes.

14. Officials will issue red and yellow cards. Issuance of a red card will require a Special Report to be sent to the WVSSAC.

15. Preseason Meetings: It is required that head coaches conduct preseason meetings for their players and parents. In addition to their own rules and regulations, coaches must address players on taunting, conduct and sportsmanship rules before the first regular season match. Coaches are also required to present information referencing Sudden Cardiac Arrest, AED's, Concussions, and Return to Play Protocol.

16. Coaches, players and spectators must note that officials will be asked to strictly enforce all taunting, conduct, and sportsmanship rules.

17. Head and Neck Trauma Guidelines-Refer to the approved Return to Play/Concussion Protocol. RTP refers to return to play and return to practice. The appropriate healthcare professional will determine when a concussed athlete may return to participation

18. All coaches are now required by law to complete the Sudden Cardiac Arrest online course ANNUALLY as well as the Concussion Course ANNUALLY. The Heat Illness Prevention must be taken once for new coaches. Links to the courses may be found on the WVSSAC Website.

19. Coaches must be trained in AED/ CPR. An AED must be available for all practices and contests.

**For additional information related to sports medicine issues concerning athletic participation, please click the "Sports Medicine" tab on the opening page of our website.**

# 2026-2027
# SOCCER RULES CLINICS

| DATE | LOCATION | TIME | COORDINATOR |
|---|---|---|---|
| July 26 | Interpreters Meeting/Rules Clinic WVSSAC | 9:00 am | Dan Comer |
| July 29 | John Marshall HS | 6:00 pm | Roger Simmons |
| July 30 | Huntington HS | 6:00 pm | Bruce Senior |
| Aug 3 | Woodrow Wilson HS | 6:00 pm | Andrew Pinnick |
| Aug 4 | Herbert Hoover HS | 6:00 pm | Richard Parsons |
| Aug 6 | East Fairmont HS | 6:00 pm | James Beckman |
| Aug 7 | Spring Mills HS | 6:00 pm | Glenn Simpson |
| Aug 8 | Frankfort HS | 9:00 am | Jay Hesse |
| Aug 10 | Make-up Clinic WVSSAC | 6:00 pm | Dan Comer |

**SCHOOLS:** The **Head Coach** shall be **required** to attend any sports rules clinics which are sponsored by this Commission in his/her coaching assignment. Schools failing to have a head coaching position filled at the time of the clinic will be required to have a school representative present at the rules clinic. An individual can only represent one school unless he/she is head coach at both schools. In a 9-12 school, both the varsity and 9th grade coach are required to attend. Failure to have a representative at one of the above clinics will result in a $50.00 fine.

***The clinic attendance requirement will not be granted if the coach or representative is late in excess of 10 minutes.***

# §127-3-25. Soccer (Boys and Girls).

25.1. Rules: Soccer rules published by the National Federation of State High School Associations are the official rules for all interscholastic competition unless otherwise provided by Commission modifications.

25.2. Organized Team Practice: Organized team practice will begin on Monday of Week 5 and the first contest may be played on Wednesday of Week 7.

25.3. Length of Season: The soccer season will end for each team by WVSSAC tournament elimination.

25.4. Maximum Team Contests: A soccer team will be permitted to play no more than 20 matches exclusive of sectional, regional, and state tournaments.

25.4.1. The maximum number of halves for a student in one season will be 50, exclusive of sectional, regional, and state tournaments.

25.4.2. A student shall not be permitted to participate in more than three halves during any one day. Any part of a half counts as one half. In an overtime game, the overtime shall be considered an extension of the second half

25.5. A high school soccer team is permitted to participate in a Soccer-o-Rama and one (1) preseason scrimmage or two (2) preseason scrimmages. See Glossary.

25.6. Individual students of a team must have practiced on 12 SEPARATE days, exclusive of the day of a contest, before participating in an interscholastic contest.

25.7. A student may not play or practice on a non-school soccer team while a member of the school team.

25.8. A student may accept awards only in WVSSAC sanctioned events during the season of that sport. These awards must be consistent with the items specified in the Awards Rule. Students may accept only this same type of award in non-sanctioned events outside the sport season.

