

COMMONWEALTH SOCCER OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION, INC.

From: The Commissioner
To: Commonwealth Soccer Officials
Subj.: **POINTS OF EMPHASIS Spring 2025**
Date: February 2025

To help us better focus on officiating high school soccer, below are points of emphasis and guidelines from the National Federation of State High School Associations, the Virginia High School League and CSOA. These guidelines are provided to promote **uniformity** and **consistency** among CSOA officials. These guidelines do not cover every situation and when in doubt please apply the following guidelines: ***first, player safety is our primary concern; second, we want to play the game; and finally, exercise common sense.***

2024-2025 NFHS RULE CHANGES

4-1-4d: Clarifies there is not a limitation on the color of tape or sock worn at or below the ankle.
Rationale: Athletes have the flexibility to modify socks within the existing regulations. Frequently, they remove the foot of one sock to layer another underneath, enhancing comfort or grip inside their shoes and fastening the top sock around the ankle. Any tape or similar material used above the ankle must match the sock's color, while at or below the ankle, any color is allowed. Referees are no longer required to oversee socks below the ankle.

Rule 12: Reorganized the rule for clarity and consistency.
Rationale: The Fouls and Misconduct rule has been revised to eliminate duplicate language and improve usability. The main changes involve reorganizing the existing rule for clarity. Sections have been rearranged to enhance ease of reference, and a new section addressing Stopping a Promising Attack (SPA) has been included. Certain general language in the rule has been modified to align with other rules codes. Section 6, Ejections, provides an ordered list of offenses by severity to allow associations more flexibility for determining post-game sanctions for misconduct. Additionally, an article has been added to clarify that all necessary conditions must be met for DOGSO (Denial of an Obvious Goal-Scoring Opportunity) to be applicable.

NFHS/VHSL POINTS OF EMPHASIS 2024-2025

Points of Emphasis

1. **Sportsmanship** – Scholastic soccer is a public event and an extension of the classroom. Work with the administrators, coaches, and players to set sportsmanlike tone. Acknowledge sporting behavior by the players. If things cross the line into demeaning words or actions of a racial, ethnic, or sexual orientation stop the game immediately. If the offender can be identified, it's a red card and ejection. If the offender cannot be identified or the crew did not hear the comments, stop the game, bring the coaches out, and clearly inform them that such behavior will not be tolerated and if it continues the game will be terminated. Such behavior has no place on the field or in the classroom.
2. **Wearable technology:** Permitted but must be under the uniform or on the shoe. Not allowed on the arm.
3. **Coaching and Team Area Decorum:** Temper tantrums, throwing water bottles, loud and repeated dissent etc. Don't tolerate it. Use escalation procedures
4. **Denying an Obvious Goal Scoring Opportunity:** All four elements must be present.
5. **Substitutions:** At midfield. Leave on bench side.

CSOA POE

Rule 1 Field of Play

- **Markings** – Field should be properly marked to include 11 yd hash marks. If field is improperly marked – note in game report.
- **Bench Location** – It is preferred that benches be on the same side of the field, however, for the regular season and district playoffs schools can choose to place them on the opposite side of the field – must be on a diagonal, preferably not on the half where the AR is located. Referees are not to have the benches moved unless it is to meet this diagonal requirement and ensure that the benches are approximately 10 yards from the touchline and the midfield line. Note the requirements on substitute entry/egress.
- **Coaching Box** (Team Areas) – Coaches boxes should be marked – however most schools will not mark them. If they are not marked get cones from the school/coach and use them to mark it. Box is 20 yds long, and it starts 10 yds down the touchline from mid-field. Bench can be anywhere in this area. Note: Team and coaching area should not be any closer to the halfway line than 10yds. This only exists in NF and college rules so coaches who also coach in USSF may not be familiar with this. It is analogous to the FIFA Technical Area. Use this to control the coaches.
- **Goals** – Must be secured – portable goals should be secured/sandbagged to make sure they do not move in the run of play or become a potential hazard to player safety

Rule 2 Ball

- **Balls** – Schools must provide a minimum of three properly-inflated game balls.

