LTRC Soccer: In-House Guidelines (2026 Season)

Updated: September 9, 2026

This packet contains guidelines for the 2026 season. These include Age Group-specific rules, guidelines and overall information (e.g., practice, game, AGC information), some rules pertaining to U7/U8 only (Build Out line), U7-U12 (playing time, substitutions, number of players), some important rules for ALL Age Groups, and recent rule changes instilled by FIFA and the IFAB Laws of the game.

This packet does not contain all of the LTRC program rules that are in accordance with FIFA Soccer Rules (those may be found elsewhere). Note that some modifications herein have been adopted by the LTRC Executive Board Members.

This packet does not contain rules or modifications from the Towson, Towsontowne, Cockeysville, or Perry Hall-White Marsh programs, all of which are participating in our U14 and/or U18 age groups (joint leagues). The AGCs and coaches in these leagues will work together to establish consistent rules and guidelines for the season.

Note: this packet has been reviewed by our head of officiating (Fred Goetzke) and his crew of officials.

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Boys Clinic

- Soccer Day is at RMS (Ridgely Middle School) and all regular season sessions are at MW-4 (Meadowood Field 4).
- Use the pop up goals given to you by LTSC.
- Play 4v4 (or 5v5…just break in half) scrimmages
- No goalies and no "guarding the goal."
- Use the area around the field to run drills with the players that are not playing in the scrimmage or use an open field if available.

- Run scrimmages/drills for 1 hour to no more than 1 hour and 15 minutes (**must be done to clear the parking lot for the next groups!**).

Girls Clinic

- Soccer Day is at RMS (Ridgely Middle School) and all regular season sessions are at VFS (Valley Fields South).
- **VFS#2 is the field to the right as you walk up the stairs from the parking lot**
- Field A is the clinic field closest to the parking lot
- Field B is the clinic field in the middle of the 3 fields
- Field C is the clinic field furthest from the parking lot
- Use the pop up goals given to you by LTSC.
- Play 4v4 (or 5v5…just break in half) scrimmages
- No goalies and no "guarding the goal."
- Use the area around the field to run drills with the players that are not playing in the scrimmage or use an open field if available.

- Run scrimmages/drills for 1 hour to no more than 1 hour and 15 minutes (**must be done to clear the parking lot for the next groups!**).

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BU7/BU8

- Soccer Day is at RMS (Ridgely Middle School) and all regular season games will be played at either Timonium ES or Ridgely Middle School
  - Ridgely #1 is the 7v7 field by tennis courts (Charmuth Road side)
  - Ridgely #4 is the 7v7 field closest to the school parking lot (Lynncrest Road side)
  - Ridgely #5 is the 7v7 field beside baseball diamond (off Lynncrest Road)
- This age group plays 7v7; **may play 8v8 if both coaches agree prior to game**
- U7 uses a size 3 ball
- U8 uses a size 4 ball
- No heading
- Build out line will be used
- No slide tackling
- No goalie punting/drop kicks
- Offsides – referees will exercise restraint when calling offsides for this age group. Referees may provide a buffer of a few yards when calling offsides (unless the player is clearly "cherry-picking"). Referee decisions are final – no arguing calls.

- Games consist of four 12-minute quarters
- Substitutions in between quarters and at the half-way mark of the fourth quarter only.
- Two-minute breaks between quarters and five-minute break between halves.
- There are no time outs.
- Teams will switch sides at halftime.

GU7/GU8

- Soccer Day is at RMS (Ridgely Middle School) and all regular season games will be played at either Hampton ES or Ridgely Middle School
- This age group plays 7v7; **but may play 8v8 if both coaches agree prior to game**
- U7 uses a size 3 ball
- U8 uses a size 4 ball
- No heading
- Build out line will be used
- No slide tackling
- No goalie punting/drop kicks
- Offsides – referees will exercise restraint when calling offsides for this age group. Referees may provide a buffer of a few yards when calling offsides (unless the player is clearly "cherry-picking"). Referee decisions are final – no arguing calls.

- Games consist of four 12-minute quarters
- Substitutions in between quarters and at the half-way mark of the fourth quarter only.
- Two-minute breaks between quarters and five-minute break between halves.
- There are no time outs.
- Teams will switch sides at halftime.

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Build Out Line for U7/U8 Field Play (applies for 7 v 7 and 8 v 8):

The installation and use of the build out line will be used to promote playing the ball out of the back (defensive) in an unpressured setting. NOTE: Every effort will be made to color the build out line orange to help the players find it on the field during the game!