25.9. *Middle School*- The above will apply for Middle School with the following adaptations:

25.9.1. Middle school teams may play 14 matches including tournaments sanctioned by the WVSSAC.

25.9.2. Organized team practice will begin on Monday of Week 6, and the first contest may be played on Monday of Week 9.

25.9.3. Middle school season will be completed by Saturday of Week 17.

25.9.4. The maximum number of halves for a student in one season will be 28.

25.9.5. Middle school teams are permitted one (1) scrimmage. See Glossary.

# COACHING REMINDERS

**Practice:** Team members must have 12 practices on 12 separate days - 5 days sports specific if participating in another sport during the same sports season. A student must have 5 days of practice if coming from one sports season into the next sports season without interruption of school days. Only students enrolled in the specific member school and a member of team is allowed to practice. Rule 127-2-13.

**Sunday Contests:** Contests or practice on Sunday is prohibited. Practice refers to any group or individual meeting to view films or activity associated with the activity of that sports season. Rule 127-3-14.

**Physical Exam:** Team members must have Athletic Participation/ Parental Consent / Physician's Certificate form completed and on file before beginning practice. Rule 127-3-3. (Must be on or after May 1st.)

**All-Star Competition:** Any student completing athletic eligibility at the end of current school year because of age or competition of semesters of eligibility may play in one (1) all-star game upon conclusion of the season without loss of eligibility for balance of year. Rule 127-3-4.

**Awards:** Team members can accept awards from school sponsoring a sanctioned event or the school. Wearing apparel, championship rings, equipment, athletic goods that exceed $100.00 are prohibited from any source. Rule 127-3-5.

**Out of Season Coaching:** Coaches may not promote, initiate, organize, supervise, or participate in out-of- season events involving students of the same sport as the grade level coaching assignment and preceding grade level except as specified in Rules 127-3-7.2 and 127-3-7.3. Rule 127-3-7.7.

**Amateur:** Any team member competing for money, receiving any award or prize of monetary value that has not been approved by the WVSSAC, capitalizing on athletic fame, or signing a professional playing contract in that sport is prohibited. Rule 127-2-11.

**Participation as Ineligible:** Any student who participates as ineligible may forfeit eligibility for up to 365 days. Rule 127- 2-12.

**Non-School Participation:** Participation is limited to school teams only with a few exceptions in individual sports provided the school principal approves and no school contests/ activities are missed. Participation includes but is not limited to, practice, fund raising, team pictures, tryouts, etc. Rule 127-2-10.

**Sanctioning and Travel:** A member school shall not enter a contest, tournament, or competition which requires sanctioning until it is approved 30 days prior to the event. Rule 127-3-16.

For complete details regarding the above regulations and those governing team memberships, scholarship, undue influence, age, semester, etc. refer to the **Rules & Regulations Handbook** or at www.wvssac.org. This is not a comprehensive list.

# West Virginia Secondary School Activities Commission

## 2026-2027 Championship Programs

Principals and Athletic Directors,

If your team qualifies for a State Championship or State Tournament, please submit the required program information by the applicable deadline.

To complete your school's program page, please email the following items **in one email** to **programs@wvssac.org**:

- Team photograph (JPG format)
- Head coach photograph (JPG format)
- Sponsor information, if a sponsor or business is purchasing your program

page. Please include your **school name in the subject line** of the email.

The cost of a team program page is **$125.00**.

In addition, schools should review and verify the accuracy of all information posted on the WVSSAC website, including:

- School information
- Coaches
- Team roster
- Schedule
- Results

**Important:** Rooming lists should be submitted in a **separate email** and should not be included with photo submissions.