Rule 3 Players and Substitutions

- **Players** - Minimum number is 7 players to start and/or finish a game.
- **Number** - Remember that in HS substitutions are unlimited. Note: In a penalty kick situation, substitutions may only be made if there is an injured player. At that point, all reported substitutes may enter and one may be added to replace the injured player, however none of the substitutes may take the penalty kick.
 - **Note** – In the last five minutes of regulation and the during the second five minute overtime the clock will be stopped if the team that is leading makes a substitution.
- **Reporting Requirements** – players must report (present themselves at the mid-field line) prior to stoppage of play. Only occasions when substitutes may come directly off the bench are after a goal or to replace injured or cautioned players (but they still must be beckoned by the referee).
- **Injury Substitutions**
 - **Field Player** - If you have an injury and you stop time so the injured field player(s) can be attended to. Once you beckon on the coach/trainer that player(s) **must leave the field** and he/she cannot reenter until the next opportunity for a substitution (dead ball or normal substitution opportunity.) If the team elects to substitute for the injured player, the player cannot return until the next opportunity for his/her team to substitute.
 - **Goalkeeper** – If you stop time and beckon the trainer/coach onto the field to attend to the goalkeeper, **the goalkeeper must leave the field**. So, ensure the goalkeeper needs assistance prior to bringing personnel on to the field.

- NFHS does not make provisions for players to reenter during the run of play, therefore be aware that reentry is on a dead ball ONLY (3.3.2 Situation I).
- **Restart after injury** – If the stoppage in play was solely to attend to the injured player (no foul, not a throw-in, etc.) the restart is a drop ball.
- **Substitutes must enter from the officials' area (midfield between/adjacent to the bench). All substituted players must exit on their bench side/area unless injured.**

Rule 4 Player Equipment

- **Player Uniform** – Jerseys - **Home dark/visitors solid white**; shorts for both teams can be any color as long as they are the same for the team; Home socks must all be the same color and visitors must be white. Goalkeeper socks must be distinct from the opponent's. Any garment worn under shirts or shorts must all be of the same color (team) and length (player). Shinguards must provide adequate protection and must not be altered to reduce protection.
- **Tape or similar material on socks** – If tape or similar material (stays/straps) is applied externally to the socks above the ankle area, it must be of similar color as that part of the sock to which it is applied. (Home tape/stays/straps = dark; Away tape/stays/straps = white). **At or below the ankle color does not matter.**
- **Illegal Equipment** – If a referee notices a player with illegal equipment, the referee should order the player off the field at the NEXT stoppage of play to correct the problem. For the first instance of illegal equipment, the coach is cautioned. Second and subsequent cases, the player is cautioned. Be proactive and address before starting the game. **EXCEPTION** - if the referee determines there is an immediate, dangerous situation, then stop play.
- **Improper Equipment** - Same procedures as illegal equipment - **player may return at the next stoppage once they have corrected the issue and reported to the referee/AR.** (Note – There is no misconduct (caution) for improper equipment.)
- **Jewelry** - **NO jewelry!** Medical tags and medical bracelets are okay. Note - they must be taped to the skin Jewelry is **ILLEGAL** equipment!
- **PROTECTIVE FACE MASK** – Players who have a facial injury can wear a protective mask. Face mask must be molded to the face and a **doctor's release must be shown authorizing the player to wear the protective mask, if not available, player is ineligible for that contest.**
- **Concussion Bands and Soft Headbands** – Both are permitted and do NOT require a doctor's permission slip.
- **Other Head Coverings**
 - **Medical or cosmetic reasons** – Requires physician's statement and state approval. The wrap must be not abrasive, hard or dangerous to any other player and must be attached in such a way it is highly unlikely that it will come off during play. (This does not refer to a simple bandage/wrap applied by the trainer to a superficial cut but something more extensive and intended as a protective measure.)
 - **Religious reasons** –covering or wrap which is not abrasive, hard or dangerous to any other player and which is attached in such a way it is highly unlikely to come off during play are permitted. No VHSL approval required.
- **Hair Adornments:** Beads and similar adornments in the hair must be securely fastened to the head and not be a safety risk to the players.