The guidelines regarding the use of the line are as follows:

1. Goal keepers cannot punt or “drop kick” the ball at any time; they must either throw, roll or kick the ball after placing it. If the goalkeeper does punt or drop kick; the restart will result in an Indirect Free Kick from where the offense occurred.

2. On Goal kicks, the defending team should be outside the build out line before the kick can be taken, **however the Kicking Team does not have to wait until the other team is over the line to take the kick**. If the goalie puts the ball in play before the opposing team has crossed the line, the ball is immediately in play no matter where the opposing players were at that time. The referees should encourage the team to retreat past this line. They cannot re-enter the area until the goalie has put ball in play!

3. On all free kicks inside the penalty area and outside the penalty area but before the build out line, the defending team must make an effort to go out past the build out line; HOWEVER, if the kicking team decides to quick kick the restart than it is fair play for the defending team to play the ball as long as they have made a clear effort to retreat (NOTE: the ball does not have to leave the penalty area).

4. Offsides (different when using the Build Out line):

   - In order for consistent application of the rule and to allow some flexibility while players this age learn what offsides is - referees will exercise restraint when calling offsides for these age groups. Referees may provide a buffer of a few yards when calling offsides (unless the player is clearly "cherry-picking"). All referee decisions are final – no arguing calls;

   - For Offside, the Build Out line becomes the midfield line

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BU10

- Soccer Day will be played at RMS (Ridgely Middle School).
- All other regular season games will be played at Valley Field North and Upper Seminary Park
- 9v9
- Size 4 Ball
- No heading
- Build out line will NOT be used
- Goalie may punt/drop kick
- No slide tackling
- Offsides determined by midfield line

- Games consist of four 12-minute quarters
- Substitutions in between quarters and at the half-way mark of the fourth quarter only.
- Two-minute breaks between quarters and five-minute break between halves.
- There are no time outs.
- Teams will switch sides at halftime.

GU10

- All games will be played at RMS (Ridgely Middle School).
- 9v9
- Size 4 Ball
- No heading
- Build out line will NOT be used
- Goalie may punt/drop kick
- No slide tackling
- Offsides determined by midfield line

- Games consist of four 12-minute quarters
- Substitutions in between quarters and at the half-way mark of the fourth quarter only.
- Two-minute breaks between quarters and five-minute break between halves.
- There are no time outs.
- Teams will switch sides at halftime.

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BU12

- Soccer Day (Game 1) will be at Ridgely Middle School (RMS).
- All other regular season games will be played at Lutherville Lab ES
- 9v9
- Size 4 Ball
- No heading
- Build out line will NOT be used
- Goalie may punt/drop kick
- No slide tackling
- Offsides, determined by midfield line

- Games consist of four 12-minute quarters
- Substitutions in between quarters and at the half-way mark of the fourth quarter only.
- Two-minute breaks between quarters and five-minute break between halves.
- There are no time outs.
- Teams will switch sides at halftime.

GU12

- All games will be played at RMS (Ridgely Middle School).
- 9v9 **(depending on registration numbers, could be 8v8)**
- Size 4 Ball
- No heading
- Build out line will NOT be used
- Goalie may punt/drop kick
- No slide tackling
- Offsides, determined by midfield line

- Games consist of four 12-minute quarters
- Substitutions in between quarters and at the half-way mark of the fourth quarter only.
- Two-minute breaks between quarters and five-minute break between halves.
- There are no time outs.
- Teams will switch sides at halftime.

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U7-U12 Rules:

Playing Time:

- Every player in attendance for the entire game is guaranteed a minimum of two full quarters of playing time.
- If a player has played for three quarters of the game, he/she may not enter the fourth quarter unless all other players present who are not injured have played at least three quarters (three quarters includes the 4th).
- A player may voluntarily ask to be removed from the game or can be replaced in case of injury.
- Failure to abide with the minimum participation rules may result in a forfeit, with the involved coach(es) placed on probation (subsequent offense results in removal from the program).

Substitutions:

- During the first three quarters, substitutions may only be made because of injuries.
- If the injury is minor and the player is able to return to the game in the same quarter in which the injury occurred, the original player may re-enter the game **but must replace the player who was used as the substitute.**
- Injury substitutions that play 2/3 or more of that quarter **will be credited with playing a full quarter.**

Number of Players:

- A team may not start an official game with less than the minimum number of field players required for an official game (**6 players in U7/U8**, **7 players in U10 and U12**).
- There is no requirement for a team to loan players to an opposing team in order to make the game official.
- When a team is short players, the opponent is not required to play the same number of players; however, reciprocity in this instance is strongly encouraged.
- If a forfeit is declared, the game may continue for "practice" purposes, with the concurrence of both coaches provided it does not interfere with another scheduled game (in this case, teams may loan players to the other team in order to have a balanced practice game).
- No team may bring a player up from another league.