**Deadlines for All State Tournaments:**

| | | | |
|---|---|---|---|
| Golf | **Oct.7 @ NOON** | Wrestling | **Feb.23 @ NOON** |
| Cross Country | **Oct. 26 @ NOON** | Girls Basketball | **Mar. 5 @ NOON** |
| Soccer | **Nov. 2 @ NOON** | Boys Basketball | **Mar.12 @ NOON** |
| Volleyball | **Nov. 6 @ NOON** | Tennis | **May 10 @ NOON** |
| Cheerleading | **Nov.13 @ NOON** | Track | **May 17 @ NOON** |
| Football | **Nov. 6 @ NOON** | Softball AAA/AAAA | **May 19 @ NOON** |
| Swimming | **Feb.12 @ NOON** | Softball A/AA | **May 19 @ NOON** |
| Girls Wrestling | **Feb.16 @ NOON** | Baseball | **May 28 @ NOON** |

*Please mail payment to:
WVSSAC 2875 Staunton
Turnpike Parkersburg, WV 26104

## §127-2-13. Practice

13.1. Only students enrolled and eligible to be listed on the eligibility certificate for that sport in the specific member school are allowed to participate in that school's practices. Exceptions
- Rules 127-2-3.2, 127-2-3.5 and 127-2-13.6.

13.2. The frequency and length of practice is at the discretion of each member school.

13.3. Member schools of the WVSSAC may practice on any day of the year with the exception of Sunday practice. Rule 127-3-14.2 further clarifies Sunday practice.

13.4. Individual players of a team must have practiced

13.4.a. on 5 SEPARATE days before participating in an interscholastic scrimmage.

13.4.b. on 12 SEPARATE days, exclusive of the day of a contest, before participating in an interscholastic contest. The following sport(s) is exempted from the provisions of this rule: golf.

13.4.c A student athlete who is absent from practice with their team for non-medical reasons, not under a doctor care, for more than fourteen (14) consecutive days must have the required full twelve (12) practice days before resuming participation in a contest. Students participating in football must follow the practice progression as set forth in Rule 127-3-23.

13.5. A student shall not be permitted to engage in interscholastic practice until that student has filed with the principal a completed Athletic Participation/Parental Consent/Physician's Certificate Form. Rule 127-3-3 further explains this required form.

13.6. A student academically ineligible may begin practicing 15 school days immediately prior to the date of regaining full eligibility. (All other ineligible students may not practice.)

13.7. If a student has established eligibility in a sport requiring 12 separate days of practice and is continuing to participate in that sport or no school days have lapsed from one sport to another sport in a same season, the student may participate in another sport of the season after completing five separate days of sport specific practice in the second sport.

13.8. Students participating in a sport(s) in one season must have practiced 12 separate days, exclusive of the day of a contest, to be eligible to participate in a sport in the next season with the following exception: the student has continued to practice or participate in tournament play without an interruption of school days. The student must complete five separate days of sport specific practice in the second sport.

# Ejection Rule / Bench Clearing

127-4-3 Code for Interscholastic Athletics

3.7. *Statement of Policy.* Insofar as unsportsmanlike actions by students, school administrators, officials, coaches, faculty members, and spectators are concerned, the identical items under the Sportsmanship Rule along with the following guides will be referred to by the WVSSAC:

3.7.a. The school whose coach behaves in a manner likely to have adverse influence on the attitudes of students or spectators may be provided with the choice of taking disciplinary action against that coach or having the entire school disciplined by the WVSSAC.

3.7.b. Any student who in protest lays hands or attempts to lay hands upon an official may be declared ineligible by the principal or by the WVSSAC for up to one year. Any student who strikes an opponent, coach, or a spectator during or following an athletic event may be declared ineligible by the principal or the WVSSAC for a specified period of time up to one year, depending on the seriousness of the act.

3.7.c. Any coach, student, or bench personnel ejected by an official will be suspended for the remainder of the game, match, meet or contest. The coach, student, or bench personnel ejected by an official will also be suspended in additional contest(s): the suspension will be assessed based upon ten
(10) percent of the allowed regular season contests or post season progression in a playoff tournament for each sport. Any tenth of a percentage from .1 to .4 will be a suspension equal to the whole number of the percent. Any tenth from .5 to .9 will be an additional contest added to the whole number. The suspension will include the number of indicated contests in that sport and at that level and all other sport contests in the interim at any level. A second ejection will result in the doubling of the suspension assessed for the first ejection. If an individual is ejected for a third time during the same sport season, the individual will be suspended from participating or coaching for 365 calendar days from the date of ejection. In accordance with rule 127-3-15.3, an individual ejected by an official may not appeal that ejection, or any subsequent suspension that is a consequence of the ejection by an official.