Rule 5 Officials

- **Jurisdiction** – The jurisdiction of the officials shall begin on their arrival at the field of play and its' immediate surroundings, which shall be no later than 15 minutes prior to the start of the game and ends when the referee team leaves the field of play. VHSL Policy – no handshakes – leave the pitch – any issues observed after the final whistle put in game report and it will be addressed as a sportsmanship violation to VHSL.
- **Meet with Game Administrator** – This is normally the athletic director or one of their assistants. Know who they are and how to reach them if needed. They are the key person to handle incidents with spectators etc.
- **Referee Uniform** - The **primary uniform is the USSF yellow shirt**, black shorts, with two striped socks. Shoes should be primarily black. Everyone is required to wear the VHSL patch. Alternate uniform is the **GREEN** shirt. If all members of the crew do not have alternate jerseys at the game site, then only the referee will change. This should be addressed in pregame communication from the referee. Bottom line: all referees should match.
- **Pregame**
 - Inspect field and have game administrator/coach(es) make corrections. Note: Make the decision about the marking for the Team/Coaching area at this time in order to allow setup/cone marking to be completed prior to the game.
 - Inspect balls and instruct ball handlers (Ball handlers only required for Varsity)
 - **Game Rosters** - Game rosters are still required to be submitted prior to kickoff. **Note: Names can be added to the game roster AFTER the game has started. Bench personnel (coaches, trainers, and managers, etc.) must be included on the roster.** *Any other people inside the fence and not on the roster should be identified to the game administrator in order to let them know that you as the referee consider that they are their responsibility* **Goalkeepers may have two numbers, if they are also field players. CSOA Guideline: If you have a problem getting the team roster prior to the start of the game, note it on your game report. The schools determine the players on the roster, if there is a challenge by the opposing coach, it is a school issue and involve the game administrator to resolve.**
 - **Pregame Conference/Coin Toss** – **Head Coaches will** attend the Pregame Conference along with the team captains. Please take care of any administrative points to include sportsmanship, adverse weather plans, hydration breaks, ball handlers, etc. **Conducting a meaningful and thorough pregame with the head coach, team captains and referee team crew provides an opportunity to review important rule changes, ensure the players are properly equipped, discourage rough play, and emphasize a zero tolerance for the use of offensive/abusive language or gestures towards and opponent or an official. Note: At this time, you must get a positive indication from each coach that their players are properly and legally equipped.**
 - **Field Conditions** - The host institution (**AD/Game Administrator**) up until game time will determine if the field is playable. Once the game begins, the referee is the final arbiter to determine if the game may be safely continued based on field conditions. *CSOA Note – Please collaborate with coaches and AD prior to final decision. Be able to explain your rationale for the decision.*
- **During the Match**
 - **Weather Conditions** - Our major concern will be during a thunder/lightning scenario. As soon as thunder and/or lightning are noticed the referee will suspend the game and begin the sequence to determine when play can be resumed. *CSOA Guideline: **30 minutes per the NFHS/VHSL STANDARD** minimum time. After a suspension of play, coaches, referees, and game*

administrator should be consulted prior to resuming the match. Err on the side of safety.

Remember – The referee still has the final say on field conditions after a rain/lightning delay.

