



**Zia Youth Soccer League's Condensed Playing Rules for NON-COMPETITIVE
COACH-LED SCRIMMAGE GAMES in the Strikers Age Division:**

Updated March 2026

Soccer's rules and regulations are maintained and updated annually by the International Football Association Board (IFAB). The board consists of eight members, four of which come from FIFA, and the other four coming from England, Scotland, Northern Ireland, and Wales - all countries that contributed to the development of the sport. FIFA's most recently published rule book is 140 pages long, which is a bit ambitious for the young player or parent who is just becoming familiarized with the sport. For this reason, Zia Youth Soccer League has prepared a simplified version below that should allow you to learn the basic rules of soccer. Please also be aware that although FIFA publishes an established set of rules, these rules are subject to modification by national, regional, and local organizations, such as Zia Youth Soccer League, as needed to best serve our players.

IFAB currently acknowledges 17 standard rules of soccer as follows:

Rule 1: The Field of Play

Soccer is played on a rectangular grassy field, distinctly marked by two short goal lines and two long-touch lines. The field is divided into halves, separated by the halfway line, which runs from the midpoints of each touchline. At the midpoint of the halfway line is a marked center point surrounded by a lined center circle.

The field is approximately 60 yards long and 50 yards wide, with the following markings:

Halfway Line - width of field, marked equidistant between goal lines;

Center Circle Radius - 7 yards;

Goal Area - approximately 5 yards from goal post and 5 yards into field;

Penalty Area - approximately 11 yards from goal post and 11 yards into field;

Penalty Mark - approximately 8 yards from goal line

Penalty Arc - 7 yard radius from penalty mark

Corner Arcs - on all four corners, 1-yard radius;

The goals used on the field are 7 feet high and 14 feet wide, securely anchored for play.

Rule 2: The Ball

The size of the soccer ball used will vary from division to division according to the players' ages. Zia Youth Soccer League's Strikers use a **size 4 ball**.

Rule 3: The Number of Players

Youth leagues such as Zia generally play small-sided scrimmages, with fewer players on the field than in a professional match, in order to best serve player development.

Number of players in a game: 7 per team on the field, plus the goalkeeper (8 per team total);

Substitutions - Substitutions can be made at any stoppage and are unlimited;

Playing Time - Playing time that is as close to equal as possible shall be offered to all team members present at a scrimmage. **Note: although every effort shall be made to provide absolutely equal playing time to all team members present, various factors may affect a coach's ability to provide 100% equal playing time, including but not limited to logistical challenges that may arise due to the number of players present, an individual player's unique readiness or ability to participate, etc.;*

Team Sizes - Standard roster size up to 16 players (roster size variation/exception may be considered per coach and administrative discretion); teams may be co-ed.

Rule 4: The Players' Equipment

All players should wear a league-issued jersey, shin guards (fully covered by the socks), and soccer cleats. No jewelry or other sharp, hard, or dangerous objects.* Goalkeepers must wear a specified jersey or pinnie so that they are easily distinguished from the other players. If the coach deems a player's equipment unsatisfactory, the player can be sent off until the issue is remedied.

**Newly-pierced ears, in which the earrings cannot be removed, may be covered with padded medical tape for player safety.*

Rules 5 and 6: The Coach-Led Scrimmage

In Zia Youth Soccer League's truly non-competitive environment, which is focused on positive player development and FUN, not strict competition, scrimmage games are led by the coaches. Certified referees are not needed, as this is not a competitive game. **The scrimmage should instead be viewed as an opportunity for players to expand upon what they learn during practice in a game-like environment, with the continued direct support of their coaches on the field.** Coaches work together, both on the sidelines and on the field with the players as needed, to guide the scrimmage in a safe and enjoyable manner for all involved.

Rule 7: The Duration of the Scrimmage

- Zia's Strikers play four 14-minute quarters or two 28-minute halves, at the discretion of the coaches;
- Quarters are highly encouraged during hot weather, at the discretion of the coaches;
- There will be 1-minute breaks between quarters, and a 5-minute halftime break.

Rule 8: The Start and Restart of Play

The initial **kick-off** is generally determined by a coin toss or rock/paper/scissors, whereby the winning team can either choose to start with the ball or choose which goal they would like to attack. The other team is then afforded whatever choice the winner does not elect to take. Kick-off occurs at the start of each half, and after each goal scored, and is taken at the center of the halfway line. If a team scores a goal, the opposing team is given the kick-off to restart the match. At kick-off, all players must be on their own half of the field. The kicker will be within the center circle; the kicker's offensive teammates may accompany him/her within the circle. Opponents must be outside of the center circle. The ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves in any direction. Player may not touch the ball again after making the kick-off until it has touched another player (doing so will result in the opponent being awarded an indirect free kick).