3.7.c.1. Any coach, player or bench personnel who has been ejected shall not be permitted to attend any contest(s)during said suspension. He/she shall not be affiliated with the team in any capacity. This would include but not be limited to transportation to or from the contest, meeting with the team before, during or after said contest. He/she is not permitted to be in sight or sound of said contest venue. Regular practice or team meetings not affiliated with a contest are permitted.

3.7.c.2. If suspensions are imposed to a student or bench personnel at the end of the sport season and no contest remains, the suspension is carried over to that particular sport until the next school year. In the case of a senior student, the penalty will continue to the next WVSSAC sponsored sport.

3.7.c.3. Any coach suspension that cannot be enforced during the sport season in which the ejection occurs will be enforced at the beginning of the next season of that same sport.

3.7.d. In case of spectators physically molesting an official, administrator, coach, or student, the school may be given one of two options: 1) file charges against the offender (s) or 2) accept discipline from the WVSSAC. Any person found guilty of W.Va. Code §61-2-15(a) Assault, Battery on Athletic Officials, while these individuals are working or as a result of working an athletic contest, shall be banned from all WVSSAC athletic events for a minimum of 365 days from the date of being found guilty. The school filing charges shall notify the WVSSAC of the incident and outcome of any legal action.

3.7.e. The school that does not lend complete cooperation in the host school's effort to promote the spirit of good sportsmanship may be disciplined by the WVSSAC.

3.7.f. A coach may be considered as committing unsportsmanlike conduct if they make degrading remarks about officials during or after a game either on the field of play, from the bench, or through any public news media, argues with officials, or goes through motions indicating dislike for a decision, protests the decision and actions of officials pertaining to the game during and after the contest, or detains the official on the field of play following a game to request a ruling or explanation of some phase of the game. If a coach feels he/she has a legitimate criticism of a penalty call or request for a rule interpretation, such criticism or request should be made in the privacy of the coach's office or the official's quarters and should be made in a courteous manner.

3.7.g. A student or team attendant shall not leave the bench area, team box area, or their designated off-field area during a game or contest other than during that time permitted by game or contest rules. A coach shall not leave the bench area, team box area, or the designated off- field area during a game or contest other than during that time permitted by game or contest rules unless a student altercation is taking place and the official requests assistance. Violation of this rule shall cause the coach, student, or team attendant to be immediately ejected from the contest, team penalized according to game or contest rules and that coach, student, or team attendant will not be eligible to participate in the next contest as outlined in§127-4-2.3.

3.8. Procedure. Unsportsmanship action must be reported in detail to the WVSSAC. A copy of the complaint must also be filed with the principal of the school involved. Each principal involved shall report such information or answers to the report as they deem appropriate. Upon receipt of all reports,t he Executive Director and/or the Board of Directors of the WVSSAC shall investigate and adjudicate such reports in accordance with the powers afforded in§127-1-8.6 and 8.7 and §127-1-12.2 and 12.3 of the Constitution. Penalties up to and including suspension of member schools may be made in accordance with §127-4.

3.9. The following defines the different types of disciplinary action which may be assessed for violation of any WVSSAC rule by a member school, administrator, coach, athlete or contest official:

3.9.a. *Warning.* A warning may be given by the Executive Director or Assistant Executive Director. It is official notice that an inexcusable, unethical, or unsportsmanship action has occurred, is a matter of record, and that such an occurrence must not be repeated.

3.9.b. *Probation.* Probation is a much more severe type of warning and may be expressed two ways: 1) a school, coach, student, or team attendant on probation is told that further violations will lead to a fine or suspension; and/or 2) a school on probation is on conditional WVSSAC membership but may engage in its regular schedule, sanctioned events, and all WVSSAC tournament play, providing a program is filed with the Executive Director of the WVSSAC indicating measures to be taken to alleviate this problem which caused the school to be placed on probation.

3.9.c. *Suspension.* A school/coach suspended from the WVSSAC may not meet in interscholastic competition of any kind with a WVSSAC members chool or a school that is a member of another state associated with the National Federation of State High School Associations.

3.9.d. *Fine.* A fine may be levied by the Executive Director.

3.9.e. Each of these sanctions (Warning, Probation, suspension and Fine) may be imposed or levied separately, or in a combination of one or more sanctions.