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BU14

- Soccer Day (Game 1) will be at Ridgely Middle School (RMS).
- Remaining regular season games will be played at Orchard Hills #3.
- 11v11
- Size 5 Ball
- Heading Allowed
- No slide tackling
- Goalie may punt or drop kick
- Offsides, determined by midfield line

- Games consist of two 30-minute halves (ten-minute break at the half). 25-minute halves for Soccer Day
- **Subs on your possessions or when other team subs.**
- There are no time outs.
- Teams will switch sides at halftime.
- Team should make every effort to ensure equal playing time.

GU14

- Soccer Day (Game 1) will be at Ridgely Middle School (RMS).
- All other regular season games will be played at Ridgely Field #3, Orchard Hills #3 or away (see schedule for details)
- 11v11
- Size 5 Ball
- Heading Allowed
- No slide tackling
- Goalie may punt or drop kick
- Offsides, determined by midfield line

- Games consist of two 30-minute halves (ten-minute break at the half). 25-minute halves for Soccer Day.
- **Subs on your possessions or when other team subs.**
- There are no time outs.
- Teams will switch sides at halftime.
- Teams should make every effort to ensure equal playing time.

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U18 Pick-Up

- 5v5 small-sided games (teams can play 6v6 if both coaches agree)
- Size 5 Ball
- Heading Allowed
- No slide tackling
- Goalie may punt or drop kick
- Offsides, determined by midfield line

- Games consist of two 30-minute halves (ten-minute break at the half).
- **Subs on your possessions or when other team subs.**
- There are no time outs.
- Teams will switch sides at halftime.

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Rules for All Age Groups:

No Running-Up Scores

- Our goal as a rec soccer program is to keep games competitive and enjoyable for all participants. We understand that occasionally one team may be much stronger than another resulting in a lopsided score. While we have removed the automatic forfeit rule, the onus is still on the coaches to make appropriate in game adjustments to keep the game under control. Examples of adjustments include (but are not limited to):
    - Having your team string together multiple passes (5-6) before they are allowed to shoot.
    - All shots must occur outside the penalty box.
    - Moving your stronger players to defense or goalie.
    - Turn the focus from scoring to possession.

While we understand that it is not always easy to keep kids from wanting to score, we need to do our best to ensure this experience is enjoyable for everyone. An isolated case of running up the score will merit a reminder and discussion with the coach. **Subsequent blatant offenses by the involved coach(es) may result in additional measures, up to and including the removal of a coach from the program and a one-year ban from coaching in LTRC.**

- Both coaches (winning and losing teams) will report scores to the AGCs!

Jewelry

- No jewelry is permitted on the field at any time. Earrings, necklaces, bracelets, etc. It all must be removed before the game begins.
- Tape or band-aids over earrings will not be permitted.

Goalie Playing Time

- No player is allowed to play goalie for more than one half of a game, unless the player **VOLUNTARILY** requests to do so. **All substitution rules in the younger age groups apply to any player playing goalie.**

Teams One Side, Spectators The Other

- Team benches are on the same side of the field; coaches and assistant coaches must stay on the side-line of their half of the field (no walking past the mid-field line).
- All parents and other spectators must stay on the side of the field opposite of the teams (**no exceptions**); all parents/spectators must remain **10 feet from the sideline**.
- Parents who are not designated as coaches are not permitted to coach on either sideline.
- Under no circumstances can coaches or parents/spectators watch a game from behind a goal.

In-House Comes First

- In case of a conflict between an in-house game and a travel soccer game, the inhouse game will take preference (pertains to players playing in both programs).

- Exceptions to this rule can only be approved by the In-House Coordinator and Program President after agreement between the respective coaches.

No Regular Season Extra Time/Shootout

- Regular season games that are tied at the end of regulation time will end as ties.
- There will be no overtime or shootouts for regular season games.

Player Ratings

- Player ratings must be submitted to the AGCs prior to the commencement of playoffs.
- No team will be eligible for the playoffs if the coaches have not submitted player ratings.

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Recent Rule Change for Goal and Free Kicks

Summary:

At a goal kick and a free kick for the defending team in their own penalty area:
the ball is in play as soon the kick is taken (it can be played before it leaves the penalty area)

1) Specifics for Goal Kicks:

- The ball is in play once the kick is taken; it can be played before leaving the penalty area

- This change creates a faster and more dynamic/constructive restart to the game.

- Opponents must remain outside the penalty area until the ball is in play.

