

Referees:

As we begin the 2024 HS soccer season, here is an update on 3 topics that have come to my attention since we began the mandatory 2024 Rules Interpretation meetings.

### **SINGLE COACH EJECTED**

Each year we find a rule change highlighted in the new Rules which change was not included in the NFHS presentation, typically because the Rules publisher did not consider it a change worthy of discussion.

Rule 12-4-4d was added stating “In the case of a coach being ejected from the field and assistant coach or other authorized school personnel is not available, the team shall forfeit the game.” The standard procedure in prior years was to remove the coach from the bench area and not permit further coaching, but have the coach within view of the field in the event the coach was needed to attend to an injured player. If the coach did not cooperate, the game was terminated. This was consistent with Rule 5.3.1 SITUATION B.

The addition of subsection “d” suggests that this is no longer an option as the removal of a sole coach will result in a forfeit (terminated game) if an “assistant coach or other authorized school personnel is not available.” Since additions to the roster are always permitted, the proper procedure when dealing with an ejected solo coach is now the following, which is a procedure used successfully in other states:

- The referee should allow the ejected head coach to name a replacement adult before leaving “sight and sound” of the field.
- The replacement adult must be added to the roster by the ejected coach. This allows the game to continue without the ejected coach.
- There is no need for officials to verify the credentials of the replacement as that determination ultimately falls to the school through the coach – it’s the school/ejected coach’s decision who satisfies “other authorized personnel.”
- If the coach refuses to name a replacement or none is available, then the game is terminated and the team with the ejected coach will forfeit

This new procedure satisfies NFHS rules and allows the students to complete a game when the responsible adult coach would otherwise deprive them of that opportunity.

### **SINGLE REF FOR VARSITY GAMES**

It should not ever occur that only one official is assigned to a varsity game. Rule 5-1-1 states that there “shall be” 2 or 3 officials. However, last minute situations occur where an

official gets sick or injured or some other unforeseen circumstance leaves only one official at a varsity game. The question arose what should or may be done.

The first option is always to move an official from a sub-varsity game to the varsity game, if that is practically feasible. The proximity of the 2 games, the qualifications (varsity eligible) of the potential replacement and other considerations may impact this solution.

If there are 3 officials, the game will revert to the dual system of officiating.

If there were only 2 officials assigned and one is not present, can the game be played with only one official? In the interest of getting the game played, it may be officiated by the only official present. Schools may be concerned about additional costs associated with busing for the visiting team or staffing for the home team if the game was not able to be played. Schools may have a field tightly scheduled and cannot wait for a replacement official to arrive. And we are always supporting the desire to have the students play. So, unless the teams or one of them objects to proceeding with one official, we are permitted to officiate as a solo referee. The teams need to be aware that a solo official may not be able to run the entire field for the entire game. And nothing in this interpretation would require an official to jeopardize the official's health and well-being by being placed in a solo ref position.

### **MINI SHIN GUARDS AS “IMPROPER” OR “ILLEGAL” EQUIPMENT**

While the pregame procedure and coach's responsibility has not changed, NFHS and NJSIAA are emphasizing the need to protect student athletes from their own poor judgment in wearing shin guards that are not “age and size-appropriate.” If such shin guards are seen by an official during the game, the question is do we caution the coach/player or just send the player off for correction. The answer depends upon whether the mini shin guards are illegal (for which the first caution goes to the coach, then subsequent cautions to the player) or merely improper (no caution).

Rule 4-1-5 on page 24 of the 2024-25 rule book shows the difference between illegal and improper shin guards. They are illegal if they are not “age and size-appropriate.” They are improper if worn in the wrong location.

The best way to get coaches to accept responsibility for properly sized shin guards on players is to have the coach suffer the caution for illegal equipment for the first violation. This is consistent with the emphasis on this area by NFHS and NJSIAA.

As always, rule interpretation questions should first be brought to your chapter interpreter who will contact me for any concerns that have not been addressed.

Good luck and we hope you have an enjoyable HS soccer season.

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