3.10 *Appeals.* All cases involving disciplinary action against member schools, coaches, students, team attendants, or officials may be protested in accordance with §127-6. However, disciplinary action imposed by an official, including disciplinary action that is a consequence of a decision by an official, such as a suspension for an additional game or games as a consequence of an ejection, is governed by rule 127-3-15.3 and is not subject to appeal.

3.11 Review of Ejections. Disciplinary action imposed by a contest official, including disciplinary action that results in a suspension for an additional game or games as a consequence of an ejection, is not subject to appeal pursuant to Rule **§**127-6. However, if the individual ejected believes the ejection was improper, he/she may request a review of the ejection by his/her principal. If the principal believes there is merit in the requested review, the principal shall complete and submit the WVSSAC Ejection Review Form within 24 hours or the next business day of the ejection to the Executive Director of the WVSSAC. If a review is properly requested, the WVSSAC will review the officials' special report, the WVSSAC Ejection Review Form, and such other information as the WVSSAC deems appropriate. Upon review, the WVSSAC Executive Director or the designated Assistant Director will either sustain the ejection and any consequent suspension(s), or will determine the ejection was improper and void any consequent suspension(s). A decision by the WVSSAC upon reviewing an ejection is not subject to appeal pursuant to Rule **§**127-6.

# Soccer Rules Changes - 2026-27

**4-4-1c: Clarifies that dark socks must be worn by the home team.**

**Rationale:** The two teams must wear colors that distinguish them from each other. The addition of the word dark in the home team sock clarifies that only the visiting team may wear white socks.

**4-2-7d, e (NEW): Offers guidance on appropriate tooth and mouth protector elements.**

**Rationale**: The overall purpose and function of the tooth and mouth protector is to protect the teeth, the mouth, and lips if it has a lip guard. Items that are added or included on the tooth and mouth protector that do not serve a purpose or function in the protection of the teeth or mouth should not be allowed. Also, items that are a part of the tooth and mouth protector that are a health risk to the individual wearing it should not be allowed.

**4-2-11a thru c NOTE 2 (NEW): Prohibits players from wearing audio or video devices while participating in a match.**

**Rationale:** No athlete participating in a match is permitted to wear any type of audio or video device to record, transmit, or live stream. This language aligns with other NFHS rules books. The use of electronic communication devices with players on the field is still prohibited. State associations may further restrict electronic devices.

**5-3-1f-j: Change updates the officiating procedures for issuing yellow and red cards by removing the term carded in favor of consistent terminology already used in the rules book; cautioned and ejected**.

**Rationale:** This aligns terminology by removing the term "carded" and using language found within the rules book. Explicitly defining that cautions correspond to yellow cards and ejections correspond to red cards provide clarity. Repeated or redundant language has been reorganized into new sub articles to improve readability and consistency across the rule. Additionally, the revision clarifies that any player who is shown a card, yellow or red, must still leave the field of play and that officials are responsible for directing the player to do so.

**8-1-2: Clarifies when a kickoff should be retaken, specifically when not all players are on their half of the field**.

**Rationale:** This change provides clarity on the differing restarts regarding kickoff offenses. This change explicitly addresses situations when the kickoff should be retaken because players were not properly positioned on their half of the field.

**12-1-2c: Emphasizes the importance of goalkeeper safety when in possession of the ball and improves clarity for consistent officiating purposes.**

**Rationale:** Overall, this change aligns the rule with consistent officiating practice, removes redundancies and improves clarity without materially altering when a charge is or is not permitted. The change consolidates language referring to the goalkeeper controlling the ball with their hands, where the simplified language refers to the full, shared definition referenced in a later section. This change emphasizes the core safety concept that remains unchanged: the goalkeeper in possession of the ball with their hands cannot be charged or challenged.

**12-2-3: Adds biting to direct free kick fouls.**

**Rationale:** Incorporates biting into direct free kick fouls.

**12-3-1 thru 3: Extends goalkeeper possession limit and adjusts the penalty when the time limit is exceeded. 4/30/26, 9:47 PM Soccer Rules Changes - 2026-27**
https://www.nfhs.org/sports/soccer/rules 1/2

**Rationale:** Reorganizes goalkeeper restrictions, extends goalkeeper possession limit from six to eight seconds and changes the penalty from indirect free kick at the point of infraction to a corner kick. It brings the rule in line with the spirit of the game and gives officials clearer authority and makes the punishment less severe when the goalkeeper clearly exceeds the time limit.

