

# AYSO Rules Made Simple

## **# Players per Team/Size of Ball**

|       |                      |                     |             |
|-------|----------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| PG:   | Min 2v2—Max 3v3--    | No goalkeeper       | Size 3 ball |
| U6:   | Min 3v3-- Max 4v4--  | No goalkeeper       | Size 3 ball |
| U8 :  | Min 4v4-- Max 5v5--  | No goalkeeper       | Size 3 ball |
| U10 : | Min 6v6-- Max 7v7--  | 5/6 + 1 goalkeeper  | Size 4 ball |
| U12 : | Min 7v7-- Max 9v9--  | 6/8 + 1 goalkeeper  | Size 4 ball |
| U14+: | Min 9v9--Max 11v11-- | 8/10 + 1 goalkeeper | Size 5 ball |

Teams must have the minimum number of players to start a game. The opposing team is not required to match that number if they have more players, but may choose to do so.

## **Length of Games**

|         |                      |                              |
|---------|----------------------|------------------------------|
| PG & U6 | 5 minute quarters    | 1.5 minutes between quarters |
| U8      | 10 minute quarters   | 2 minutes between quarters   |
| U10     | 12.5 minute quarters | 2 minutes between quarters   |
| U12     | 15 minute quarters   | 3.5 minutes between quarters |
| U14/U16 | 15 minute quarters   | 5 minute minimum half time   |

## **Mandatory Equipment**

Legal soccer shoes – no metal cleats, no cleat at toe of shoe, tennis shoes OK  
Shin guards – NOTE: If a player does not have shin guards, they **CANNOT** play or practice.

Socks MUST COVER the shin guards, no exposed shin guards allowed

Shirt & shorts of team colors

Check all players' shoes and shin guards prior to each game

## **Objects Not Allowed by any player**

No Jewelry- including but not limited to:

Hair beads

Necklaces

Piercings (ears, nose, etc.)

Any other item determined dangerous by the referee

## **When Teams Can Substitute Players**

U12 and under can substitute ONLY after each quarter, unless a player is hurt. If a player goes down and may be hurt, the referee should stop the game and allow for a substitution. The restart should be a drop ball at the point where the ball was when the referee stopped the game.

U14-U16 allow free substitutions only on throw-ins, goal kicks, and after a goal is scored. NO substitutions are allowed during corner kicks or direct/indirect kicks. If the team taking a throw in does not substitute, then the opposing team cannot make a substitution. However, if the team making a throw in makes a substitution, then opposing team can substitute.

Everyone must play a minimum of 2 quarters.

No player can play all 4 quarters until everyone has played at least 3 full quarters.

Do not let a player dominate a game by playing the entire game.

## **Starts & Restarts**

### **KICKOFFS**

**Kickoffs** occur at the start of both the first and third quarters, as well as after each goal scored. At the end of the first half, teams will switch sides of the field. Kickoffs are executed from the midfield line at the center of the field. Defenders must maintain a distance of 10 feet for U10 and under, and 20 feet for U12 and older. Each team is required to stay within their own half of the field until the kicked ball moves forward into the opposing team's half.

If a kickoff is initially directed backward to another player on the kicking team, the kick must be retaken since it was not legally put into play. A player taking a kickoff, or any free kick, may not touch the ball again until another player has touched it (i.e., a player cannot take a free kick to themselves). An Indirect Free Kick is awarded to the opposing team if the player taking the free kick touches the ball again before it is touched by another player. A kickoff is considered a Direct Free Kick, meaning that a goal can be scored directly from the kick without the necessity of another player touching the ball first.

### **Throw-ins**

A **throw-in** is awarded to the team that did not last touch the ball before it completely crossed the touch lines (side lines). The entire ball must cross a line to be considered out of bounds or ruled a score if it is kicked into the opposing

team's net. If any part of the ball is on the line, it is still in play. A throw-in occurs when a player throws the ball back onto the field using both hands, taking the ball directly back over the head and throwing it into the field of play. Both feet must maintain contact with the ground when the ball is released. A player may touch the line with their feet but cannot step over the line.

For players U10 and younger, retakes of throw-ins will be permitted until they are executed correctly. For players U12 and older, an incorrect throw-in will result in a throw-in being awarded to the opposing team. The player taking the throw-in cannot touch the ball again until it has been touched by another player; if this rule is violated, an indirect free kick (IFK) will be awarded to the opposing team.

No whistle will be signaled to indicate a throw-in. The players will dictate the pace of the game, as quick throws are an integral part of the game. The referee will call out "white throw" or "blue throw" to inform the players which team is awarded the throw-in.

### **Goal Kick**

When the offensive team last touches the ball before it crosses the goal line without scoring, the defensive team gets a **goal kick**. For U10 and older, any player on the defensive team can take the kick from within the goal box. The ball must be stationary and is not in play until it is kicked directly out of the penalty box. If a player taking the kick or an opposing team member touches the ball inside the penalty box, the goal kick is retaken.

For U8 and younger, the ball will be placed on the goal box line, allowing any player designated by the coach to kick.