- **RISK MINIMIZATION (HANDLING CONCUSSIONS)** - Concussions are of increasing concern and need to be dealt with immediately. If a player may be injured due to any type of blow to head, STOP THE GAME /(TIME) IMMEDIATELY, and get the trainer on the field. Only let the player back into the game if the player is cleared by the trainer. Make sure that **THE TRAINER IS THE PERSON WHO VERIFIES TO THE REFEREE TEAM ABOUT THE PLAYER'S ABILITY TO RETURN TO THE GAME. IF THE TRAINER SAYS THE PLAYER MAY HAVE SUFFERED A CONCUSSION, THEN THEY CANNOT PLAY W/O DOCTOR'S PERMISSION.**
- **Spectator Issues:** Spectator issues are the game administrator's responsibility. If spectators are impacting the game or your ability to officiate, stop the game and get the administrator. Bear in mind that the administrator may have multiple events at the same time and it may take a few minutes to get them. **If the issue cannot be resolved, abandon the match. Again, all the facts in the game report.**
- **Post Game**
 - Leave the pitch immediately
Note: If a coach or game administrator asks for your names, please provide and then let me know in your game reports. Note: If the teams come over to you after the match to shake your hands, then please do so, but don't wait to give them the opportunity. If there is any unsporting behavior prior to the referee team departing the area, please note the incident in your game report, and the Commissioner will deal with the school and VHSL.
 - **Game Reports** – File your Assignr Game Report as soon as possible via the mobile app or home computer. Provide sufficient information on cautions and ejections. Head referee on the JV game is responsible for filing the report.
 - **REPORTING EJECTIONS** - Report all ejections **prior to 0600 the following day** via the appropriate section in the Assignr game report. However, if there is something I need to know about right away (fight, coach ejection, etc.) **CALL ME!!!!!!** Phone number is 703-873-7537 (voice mail) and e-mail to kevin.newmeyer@gmail.com

Rule 6 Ball holders/Scorer/Timer

- **Ball Handlers** – Minimum of two for varsity games. If none are available, have the home team provide two players. They must be wearing pennies or other distinguishing clothing.
- **SCORER/TIMER** - If the scorer and timer are not on the field, please arrange some means to communicate with them on timing issues. You can verify scoring and cards at the breaks between periods.

Rule 7 Duration of Game and Length of Periods

- **Timing** - All varsity games consist of two 40-minute halves. JV games are either 30 or 35 minutes. Fairfax County JV games are 35-minute halves. Prince William, Loudoun, Stafford, and Fauquier County JV games are 30-minute halves. (The location of the game determines the length of the half.) **CSOA Guideline: It is important to keep the JV games moving so the varsity games can start on time. To meet this goal, we will NOT stop the clock in JV games after goals, cautions/ejection, penalty kicks, etc. Injuries are the only reason for a clock stoppage, and we should keep them to a minimum. If teams arrive late, work with the Game Administrator and coaches to adjust times to keep on original schedule (i.e., shortening JV halves, shortening halftime, shortening on field Varsity warm up, etc.)**

- **Official Time** – Per VHSL guidelines official time will be kept on the field and the scoreboard clock will be turned off at the two-minute mark. (Note – there is NO EXTRA/ADDED/INJURY time beyond the 40 minutes, so the game time is controlled by starting and stopping the clock at the appropriate times, do not let time run and then add time.)
- **Tie Games** - All VHSL varsity **regular** season games ending in a tie **will be required to play two full five-minute overtime periods**. Time between regulation and the first overtime is 5 minutes and between overtime periods is two minutes.
- **Playoff Games** - All VHSL **playoff** games ending in a tie will use the two full five-minute overtime periods followed by two, if needed, five-minute golden goal overtime periods followed by kicks from the mark. Coin toss is required between the full overtime periods and the golden goal sequence.
- **Penalty Kick Tie-breaker**- VHSL rules state that, if a penalty kick tiebreaker is required to determine a winner, the coaches will designate five kickers to take the kicks. A coin flip will determine order of kicks. If still tied at the end of five then they must designate a second group of five kickers who will participate in the sudden death portion of the penalty kick tiebreaker portion (**NOTE: IN VHSL, THEY MAY CONTINUE TO USE THE SAME FIVE KICKERS OR ADD NEW ONES**). If you go beyond 10 repeat the above procedure to continue the sudden death. **NOTE: 1 - ORDER OF KICKERS DOES NOT MATTER IF NO ONE KICKS TWICE IN THE SAME ROUND OF FIVE. NOTE 2: A COIN FLIP IS REQUIRED BETWEEN EACH ROUND OF KICKS.**
- **Mandatory Clock Stoppages**
 - Injury
 - Penalty Kick
 - Caution/disqualification
 - Soring of Goal
 - Referee orders clock to be stopped.
 - **Last five minutes of second period and the second overtime when team in lead has a substitute beckoned on the field by the referee.**

Rule 9 Ball in and out of Play

- **Second Whistle** - A second whistle is required after a stoppage of play for a substitution, injury, caution, ejection, penalty kick, or when setting a wall or dealing with encroachment.
- **Official is struck with ball** – The ball is out of play if the ball strikes the official and the ball remains on the field if (1) A team starts a promising attack; (2), goes directly into the goal; or (3) possession changes. (Restart drop ball to team in possession, when the ball hit the official and stayed on the field. If the ball leaves the field, the appropriate restart would take place.)