**12-3-5: Clarifies considerations of dangerous play.**

**Rationale:** Adds clarifying language to the considerations for dangerous play that include actions that prevent a nearby opponent from playing the ball for fear of injury.

**12-3-6 & 7 (NEW): Offers flexibility for officials when addressing verbal offenses by categorizing them as indirect free kick fouls.**

**Rationale:** By including "other verbal offenses" as an indirect free kick foul, this also gives more flexibility for officials when disciplining verbal offenses: they are now considered fouls at a minimum and may rise to the level of misconduct depending on the circumstances. New Article 7 then addresses any other reason for which play is stopped for misconduct; play is restarted with an indirect free kick.

**12-6-1b (1-4) (NEW): Adds language to provide additional guidance regarding DOGSO.**
**Rationale:** This change clarifies and simplifies the language surrounding DOGSO ejections by removing redundant wording, eliminating references to "attempted" DOGSO, since intent is not part of the decision, and aligns with previous rule wording within Rule 12. The updated structure provides four clear categories for denying a goal or obvious opportunity.

**13-1 thru 3: Reorganizes free kick restart procedures into distinct categories, clarifying when, where, and how free kicks are awarded and taken, while incorporating guidance for situations involving outside agents, off-field offenses, thrown objects, and unauthorized field entry or exit**.

**Rationale**: The revision of Rule 13 clarifies the procedures for restarts on free kicks by breaking the rule into distinct categories, outlining when and where free kicks are awarded, and detailing how they should be taken. It also specifies the correct restart locations and provides guidance for officials on managing these situations. Additionally, the update incorporates restart procedures for scenarios involving outside agents, offenses occurring off the field, thrown objects, individuals entering the field illegally, players leaving the field without permission, and offenses that occur outside the field of play.

**Rule 14: Encroachment is now penalized only when it clearly impacts the kick outcome, and goalkeepers receive a warning for a first offense rather than an immediate caution. Deceptive movements and stutter-stepping remain permitted during the run-up, but feinting after the approach is completed is prohibited.**

**Rationale**: The rewrite ensures that encroachment is now only penalized if the offense has a clear impact on the penalty kick. Goalkeepers will now receive a warning for a first offense rather than an immediate caution, acknowledging that such infractions often stem from mis-anticipation. Regarding the kicker, the revisions continue to allow for deceptive movements and stutter-stepping during the run-up; however, the change strictly prohibits feinting once the approach to the ball is completed. Finally, in rare instances where both the kicker and goalkeeper offend simultaneously, the kicker is penalized, as their illegal feinting is typically the catalyst for the goalkeeper's infraction. The penalty chart is also updated and reformatted for clarity.

# Soccer Points of Emphasis - 2026-27

BY NFHS ON MAY 29, 2026 | RULES, SOCCER

## Properly Marked Fields

Administrators, coaches, and officials must prioritize the proper marking of team areas and the maintenance of the 10-foot buffer around the field's boundary lines to ensure a safe and professional environment for student-athletes. The Soccer Field Diagram in Rule 1 requires a minimum of 10 feet of space beyond the field boundary lines for spectators, fencing, or any objects. Any safety concerns should be identified by officials and brought to the attention of administrators or coaches for remediation.

Team areas extend 10 yards from each side of the halfway line for a total length of 20 yards and set back 10 feet from the touchline. On multi-use fields, football lines can provide a visual landmark: team areas extend from the 40-yard line to the 20-yard line. By rule, team areas must be clearly designated and marked by a solid line. Defining these spaces is essential for maintaining bench decorum, as all coaches and bench personnel are required to remain within these restricted areas during the contest. Properly marked areas allow officials to effectively manage the sidelines and ensure that personnel do not interfere with the game or the activities of the officiating crew. When conducting pre-game safety inspections, officials should identify any missing team-area markings and work with administrators or coaches to place cones as temporary boundaries. Any violations of Rule 1-5-3 must be reported to the state association.

