

# COMMONWEALTH SOCCER OFFICIALS ASSOCIATION, INC.

From: The Commissioner  
To: Commonwealth Soccer Officials  
Subj.: **POINTS OF EMPHASIS SPRING 2026**  
Date: January 2026

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, IFAB, 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.***

For the Spring season the public high schools and the middle schools use NFHS rules. VHSL overtime is two five-minute periods for varsity matches. While fewer than in the fall many of the private schools use the IFAB laws of the game. Be sure to check the CSOA website and Assignr notes before heading out. If you have questions clarify with Jon or myself. It is a good item to add to your pregame and coaches meetings to verify which rules/laws are going to apply to match.

NFHS mandates shin guards that provide “adequate protection.”, be age and height appropriate, and carry NOCSAE seal. Be sure to observe this in the pregame and player introductions. If the shin guards are not appropriate, the player must change them or not play. Mini-shinguards are not allowed.

Bench placement and team areas. Be sure to have the schools mark the team areas with cones/chalk. If the benches are on opposite sides of the field, they must be offset with respect to the midfield line. Benches must be ten yards from midfield and can extend to twenty yards (40 yard line to the 20 yard line). Make sure they are back away from the touchline as far as practical and a minimum of 10 feet.

## **2025-2026 NFHS RULE CHANGES**

**3-3-1,2,3 Removes redundant language and permits substitutions during a temporarily suspended game.**

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

**3-3-2b(2) Clarifies that an injured player must leave the field if the referee beckons a coach or appropriate health-care provider.**

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

**4-1-2 Clarifies that a number is required on the front of the jersey and/or the shorts.**

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

**7-2-4 Prohibits a coach or team personnel other than the team captain from speaking with a**

referee during interval between periods, unless beckoned by a referee.

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

**12-4-4 A misconduct penalty may be given to the head coach if team or bench misconduct occurs.**

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

### **NFHS Points of Emphasis 25-26**

#### **Points of Emphasis**

1. **Education based high school athletics:** High school athletics play a vital role in the overall growth of student-athletes, providing opportunities to develop physically, mentally, and emotionally. Soccer serves as a platform for building essential life skills such as teamwork, discipline, leadership, and resilience. Coaching priorities focus on fundamental skills, strategic gameplay, and decision-making while instilling respect for opponents, officials, and teammates. Education-based athletics prepare students not only for success in sports but also for their future endeavors by teaching valuable life lessons through competition. Schools, coaches, and administrators must work together to ensure that high school soccer fosters growth, responsibility, and leadership, creating a positive experience that supports student success both on and off the field.
2. **Courage, character, and consistency.** Courage, character, and consistency are essential qualities for any soccer official. These qualities encourage the game to be managed fairly, effectively, and with integrity. Officials must have the courage to make difficult decisions, calling fouls equally for both teams without fear of backlash from players, coaches, or spectators.
3. **Team areas and bench decorum:** Effective communication is essential for officials in maintaining control over the match, particularly when dealing with bench decorum and sportsmanship. An official's role is to keep the game safe, fair, and fun, which requires adapting to the level of play and responding to game situations as they develop. High school soccer is an extension of the classroom, meaning officials must uphold the highest standards of professionalism, composure, and integrity. By setting a respectful tone, referees can prevent escalation and unnecessary conflict. Recognizing and addressing dissent early is crucial—while emotional reactions can be ignored, public, provocative, or persistent complaints must be dealt with decisively.

#### **IFAB Law Changes**

- 1 Competitions may implement the "Only the Captain" guidelines on speaking with officials. I am not aware of this being applied by any of the conferences/leagues.
- 2 Goalkeeper is allowed 8 seconds to release the ball into play after gaining possession with their hands/arms. The referee will countdown the last five seconds. Failure to release the ball results in a corner kick for the opponents.
- 3 Dropped ball restarts: if play was stopped with the ball in the penalty area, the referee drops the ball to the defending goalkeeper in their penalty area. If the ball was outside of the penalty area, the ball is

dropped to one player from the team that had possession or would have had possession if this can be determined by the referee, otherwise it is dropped to a player from the team that last touched the ball.

### **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.