2) Specifics for Free Kicks:

- The ball is in play once the kick is taken; it can be played before leaving the penalty area

- When there is a 'wall' of three or more defenders, the attackers are not allowed within 1m (1 yd) of the wall; an attacker less than 1m (1yd) from the 'wall' when the kick is taken will be penalized with an indirect free kick

- This change creates a faster and more dynamic/constructive restart to the game.

- Opponents must remain outside the penalty area until the ball is in play.

- Attackers standing very close to, or in, the defensive 'wall' at a free kick often cause management problems and waste time. There is no legitimate tactical justification for attackers to be in the 'wall' and their presence is against the 'spirit of the game' and often damages the image of the game.

NOTE: U7/U8 age group uses the build-out line, so in all instances discussed above the attacking offense MUST be positioned outside the build-out line before the ball is played.

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Recent Rule Change for Dropped Balls

Summary:

At all dropped ball occurrences (in and out of the penalty area): only one player will take the dropped ball with all other players at least 4.5 yards away from the dropped ball

1) Play stopped in the penalty area:

- The ball will be dropped for the **goalkeeper**

2) Play stopped outside the penalty area:

- The ball will be dropped for **one player of the team that last touched the ball at the point of the last touch**

- In both cases, all the other players (of both teams) must be at least 4m (4.5yds) away

- The current dropped ball procedure often leads to a 'manufactured' restart which is 'exploited' unfairly (e.g. kicking the ball out for a throw-in deep in the opponents' half) or an aggressive confrontation. Returning the ball to the team that last played it restores what was 'lost' when play was stopped, except in the penalty area where it is simpler to return the ball to the goalkeeper. To prevent that team gaining an unfair advantage, all players of both teams, except the player receiving the ball, must be at least 4m (4.5 yds) away.

3) Dropped ball is awarded if the ball touches the referee (or another match official) and:

1) **The ball goes into the goal,**
2) **Team possession changes, or**
3) **A promising attack starts**

- It can be very unfair if a team gains an advantage or scores a goal because the ball has hit a match official, especially the referee.

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Recent Rule Change for Hand Balls

The following 'handball' situations, **even if accidental**, will be a free kick:

- The ball goes into the goal after touching an attacking player's hand/arm;
- A player gains control/possession of the ball after it has touched their hand/arm and then scores, or creates a goal-scoring opportunity;
- The ball touches a player's hand/arm **that is positioned to make their body unnaturally bigger**;
- The ball touches a player's hand/arm when it is above their shoulder (**unless the player has deliberately played the ball, which then touches their hand/arm**).

The following will not usually be a free kick, unless they are one of the above situations:

- The ball touches a player's hand/arm directly from their own head/body/foot (or the head/body/foot of another player who is close/near);
- The ball touches a player's hand/arm that is positioned close to their body and **has not made their body unnaturally bigger;**
- If a player is falling and the ball touches their hand/arm when it is between their body and the ground to support the body (**but not extended to make the body bigger**);
- If the goalkeeper attempts to 'clear' (release into play) a throw-in or deliberate kick from a team-mate but the 'clearance' fails, the goalkeeper can then handle the ball.

- Greater clarity is needed for handballs, especially on those occasions when a 'nondeliberate' handball is an offense. The re-wording follows a number of principles:

1) Soccer does not accept a goal being scored by a hand/arm (**even if accidental**).
2) Soccer expects a player to be penalized for a handball if they gain possession/control of the ball from their hand/arm and gain a major advantage (e.g. score or create a goal-scoring opportunity).
3) It is natural for a player to put their arm between their body and the ground for support when falling.
4) Having the hand/arm above shoulder height is rarely a 'natural' position and a player is 'taking a risk' by having the hand/arm in that position, **including when sliding**.
5) If the ball comes off the player's body, or off another player (of either team) who is close by, onto the hands/arms it is often impossible to avoid contact with the ball.
6) When the goalkeeper clearly kicks or tries to kick the ball into play, this shows no intention to handle the ball so, if the 'clearance' attempt is unsuccessful, the goalkeeper can then handle the ball without committing an offense.

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Recent Rule Change for Penalty Kicks

The following changes pertain to player safety and goalkeeper behavior:

- The team's penalty taker can have (quick) treatment/assessment and then take the kick.
- The goalkeeper must not be touching the goalposts/crossbar/nets; they must not be moving.
- The goalkeeper must have at least part of one foot on/in line with the goal line when the kick is taken (cannot stand behind the line).