The **dropped ball** is the method of restart generally used when the game is stopped for an injury, outside interference, weather, or similar. An unlimited number of players may take part in a dropped ball. The ball is in play when it makes contact with the ground. Ball must be touched by two different players for a goal to be awarded.

Rule 9: The Ball In and Out of Play

The ball is out of play when it completely leaves the field of play over the touchline or goal line, on the ground or in the air. The ball is also considered out of play whenever there is a stoppage. If, for any reason, the ball strikes the frame of the goal or a coach and remains within the goal and touch lines, it is still in play.

Rule 10: Method of "Scoring"

A "score" has been made when the whole of the ball completely crosses the goal line between the posts and under the cross-bar. But remember, this is a RECREATIONAL NON-COMPETITIVE scrimmage. As such, no scores or standings will be recorded or posted, in accordance with Zia Youth Soccer League's philosophies of non-competitive recreational play. Coaches should maintain a focus on fun, encourage players in all areas of scrimmage activity, and help them understand that "scoring" is not the only goal. Players should be praised for every effort and achievement on the field, not just when goals are made.

Rule 11: Offside

The offside rule is not observed in Zia Youth Soccer League's scrimmages.

Rule 12: Fouls & Misconduct

This rule covers offenses involving contact committed on the field-of-play while the ball is in play and against any opponent, teammate, or coach, in addition to non-contact fouls and technical offenses, as follows:

A direct free kick is awarded when a player:

- Kicks or attempts to kick an opponent
- Trips or attempts to trip an opponent
- Jumps at an opponent
- Charges an opponent
- Strikes or attempts to strike an opponent
- Pushes an opponent
- Tackles an opponent
- Holds an opponent
- Spits at an opponent
- Handles the ball deliberately

If any of these fouls are committed by a player in their team's penalty area, the opposing team is awarded a penalty kick.

Indirect free kicks are awarded if a player:

- Plays in a dangerous manner
- Impedes the progress of an opponent
- Prevents the goalkeeper from releasing the ball from his/her hands
- Commits any other unmentioned offense

Single warnings or cautions are issued to a player for the following offenses:

- Unsporting behavior
- Dissent by word or action
- Persistent infringement of the rules
- Delaying the restart of play
- Failure to respect the required distance when play is restarted with a corner kick, free kick, or throw-in
- Entering or re-entering the field of play without the coach's permission
- Deliberately leaving the field of play without the coach's permission

Players may be removed from the field for a full quarter or half, or the remainder of the game, at the coaches' discretion, for the following offenses:

- Serious foul play
- Violent conduct
- Spitting at an opponent or any other person
- Denying the opposing team a goal or an obvious goal-scoring opportunity by deliberately handling the ball (the goalkeeper being an exception)

Denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity to an opponent moving towards the player's goal by an offense punishable by a free kick or a penalty kick
Using offensive or abusive language and/or gestures
Receiving a second warning or caution in the same scrimmage

In general, contact fouls result in a direct free kick restart, while non-contact fouls and technical infractions result in an indirect free kick restart. Additionally, goalkeepers are not allowed to punt or drop-kick the ball, and **it is prohibited for any player to deliberately head the ball**, for both player safety and in accordance with US Youth Soccer regulations; both will result in a restart with an indirect free kick to the opposing team at the spot of infraction.

Rule 13: Free Kicks

The free kick is broken into two categories, being direct and indirect. A direct free kick can be shot directly into the opponent's goal without touching another player. An indirect kick can only go into the goal if it has subsequently been touched by another player before it enters the goal. The ball must be stationary for both types of kicks, and is in play when kicked and clearly moves.

In the Strikers division, opponents must be at least 8 yards from the ball or on goal line between the goal posts during a free kick.

Rule 14: The Penalty Kick

A penalty kick is awarded either when a defensive player fouls an attacking player or commits a handball in his/her team's penalty area. The penalty kick is taken from the penalty spot, and all players on both teams (except kicker and goalkeeper) must remain outside the penalty area, penalty arc, and behind the ball during the shot. They may enter the box immediately after the shot is taken. The goalkeeper may move horizontally along the goal line before the shot is taken, but he may not come off the line until the ball is struck. Ball must be clearly kicked in a forward direction.

Rule 15: The Throw-In

This is the method of restart used when the ball goes over the touchline (side line). The throw-in is taken by an opponent of the player who last touched the ball. Both of the thrower's feet must remain on the ground, on or outside the touchline. The throw-in must be taken with both hands, from behind and over the head. The ball is in play when any portion of the ball breaks the outside plane of the touchline into the field-of-play after having been thrown. When an improper throw-in is taken, the coaches should stop play, explain the proper procedure and allow throw-in to be retaken. A goal cannot be scored directly from a throw-in.