## Shared Professionalism and Bench Accountability

High school soccer serves as an extension of the classroom, requiring both officials and coaches to uphold the highest standards of composure and integrity. As adult leaders in education-based environment, everyone involved must contribute to a calm, respectful atmosphere that prioritizes student athletes. Professional communication should remain non-threatening and conversational, as raising one's voice, displaying frustrations or acting in a provocative manner only escalates conflict and distracts from the educational

athletes and maintain a respectful, professional, and safe environment for competition.

In situations involving misconduct, education-based principles require that interactions between coaches and officials remain brief, respectful and focused on facts. When a caution or ejection is issued, officials are trained to advise the head coach of the sanction using appropriate rulebook language, such as "unsporting conduct" or "dissent." Both parties share responsibility for ensuring communication remains professional. Officials must deliver information calmly and clearly and coaches must receive it without arguing, complaining or displaying unsporting dissent.

Any dissent or inappropriate conduct during these conversations should be addressed firmly and professionally by officials as maintaining order and respect is essential to the learning environment. Coaches are accountable for their behavior and must support the educational goals of high school athletics by modeling emotional control and sportsmanship. When both coaches and officials uphold these shared standards, the result is a safe, respectful and developmentally appropriate environment for student athletes.

**Managing Goal Celebrations**

Celebrating after scoring a goal is an integral part of the game of soccer. Reacting with joy is permissible provided it is not excessive and not accompanied by taunting. Officials should recognize that high school soccer is a players' game, and allowing student-athletes to celebrate success contributes to a positive educational environment. To this end, players are allowed to celebrate, and it is a reality that it takes some time to express emotions. Luckily, the clock is stopped after a goal and it also takes time for the defending team to regroup and collect themselves before their kick-off. Celebrations may include leaving the field momentarily, which is permissible so long as players make a prompt return to the playing field. Engaging in rehearsed or choreographed celebrations should be discouraged by officials. The line between allowable celebration and misconduct is crossed when a player or team prevents a timely restart by delaying excessively or by taunting their opponents or fans.

Illegal actions occur when celebrations become prolonged, excessive, or serve to focus attention upon the individual rather than the game. This is especially true if celebrating players ignore requests by the official to return to their half of the field. Any act that prohibits a timely restart is considered unsporting conduct and requires the official to intervene and issue a caution

vigilant following a goal, observing players to ensure that no taunting or other provocative gestures occur that could create a serious situation. By using preventive officiating to discourage time-wasting and holding players accountable for delayed restarts, officials maintain the flow of the game and uphold the spirit of safe and fair competition.

**Penalty Kick Offenses and the Concept of Impact**

For the 2026-27 season, Rule 14 has been revised to clarify that encroachment during a penalty kick is only penalized if the offense has a clear impact on the play. For the defending team, impact occurs if an encroaching defender clearly distracts the kicker or if they play a rebounding ball or challenge an attacker to prevent a goal-scoring opportunity. For the attacking team, impact constitutes clearly distracting the goalkeeper or if an encroaching attacker plays the ball or challenges a defender to score or create a scoring chance. If players from either team enter the penalty area or arc early but have no effect on the kicker, goalkeeper, or the immediate play, officials should allow the result of the kick to stand without penalty. Officiating these offenses on a penalty kick requires officials to judge the consequence of the encroachment alongside the outcome of the kick. Encroachment by the defending team is never penalized if the goal is scored. If the kick is missed or saved and the defense encroached with impact, the kick is retaken. If the attacking team encroaches with impact and a goal is scored, the goal is disallowed and the kick is retaken; if they encroach with impact and miss, the restart is an indirect free kick for the defending team. Goalkeepers who encroach and impact the kicker or make a save shall receive a warning for the first offense in a game, with cautions reserved for subsequent infractions. While kickers are permitted stutter-steps and hesitation moves during their run-up, once the approach to the ball is complete, feinting to kick the ball is an act of unsporting conduct, that shall be cautioned and is enforced on the first and every subsequent occurrence.