Rule 10 Scoring

- **If a dropped ball enters the goal without touching at least two players, play is restarted with a goal kick if it enters the opponent's goal or a corner kick if it enters the team's own goal.**

Rule 12 Fouls and Misconduct

- **Handling** – NFHS rules make provisions for players using their hands to protect their groin, chest, and face areas. This can be done either in a dead ball (wall) or during the run of play. (**Note – ball to hand is not handling, hand to ball is handling, extending hands/arms deliberately beyond the body (commonly called making the player bigger) to impede the flight of the ball is handling.**)

- **Impeding** - Impeding is the deliberate act by a player, not in possession of the ball and/or not attempting to play the ball, of running between the opponent and the ball or using his/her body as an obstacle to slow the opposing player down or redirect the them away from the ball when not in playing distance of the ball so that the a teammate can gain possession or, so the ball will go out of touch or across the goal line. **NOTE - IF CONTACT IS MADE BY THE OPPONENT IN AN ATTEMPT TO IMPEDE, IT THEN BECOMES HOLDING, WHICH IS A DIRECT KICK FOUL!**
- **TAUNTING** - Taunting is defined as a word or act designed to incite or degrade the opposing players, officials, coach, or fans. *CSOA Guideline - If you have a taunting incident for which you stop play, the penalty is EJECTION and an IDFK from the point of the misconduct/incident. If you are unsure, but know something of an unsporting nature took place, then please issue a caution (misconduct/yellow) and get on with the game.*
- **Incidental Foul Language** - This is probably the toughest area to deal with from a standardization viewpoint because every referee has different tolerances. It happens at all levels because players get frustrated with themselves and the way the game is progressing, and they will sometimes spontaneously say things in the heat of the moment. If this language is directed at someone/anyone, **it is to be considered deliberate**, and therefore, becomes **abusive, offensive, and/or insulting language that must be dealt with by ejecting the offending party.** **There is no tolerance for demeaning comments on race, ethnic origin, or sexual orientation.** In the case of incidental language, at the referee's discretion, it can be treated as misconduct and cautioned especially if the language carries beyond the field of play. At a minimum, you **must** talk to the player and remind him/her of their sportsmanship responsibilities. In these situations, informing the player's coach is important for awareness and for gaining assistance in dealing with the player(s).
- **Bench Coach Misconduct** – **Head coaches will be held accountable for the conduct of their bench area; however, cards will be issued to the identified individual(s) who commit the misconduct (i.e., head coach, Asst Coach, player, bench personnel).** **DO NOT EJECT ANY TRAINERS – GET THE GAME ADMINISTRATOR TO DEAL WITH THE TRAINER IF THERE IS AN ISSUE.** *CSOA Note: Game Administrators deal with fan conduct (both home and away) issues.*
- **Player Ejection** – Player(s) ejected from a game **must** remain in bench area or under the direct supervision of a school official/coach.
- **Coach Ejection** – **Dealing with coaches is a skill. I expect a caution before an ejection.** VHSL is taking coach ejections seriously. I need the full facts surrounding the cautions and ejection. **EXCEPTION – Foul/Abusive Language or Referee Integrity.** Coaches ejected from game **must** leave bench area and have no further contact with the team.
- **LEAVING THE TEAM AREA DURING AN ALTERCATION** - Any player or bench personnel that leaves the team area without permission and enters the field of play during an altercation **will automatically be ejected.** *CSOA Guideline – get the coaches to assist you in controlling their team and helping on the field. Put a full description of the incident in the game report.*
- **Excessive celebration:** Scoring goals is exciting for the players and spectators. **In a rivalry or a tight game, expect the exuberance.** Get between the teams and be ready to herd the players and substitutes back to their positions for the kickoff. Discuss it in your pregame. Be mindful of taunting, celebration with teammates is one thing; demeaning the opponent is entirely different and shall be addressed. If you decide it is taunting, it is an ejection.