### **Corner Kick**

When the defensive team is the last to touch the ball before it crosses the goal line without resulting in a score, the offensive team is given a **corner kick** from the nearest corner where the ball left the field. The ball must be kicked from the ground within the arc located at each corner. The player taking the kick is not allowed to touch the ball again until another player has made contact with it. If the kicker touches the ball again before another player does, an indirect free kick (IFK) is awarded to the opposing team. Defenders must maintain a distance of 10 feet from the ball for U10 and below, and 10 yards for U12 and above.

## **Free Kicks**

Direct Free Kick (DFK) – a free kick that can score a goal directly from the kick without the ball having to touch another player on the field.

Fouls that warrant a DFK include:

Unconditional Fouls:

- Handball offense
- Holding an opponent

- Impeding an opponent with contact
- Biting/spitting at someone
- Throwing the ball at an opponent, or match official

Conditional Fouls against another player:

- Kicking (or attempting to...)
- Tripping (or attempting to...)
- Striking (or attempting to...)
- Charging at
- Jumping at
- Pushing
- Tackling/challenging

Typically, direct free kicks (DFK) are not awarded below U10 because players rarely intentionally commit penal fouls such as pushing, kicking, tripping, shoving, and dissent. Unless a player is seriously and intentionally committing fouls to gain an advantage, it is recommended to let the game continue. If a call is made, the referee should blow the whistle and award a DFK to the team fouled at the point of infraction. Defenders must be at least 10 feet away when the kick is taken. A verbal signal will be given for U10 and under for the kick to be taken.

At U12+, once the signal is given for the DFK, the team taking the kick can proceed as quickly as desired without further signals from the referee. For U12+, additional signals will only be given if the kicking player requests the referee to move defenders back from the ball. If this request is made, the defenders will be moved back, and the kicking team will need to wait for a whistle from the referee before taking the kick. Quick kicks are part of the game, and the players should dictate the pace.

**Indirect Free Kick (IFK)** – a free kick that must touch another player on the field before entering the net for a score to occur. If a player kicks the ball directly into the opposing net on an IFK without another player first touching the ball, then a goal kick is awarded to the opposing team.

Fouls made in a careless or reckless manner that may endanger themselves or others include:

- Impeding an opponent without contact
- Dissent, offensive, abusive, insulting language or gestures, or other verbal offenses
- Preventing a goalkeeper from releasing the ball, or kicking at the ball when the goalkeeper has full possession or is trying to release it
- Committing any other offense, not mentioned in the Laws, for which play is stopped to caution or send off a player, as determined by the referee

**There are 4 fouls that apply to the goalkeeper that will result in an Indirect Free Kick:**

- Controls the ball with the hands for more than 6 seconds
- Touches the ball with his/her hands after:

- Releasing it from his/her hands and before another player has touched it
- The ball has been deliberately kicked to the goalkeeper by a teammate
- Receiving it directly from a throw-in by a teammate

## **Hand Ball**

A hand ball foul occurs when a player, other than the goalkeeper inside their own penalty area, **intentionally or unintentionally** (updated 2024) plays the ball with any part of their arm or hand. Self-protection by crossing the arms against the chest is not considered an offense. However, if players use their hands or arms to control a ball that is about to hit them, it is considered handling the ball. A direct free kick (DFK) is awarded when a hand ball foul is committed, or if the foul occurs inside the penalty area, a penalty kick will be awarded. The referee must determine if the action was intentional. Incidental contact with a hand or arm should not be penalized. The referee should consider whether the ball played the arm or the arm played the ball. Using arms to protect oneself reflexively should not be penalized for younger players. This judgment call becomes more challenging as players age.

## **End of Play**

For U10 and up: At the end of a quarter, the whistle will be blown twice to signal a water break and three times for the end of the game.

For PG, U6, and U8 players: To end the quarters, if time is up, it is advised to wait until the ball goes out of play (out of bounds, score, or upon a free kick).

## **Injuries**

The referee will immediately stop play if a player is seriously injured. The coaches are responsible for treating their players. To restart the game after an injury, a drop ball will be used at the location where the ball was when play was stopped. One player from each team will face each other and the referee will drop the ball between them. The ball will be in play once it touches the ground. All other players must be 10-20 feet away, depending on age.

## **Advantage**

All serious fouls will be called at the U10 level and below. For U12 and above, the advantage rule will apply. If the offensive team is fouled but retains possession and continues to advance down the field, the game will proceed without a call being made. The referee should then indicate by announcing "PLAY ON" or "ADVANTAGE".

## **Offside**

The purpose of the offside rule is to prevent a player from positioning themselves in front of an opponent's goal to easily score. For an offside call to occur, it must first be determined if a player is in an offside position when the ball is played to them by a teammate. At the U10 level and above (offside rules do not apply at PG/U6/U8 levels), all three conditions must be met:

- The offensive player must be in the offensive half of the field AND
- The offensive player must be closer to the opponent's goal line than the ball AND
- The offensive player must be closer to the opponent's goal line than the next to last defender

For an offside penalty to be called, these conditions must be met and the player in the offside position must gain an advantage by being in that position when the ball is played to them by a teammate. If the player is even with or behind the next to last defender when the ball is played and then moves past the defender to get to the ball, no offside is called. A player in the offside position cannot move back onside to receive a ball played to them by a teammate. When offside is called, an indirect free kick (IFK) is awarded to the defending team at the location of the infraction.