**Identification of the NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls**

The NFHS Authenticating Mark ensures easy identification of inflated and non-inflated balls used in interscholastic competitions for which the NFHS writes playing rules. All such balls are required to display the NFHS Authenticating Mark. The use of conforming equipment is essential to the integrity of contests played under the NFHS rules. This mark helps to promote

clearly communicates to administrators, coaches, and officials that these standards are being met.

Non-compliance with these requirements will be reported to the state association for potential penalties following the contest. Administrators and coaches play a pivotal role in making sure all inflated and non-inflated balls meet these specifications. They must instill the importance of proper equipment use through consistent reinforcement during the pre-competition certification meeting and throughout the season. Game officials must also remain vigilant and report any non-compliant balls to the state association office.

## Recruiting Regulations

If a coach is contacted by a student, his/ her parents, or anyone else regarding a student athlete transferring to his/ her district, the coach shall refer the individual(s) to a school administrator in the district immediately. A coach cannot discuss the matter with the student or anyone else for that matter and should not even listen when the subject is brought up concerning students transferring to his/ her school. School coaches working or coaching in outside school leagues and camps should be warned that a potential problem exists if a student later enrolls at the school where the coach is employed. The school administrator, after being notified by the coach that a prospective student athlete has approached the coach about possibly playing for his/ her school team, should contact the WVSSAC office immediately. Seriously or jokingly telling a student that you would like for that athlete to play for you, or your team shall be considered recruiting. Rules regarding individuals who engage in recruiting shall not be restricted specifically to school personnel.

Approved by the Board of Appeals October
1998

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## Guidelines for Suspended Coach/ Player

A coach or player who is ejected from a contest shall be suspended for the remainder of the game, match, meet or contest. An ejected coach shall exit the playing arena (out of sight and sound of the venue) as well as the team and bench areas. If there is not another person hired by the board of education to coach that sport or a professional from that school present to take his/ her place, the contest shall be forfeited. Because of supervision and liability, an ejected athlete shall sit on the bench and shall not cause nor participate in any further problems. Furthermore, a coach or player shall not be permitted to attend subsequent contests of the suspension. He/ she shall not be formally affiliated with the team in any capacity. This would include but not be limited to transportation to or from the contest, meeting with the team before, during or after the contest, wearing a uniform, or sitting in the bench or team area. Regular practice or team meetings not affiliated with a contest will not fall under this policy

## SPECTATOR SUPPORT INFORMATION FOR TOURNAMENTS

The following sport support information is provided for each specified sport. ONLY those items marked with "Yes" are allowed during tournament play (sectional, regional, and state). It is recommended that schools follow these regulations during regular season play.

Vocal cheering and support from team bench areas are encouraged, however, the items indicated on this page are for use by spectators. Schools must stress GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP when allowing any item to be used. All items must be for support of your team and not directed against the opponent.

Legend: BSK Basketball, BB Baseball, CH Cheer, CC Cross Country, FB Football, GO Golf, SB Softball, SC Soccer, SW Swimming, TE Tennis, TR Track & Field, VB Volleyball, WR Wrestling

| SPORT | BSK | BB | CH | CC | FB | GO | SB | SC | SW | TE | TR | VB | WR |
|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|---|
| Apparel Required<br>Upper/Lower Body Garments | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Balloons | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No |
| Banners on wall/<br>Stadium | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Cheer & Band Member<br>"Human" Tunnels | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Permanent Signage/<br>Advertisement<br>Senior Pictures | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Confetti/Paper Debris | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Hand-held Signs<br>(one holder) | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Inflatable Tunnels | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | Yes | Yes |
| Laser Pointer | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Miniature sports Balls thrown to crowd | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Noise makers (Horns, cow bells, bells, buzzers, clickers, etc. | No | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | Yes | Yes | No | No | No | No | No |
| Opening Prayer / Invocation | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Paper banners for<br>team to run through | Yes | Yes | N/A | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Pom poms<br>Sprit Towels | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Recorded/taped.<br>music over<br>amplifying system<br>(only pregame or halftime) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| School Band, Pep Band | No | No | No | No | Yes | No | No | Yes | No | No | No | No | No |
| Pressurized Air Horn<br>Electronic Bull Horn | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Megaphones (as intended) | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes | Yes |
| Cannons & Muskets | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| 50-50 Drawing | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |
| Reserve Seating<br>State Only | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No | No |

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