Rule 13 Free Kick

- **Free Kick** – Free kicks, except for a penalty kick, may be taken in any direction to put the ball in play which occurs when the ball moves.
- **Free Kick Awarded at Spot of Infraction** - Rule 12-8-1, 12-8-2, and 12-8-3 all prescribe penalties resulting from misconduct (red or yellow card). **THE FREE KICK WILL NOW BE TAKEN FROM**

THE SPOT OF THE INFRACTION. OFF THE FIELD INCIDENTS THAT RESULT IN A FREE KICK BEING AWARDED WILL BE TAKEN FROM THE LOCATION OF THE BALL AT THE TIME THE WHISTLE WAS BLOWN TO STOP PLAY.

Rule 14 Penalty Kick

- Stutter-step is permitted but the player must maintain continuous motion through the kick.
- **Substitutes are not permitted to take the kick**

Rule 15 Throw-In

- **THROW-IN** - The ball must enter the field of play. PENALTY – **If the ball does not enter the field of play, the throw-in is awarded to the opponent.**

ASSIGNOR NOTES

- **Assignments** - Assignments will be made via Assignr based on the availability you put into the system under your account at (<https://commonwealthsoccer.assignr.com/>). **Emergencies** - If you cannot make a game, please notify the assigner ASAP (PREFERABLY VIA PHONE) so he can find a replacement. Game day turnbacks MUST be by phone call, then by text; never by email.
- **Switching Assignments** - Please do **NOT** switch assignments with another official without checking with the assigner first. Injuries that occur during a game are the sole exception. Report a change made under these circumstances immediately after via text, then in your game report.
- **No Shows** - If there is a no show for a game the available referee(s) must notify the assigner as soon as you can. If it is a JV game, then we may be able to get a substitute for the varsity game.
- **Game Cancellations** – **ANTICIPATE** the weather and don't relax on fair weather days. Schools sometimes cancel games based on other priorities—busses, lights, in-school emergencies. **ALWAYS CHECK** your **e-mail** and **Assignr** for cancellation information first. Call the schools second. Schools are moving to a web-based notification procedure for parents, officials and other interested persons. If you do not have access to the web and there is no hot line number, call/text the assigner.
- **CONTACT YOUR PARTNERS** – **THIS IS A MANDATORY REQUIREMENT.** Head referee for JV games and the center referee for Varsity games please contact your partners at least 24 hours prior to the game. AR's if you don't hear from the head or center referee **PLEASE CONTACT THEM.** There are no exceptions to this requirement.

VHSL
Officials Code of Ethics

- Officials at an interscholastic athletic event are participants in the educational development of high school students. As such, they must exercise a high level of self-discipline, independence, and responsibility. The purpose of this Code is to establish guidelines for ethical standards of conduct for all interscholastic officials.
- Officials shall master both the rules of the game and the mechanics necessary to enforce the rules and shall exercise authority in an impartial, firm, and controlled manner.
- Officials shall work with each other and their state association in a constructive and cooperative manner.
- Officials shall uphold the honor and dignity of the profession in all interaction with student-athletes, coaches, athletic directors, school administrators, colleagues, and the public.
- Officials shall prepare themselves both physically and mentally, shall dress neatly and appropriately, and shall comport themselves in a manner consistent with the high standards of the profession.
- Officials shall be punctual and professional in the fulfillment of all contractual obligations.
- Officials shall remain mindful that their conduct influences the respect that the student-athletes, coaches, and the public hold for the profession.
- Officials shall while enforcing the rules of play, remain aware of the inherent risk of injury that competition poses to student-athletes. Where appropriate, they shall inform event management of conditions or situations that appear unreasonably hazardous.
- Officials shall take reasonable steps to educate themselves in the recognition of emergency conditions that might arise during competition.