Soccer-for-Parents

Presents

10 Simple Soccer Rules

For Baffled Parents



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RULE 1 - No Hands, please

I bet you knew that one. Most people who know nothing about soccer still know that you aren't supposed to use your hands unless you're the goalie.

A couple of points to clarify.

First, the rule for a hand ball includes using any part of the body from the tips of the fingers to the shoulder.

Second, the proper way to look at this soccer rule is that a player cannot "handle" the ball. A ball that is kicked and hits a player's hand or arm is not a hand ball. This means that the referee must use his or her own judgment to some extent in determining whether or not a hand ball is accidental contact or a purposeful attempt to gain an advantage.

Put another way, the referee must determine if the play was

Ball to Hand (legal)

or

Hand to Ball (illegal)

Believe it or not, there is also a situation in which the goalie cannot use his/her hands. This is sometimes called the back-pass rule. Goalkeepers cannot pick up a pass that came directly from one of their teammates. In this case, the goalkeeper must use his feet. Infraction of this soccer rule will result in an indirect kick from the point of the infraction.

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RULE 2 - Equipment

The basic equipment for soccer required by the FIFA Laws of the Game are:

- a jersey or shirt
- shorts
- stockings
- shinguards
- footwear

Most youth recreational soccer leagues will provide everything but the shinguards and the footwear.

Shinguards

According to FIFA, shinguards should be "*covered entirely by the stockings, made of a suitable material (rubber, plastic, or similar substance), and provide a reasonable degree of protection.* This leaves a lot of wiggle room!

Most soccer leagues will not allow a person to play or practice soccer without shinguards. Purchasing good shinguards should be a top priority for every parent.

For more information I suggest you read my reviews & recommendations on shinguards.

Footwear

There are no requirements by FIFA that your child have shoes with cleats. Technically, regular tennis shoes are fine - not recommended, but legal. Of course, local league rules may apply.

There is also more information on soccer cleats on the Soccer for Parents website.

There is also this general safety clause in the FIFA rules:

A player must not use equipment or wear anything which is dangerous to himself or another player

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(including any kind of jewelry).

No necklaces, earrings, nose rings, belly rings, bracelets, or tiaras. Soft "scrunchies" in the hair are generally allowed as are soft head stockings.

If a child just had their ears pieced, the studs should be covered with tape or removed. *Many leagues will require that the studs be removed*. As one fellow commented, is the hole going to grow back in an hour?

Lastly, the goalkeeper must wear colors which distinguishes him/her from the other players, the referee, and the assistant referees.

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RULE 3 – Start and Restart

A kick-off is the way a soccer game is started or restarted:

- at the start of a game
- after a goal has been scored
- at the start of the second half (or each quarter in younger ages)
- at the start of each period of extra time, if used

The ball is placed in the center of the field. All players must be in their own half of the field and the opponents of the team taking the kick-off must be at least 10 yards from the ball. This distance is indicated by the center circle on the field and will vary some with age.

Normally the referee will blow his/her whistle to indicate they are ready for the kick-off. The ball is in play when it is kicked and moves forward.

Note that the two-touch rule applies here (see Rule 8).

After a team scores a goal, the kick-off is taken by the other team.

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RULE 4 - Throw-ins

A throw-in is taken when the ball crosses a sideline and leaves the field. The two basic soccer rules for a proper throw-in are to have both feet on the ground and to throw the ball with both hands over the head.

To clarify, both feet must be on the ground ***when the ball is thrown***. The player can hop, run, or do cartwheels up to the point where the ball is released but not *when* the ball is released. Dragging the toes of one foot is considered legal.

Some people also have the impression that a properly thrown ball will not spin. **This is not true.** A good player can throw the ball with both hands over the head and make the ball spin by applying more or less force to one side of the ball. As long as the motion is over the head and not to the side this is a completely legal throw.

For teaching purposes it is common to allow players under the age of 8 to take more than 1 attempt.

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RULE 5 - Corner Kicks & Goal Kicks

A corner kick or goal kick is taken when the ball leaves the field across a goal line – you know, either end of the field with a goal.

If the offensive team kicks it out, play is restarted with a goal kick. If the defensive team kicks it out, play is restarted with a corner kick.

The goal kick is taken from anywhere inside the “goalie box” as it is affectionately called. It can be taken by any player, not just the goalkeeper.

The corner kick is taken from – yes, you guessed it – the corner nearest to where the ball left the field.

You may be confused at times in youth soccer games to see a goal kick retaken. This is because the FIFA soccer rules state that the ball is not back “in play” until it leaves the penalty area, the large box outside of the “goalie box” (see diagram if needed). If either team touches the ball before it leaves the penalty area the kick must be retaken, and if the ball is not kicked well enough to leave the area, the kick must be retaken.

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RULE 6 - Direct and Indirect Free Kicks

Direct and indirect kicks are two primary ways that play is restarted after the referee stops play for an infraction.