U8 and below: Although there is no offside rule for U8 and below, no player is permitted to station themselves in front of the goal box waiting for the ball. A goal scored within the goal box (including the line) will not count, and a restart is given via a goal kick. The defending team cannot be in the goal box while the offensive player is attempting to shoot a goal (a corner kick will be awarded). However, the defensive team may enter the goal box to defend the goal after the ball has been released by the offensive player.

## **Penalty Kick**

A Penalty Kick is awarded if a player commits a Direct Free Kick (DFK) offense inside their penalty area, or off the field as part of play. Whenever a foul is committed by the defending team within their own penalty box, which would result in a DFK, a penalty kick is awarded to the offensive team.

The designated kicker must be identified to the goalkeeper. The ball is placed on the penalty mark, located halfway between the goal box and the penalty box at the center of the field. The goalkeeper must stay with their feet on the goal line until the ball is kicked, but they are allowed to move laterally along the goal line. All other players are required to remain outside the penalty box until the ball is kicked.

If the kicker misses and the goalkeeper does not touch the ball, a goal kick is awarded. If the goalkeeper deflects the ball out of bounds over the goal line without a goal being scored, a corner kick is awarded.

## **Weather**

Soccer matches are played in the rain. If there is lightning, players will leave the field until it is safe to return. Only the Regional Commissioner has the authority to cancel games due to weather. Coaches and referees are expected to attend each game. Please inform parents and players to attend every game as scheduled.

## **Special Rules for PG, U6 & U8**

AYSO **does not** permit a PG, U6 or U8 player to be a designated goalkeeper.. However, having an unprotected net with no defenders within a specified area may affect players' motivation, especially when there is a significant disparity in game scores. U6 and U8 players are allowed to play defense and shoot from anywhere on the field. No player is permitted to use their hands on defense, and goal box defending is not allowed. The PG age group should only be taught the basics of kicking the ball into the goal.

## **Final Guidelines for Referees**

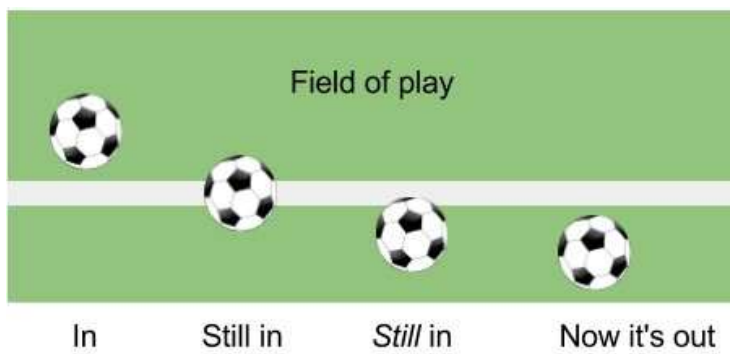
For U10 and below, use more encouraging words and coach them on the rules as needed. Explain your calls to the players.

At U12 and above, players are expected to know the rules. Communicate with players only to maintain game control. Inform them if you notice something (as a warning), even if no call is made. Understand that fouls are subject to judgment and not always clear cut, as soccer involves controlled contact. Aggressive play and incidental contact with the ball, and not against another player, is part of the game.

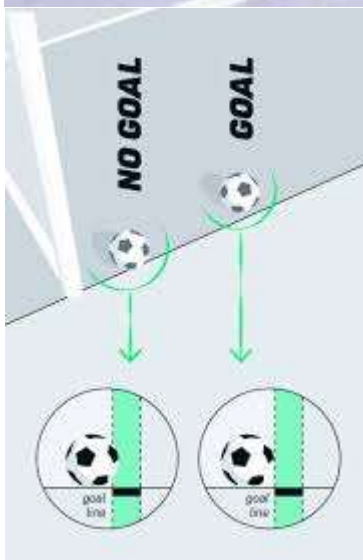
- Heading is not allowed below U14.
- AYSO 1408 DOES NOT allow slide tackles.
- Remember the 7 important words in the rules:  
"If in the opinion of the referee..."
- A referee's decision is final. Once the ball is put back into play, no call can be reversed. If you realize a mistake before the restart, correct yourself. If you doubt yourself after the ball is in play, then "play on".

Simply call out "white throw" or "blue throw" for throw-ins. Call out "white corner kick" or "blue goal kick" for the appropriate restart when the ball crosses a goal line without a score. It is important for players to learn to play to the whistle and set the pace of the game – not the referee. Whistles should only be blown for IFKs, DFKs, injuries, and to signal the end of a playing period.

What is in play and what is not.



What is a goal and what is not.



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