Rule 16: The Goal Kick

This is the method of restart used when the ball goes over the goal line (end line), and was last touched by an attacking team player. After the ball is out of play, the defender or goalkeeper may place the ball anywhere within the penalty box and kick the ball back into play. All opposing players must remain 8 yards from the ball. If any player on either team, other than the kicker, touches the ball before it leaves the penalty area, or if any member of the opposing team fails to remain 8 yards from the ball, the goal kick is retaken. A goal may be scored directly from a goal kick.

Rule 17: The Corner Kick

This is the method of restart used when the ball goes over the goal line (end line), and was last touched by a defending player. The ball is placed within the corner arc and is kicked back into play by a member of the offensive team. Opponents must remain 8 yards from the corner area. Ball is in play when it is kicked and clearly moves. A goal may be scored directly from a corner kick.

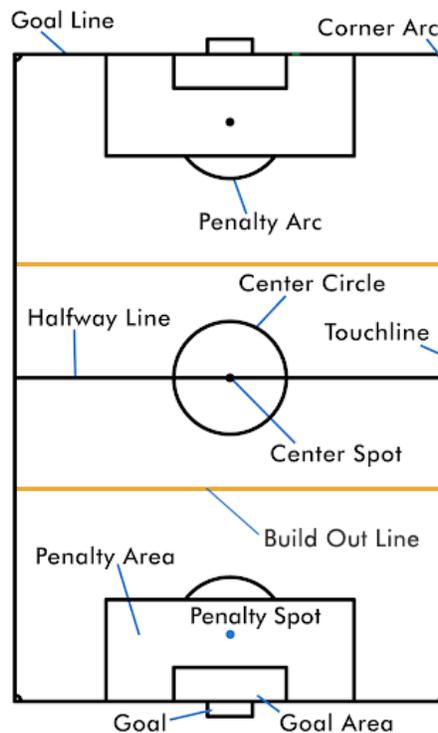
The Build-Out Line (from US Soccer's Player Development Initiatives for Small-Sided Games): The Build-Out Line promotes playing the ball out from the defensive third in a less pressured setting. This line is painted across each half, equidistant between the penalty area line and the halfway line, and may be either a different color OR a dotted line, to differentiate it from other lines on the field. Please see the field layout example on the next page for the location of this line.

When the goalkeeper has control of the ball, with their hands, during play, the opposing team **MUST** move behind the Build-Out Line until the ball is released (put in play) by the goalkeeper. Once the opposing team is behind the Build-Out Line, the goalkeeper can pass, throw, or roll the ball into play (punts or drop kicks are NOT allowed). After the ball is put into play by the goalkeeper, the opposing team can cross the Build-Out Line and play resumes as normal.

Also, the opposing team **MUST** move behind the Build-Out Line for a goal kick restart and may only cross the Build-Out Line once the ball is in play (meaning that the ball has left the penalty area).

- The Build-Out Line promotes playing the ball out of the back in a less pressured setting.
- When the goalkeeper has the ball in their hands during play from the opponent, the opposing team must move behind the build out line until the ball is put into play.
- Once the opposing team is behind the build out line, the goalkeeper can pass, throw or roll the ball into play (punts and drop kicks are not allowed).
- After the ball is put into play by the goalkeeper, the opposing team can cross the build out line and play resumes as normal.
- The opposing team must also move behind the build out line during a goal kick until the ball is put into play.

- If a goalkeeper punts or drop kicks the ball, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense.
- If the punt or drop kick occurs within the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the nearest point to where the infringement occurred.



MERCY RULE: Keeping the scrimmage experience positive and balanced.

Although Zia Youth Soccer League tries to form teams that are as balanced as possible, there are times when one team will simply be at a more advanced place in their skill development than another. If this happens, and one team is "scoring" goal after goal while the other team clearly struggles and begins losing confidence (and their smiles), the coaches must take action together. Remember, Zia's scrimmage games are designed to be fun opportunities for players to expand upon what they learn in practice in a game-like environment. These are NOT competitive games, and not a single child should walk away feeling like they've "lost." That is not what Zia is about.

So should a scrimmage begin to have an unbalanced feel as previously described, coaches should take steps to balance the environment accordingly. Sometimes this may mean loaning a more skilled player to the other team, or allowing the team in need of a boost to have an extra player on the field. Or perhaps adding a new rule for the team that keeps "scoring," requiring that each player they have on the field must touch the ball before it goes in the goal. Another great tactic - one which is particularly useful to not only help the team that is struggling but to also challenge the team that is ahead - is to move players out of their "usual" positions in which they excel, in order to try new positions.

This could mean moving that one player who scores goal after goal into a defensive spot, or giving a new player a chance to try the position of goalkeeper. Or the goalkeeper could even be temporarily removed altogether. The options are endless. Coaches are encouraged to get creative and work together to make the experience a positive one for every player on every team, supporting Zia Youth Soccer League's mission of providing a truly recreational, non-competitive, FUN and pressure-free soccer experience.