For both of these the ball must be stationary before it is kicked and the opposing players should be a minimum of 10 yards away. The 10 yard allowance is often reduced for the smaller age groups and is left up to the discretion of the referee.

The simple difference between the two is this: On a direct kick you can score by kicking the ball *directly* into the goal. On an indirect kick you cannot score. An indirect kick must be touched by another player before it can go into the goal – that is the kicker and a second person.

> *As a parent on the sideline, you can tell whether the kick is direct or indirect by looking at the referee. For an indirect kick, the referee will hold one arm straight up in the air until the second person touches the ball. No arm up, it's a direct kick.*

There are many soccer rules around what causes a direct or indirect kick.

In general, a direct kick comes from a contact foul or hand ball. Everything else is indirect.

Also, be aware that some youth leagues will not allow ***any*** direct kicks until after U-8.

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RULE 7 - Penalty Kick

A penalty kick results from a contact foul or hand ball by the defending team within the penalty area – the large box on either end of the field. So it's a type of direct kick also.

The ball is placed on the penalty spot or mark, 12 yards in front of the center of the goal.

All players must remain outside the penalty area and the penalty arc until the ball is kicked. The goalkeeper must have both feet on the goal line until the ball is kicked.

If after the ball is kicked, it rebounds off of the keeper and stays on the field, the ball is "live" and anyone can play it.

If after the ball is kicked, it rebounds off of the goal and stays on the field, the ball is "live" and anyone can play it ***with the exception of the person who just kicked the ball***. If the ball rebounds off of the goal and back into play, the person who kicked the ball cannot play it until the ball is touched by another player – otherwise he/she will be called for two touches (the next rule).

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RULE 8 - Two-touch Rule

A player cannot touch the ball twice in a row when putting the ball in play. You will see this called many times in youth soccer. It applies everywhere. You will see it frequently on kick-offs, corner kicks, or direct and indirect kicks. If a kid barely hits the ball and decides to take another swipe at it, that is a two-touch violation.

This also applies to throw-ins. A kid cannot throw the ball in and then kick it. Nope. No way. No can do.

The only exception to this rule is on a drop ball restart.

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RULE 9 – Fouls and Punishment

The common rule of thumb on fouls is “If it looks like a foul, it probably is.”

Too true. A player cannot kick, trip, jump at, charge, strike, push, hold, or spit at an opponent.

So what’s the problem?

Soccer can be a physical, contact sport when two opposing players both want the soccer ball and no parent or grandparent likes it when little Susie loses the ball and ends up on the ground!

“**Foul!**” cries the parent. “**Little Susie was pushed!**”

What you need to know as a parent is that bumping or going shoulder-to-shoulder while competing for a ball is *not a foul* until the hands or elbows come up. This is a bit of a judgment call and not all referees will call it the same way. Some soccer rules are actually not black-and-white.

Remember though, the referee is ALWAYS right. 

The normal consequence of a foul is a direct kick for the opposing team. However, depending on the type of foul and severity, the playing “dishing it out” may be punished.

Punishment is given in soccer with yellow and red cards. The FIFA soccer rules give the guidelines for when to give a yellow card to a player and when to give a red card. I’m not going to get into the specifics here.

If a player is given two yellow cards in the same game, that is equal to a red card.

A red card can be given at any time without the player first receiving a yellow card. When a player gets a red card, they must leave the game and their team must play short. An ejected player cannot be replaced (unless they are ejected prior to the start of the game).

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RULE 10 - Offside

I decided to leave the best for last.

This is without a doubt the least understood rule by parents and coaches alike.

Check your local league soccer rules first. There's a good chance that this rule won't be called for the U-8 or younger teams. You may be off the hook for now. However, if you are a U-8 or U-6 coach you still need to know this rule so you can begin teaching your players not to be offside.

The first thing to know is that you cannot be offside on a corner kick, goal kick, or throw-in. Don't ask me why. Just accept it and go on. The explanation is too long.

Also, *it is not an offense for a player to be in an offside position*. The player must be involved in active play as determined by the referee to be called offside.

As quoted from the FIFA soccer rules:

A player is in an offside position if: *he is nearer to his opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second last opponent.*

Clear yet? I didn't think so.

Try this. An offensive or attacking player can't be ahead of the ball and involved in the play unless there is a defender between him and the goalkeeper. Or, you can't hang out at the other team's goal waiting for the ball.

A few other buts. 

You can't be offside if you are standing on your half of the field. Also, the offside rule applies *when the ball is kicked*, not when the player receives the ball.

To accurately judge offside, one has to stay even with the second-to-last defender and not watch the ball. Listen for the kick of the ball and judge at the time of the kick whether or not the player was offside.

To be honest with you, this can be a hard rule to understand. Don't get too hung up on it. Trust the referees.

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Or not. Educate yourself by using the resources on the next page to learn more about offside.