Explanations:

- It is unfair if the kicker needs assessment/treatment and then has to leave the field and cannot take the penalty kick.
- The referee must not signal for the penalty kick to be taken if the goalkeeper is touching the goalposts, crossbar or net, or if they are moving e.g. the goalkeeper has kicked or shaken them.
- Goalkeepers are not permitted to stand in front of or behind the goal line. Allowing the goalkeeper to have only one foot touching the goal line (or, if jumping, in line with the goal line) when the penalty kick is taken is a more practical approach as it is easier to identify if both feet are not on the line. As the kicker can 'stutter' in the run, it is reasonable that the goalkeeper can take one step in anticipation of the kick.

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Recent Rule Change for Headed Balls

For U12 and Under: NO HEADING WILL BE ALLOWED in games or in practices.

- If a player deliberately heads the ball in a game…
    - An indirect free kick will be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the infringement.
    - If the intentional header occurs within the goalie box, the indirect free kick must be taken on the goalie box line at the point nearest to where the infringement occurred.
    - If the intentional header occurs within the goalie box by the defensive team and prevents a clear goal scoring opportunity, a penalty kick will be awarded to the attacking team.

- If a player is hit by the ball in the head unintentionally…
    - The referee may allow play to continue if contact was minimal. If the contact is severe and the player must be substituted, the referee will stop play, and a drop ball will take place at the point of the occurrence, given to the team who last touched the ball before the unintentional header.
    - If the unintentional header takes place in the goalie box and play must be stopped, a drop ball will be given to the goalkeeper regardless of who touched the ball last.

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Other Recent Rule Changes

Rule Change for Team Officials and Yellow/Red Cards

- A team official guilty of misconduct will be shown a yellow (caution) or red (sending off) card; if the offender cannot be identified, the senior coach who is in the technical area at the time will receive the yellow/red card.

Explanation:
This approach for dealing with misconduct by team officials will benefit all levels **but is especially geared for young referees dealing with 'difficult' adult coaches**. If the offender cannot be identified, the senior team official (usually the head coach) in the technical area will receive the yellow/red card (as the person responsible for the other team officials).

Rule Change for Kick-off

- The team that wins the toss can now choose to take the kick-off or which goal to attack (previously they only had the choice of which goal to attack).

Explanation:
Recent Law changes have made the kick-off more dynamic (e.g. a goal can be scored directly from the kick-off) so captains winning the toss often ask to take the kick-off.

Rule Change for Substitutes

- A player who is being substituted must leave the field by the nearest point on the touchline/goal line (unless the referee indicates the player can leave quickly/immediately at the halfway line or a different point because of safety, injury etc.).

Explanation:
To prevent a substituted player from 'wasting time' by leaving slowly at the halfway line (which is not a Law requirement), the player must leave at the nearest point (as with an injury) unless the referee indicates otherwise (e.g. if the player can leave quickly at the halfway line, there is a safety/security issue, or the player leaves on a stretcher). The player must go immediately to the technical area to avoid problems with substitutes, spectators, or the match officials. **A player who infringes the spirit of this Law should be sanctioned for unsporting behavior (i.e. delaying the restart of play)**.

Rule Change for Medical Breaks

- Difference between 'cooling' breaks (90 secs – 3 mins) and 'drinks' breaks (max 1 min)

Explanation:
In the interests of player safety, competition rules may allow, in certain weather conditions (e.g. high humidity and temperatures), 'cooling' breaks (from ninety seconds to three minutes) to allow the body's temperature to fall; they are different from 'drinks' breaks (maximum one minute) which are for rehydration.

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Rule Change for Goal Celebrations

- A yellow card for an 'illegal' celebration (e.g. removing the shirt) remains even if the goal is disallowed.

Explanation:
Cautions for inappropriate goal celebrations apply even if the goal is disallowed, as the impact (safety, image of the game etc.) is the same as if the goal was awarded.

Rule Change for Quick Free Kick and Yellow/Red Cards

- If the referee is about to issue a yellow/red card but the non-offending team takes the free kick quickly and creates a goal-scoring opportunity, the referee can delay the yellow/red card until the next stoppage if the offending team was not distracted by the referee.

Explanation:
Occasionally, an attack is stopped by a cautionable (yellow card) or sending-off (red card) offense and the attacking team takes a quick free kick that restores the 'lost' attack; it is clearly 'unfair' if this 'new' attack is stopped to issue the yellow/red card. However, if the referee has distracted the offending team by starting the yellow/red card procedure, the quick free kick is not allowed. For a DOGSO (Denial of an Obvious Goal-Scoring Opportunity) offense, the player will be cautioned (yellow card) and not sent-off (red card) because the attack was re-started (as when advantage is applied for a DOGSO offense).