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Resources

Below are my personal recommendation for improving your knowledge of the Laws of the Game beyond the "10 basics" that I have outlined.



Koach Karl Clearly Explains FIFA Laws Of The Game

(Two Hour Audio Download)

If you want to learn the soccer rules **FAST** this is the download for you.

Koach Karl (see his bio) does an outstanding job reviewing the 17 Laws of the Game and how they apply to youth soccer.

That is the key. **Youth Soccer**. He explains how the rules should be modified to allow the younger kids to have more FUN while learning the game, and at the same time teaches you the FUNdamental rules.

Read my review on the FIFA laws download.

Listen to the first 15 minutes NOW!

Download the FIFA Laws of the Game at:

http://www.fifa.com/fifa/handbook/laws/2004/LOTG2004_e.pdf [1.3mb]

This is the official version. They have good diagrams of what is and isn't considered offside. FIFA has also made an online version available very recently. Here are the Laws of the Game 2004 in html format.

Another great, free reference from FIFA is their document called Questions and Answers to the Laws of the Game. [500kb]

Buy a soccer rule book. Browse through my recommended soccer rule books at Amazon.com and start reading.

These books offer a detailed description of the Laws of the Game with background, application, and examples.

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Attend a soccer referee clinic. Contact your local soccer league for information on when and where the next referee clinic will be held. Due to turnover, clinics are usually held at least once a year to certify new referees and to recertify the old ones. Even if you don't want to be an official, attending a clinic will give you great insight into how referees work and make calls and certainly will give you an advantage as a coach.

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Definitions

Caution – a disciplinary action in which the referee shows a player the yellow card (for violating a soccer rule, obviously). A second caution in the same match results in the player being shown the red card (ejected from the game).

Corner kick – a direct free kick that is awarded when the defending team puts the ball over the end line. A corner kick is taken by the offensive team from next to the corner flag.

Dangerous Play – an action by a player that the referee considers dangerous to that player or others. Examples are high kicking, playing while lying on the ground, or playing the ball while it is in the possession of the goalkeeper.

Direct Free Kick – a free kick that is awarded at the spot of the infraction for a physical contact foul such as tripping, holding, pushing, tackles from behind, jumping into an opponent, or for hand balls. A direct free kick can score by going directly into the goal. It does not have to be touched by anyone other than the kicker.

Drop Ball – a method of restarting a game where the referee drops the ball between 2 players facing each other. A drop ball restarts the game after play is stopped for no penalty situation (e.g. after an injury) and in other circumstances (more than one soccer rule about this). The ball is dropped where it was last in play or at the nearest point outside the penalty area.

Foul – when the referee judges a violation against an opposing player. The team that suffers the foul is awarded with a direct free kick unless the foul is committed by a defensive player inside his own penalty area, in which case the foul results in a penalty kick.

Goal Kick – a type of restart that is awarded when the attacking team puts the ball over the end line. The ball is kicked from anywhere inside the goal area away from the goal to restart play. After the kick is taken, the ball cannot be touched again by any player until it is outside of the penalty area.

Indirect Free Kick – a free kick that is awarded at the spot of the infraction for other fouls that are judged not to be serious such as obstruction, dangerous play or charging (non-contact fouls), as well as for offside. Indirect kicks must touch another player (either team) before the ball goes into the net in order to score.

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Offside – *a difficult soccer rule.*

Not good enough for you? Ok, ok. Here it is: a violation that occurs when an offensive player is closer to the opponent's goal than both the ball and the second-to-last opposing player at the time that the ball is passed to the offensive player by his or her teammate. Players cannot be called offside if they are in their own half of the field or if they receive the ball from a throw in, corner kick, or goal kick. When a player is called offside, the opposing team is awarded an indirect free kick.

Obstruction – a foul in which a defensive player, instead of going after the ball, illegally uses their body to prevent an offensive player from playing it.

Penalty kick – A kick taken from 12 yards in front of the goal as a result of a contact foul or hand ball that takes place inside the penalty area.

Red card – a referee shows a player a red card to signal that the player has been banned from the rest of the match. A red card can be shown for a single serious offense or as the result of being shown a second yellow card in the same game. After a player is shown a red card, the player must leave the field of play and cannot be replaced by a substitute, meaning that his or her team must finish the match with one player fewer.

Sending off – an ejection resulting from a player being shown a red card. See also Red card.

Throw-in – a way to restart play when the ball goes out over the sidelines. The team that did not touch the ball last is allowed an overhead throw.

Yellow card – see Caution.

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FAQs

Question: Can you score directly from a kick-off?

Answer: Yes. Even if no one else touches the ball – GOOAAAALLLLL!!

Question: Can you score directly from a throw-in?

Answer: No. If the ball goes into the goal directly from a throw-in without anyone else touching the ball, that is not a goal. Play would resume with a goal kick.

Question: When is time stopped?

Answer: Under FIFA rules, game time is kept by the center referee. Technically, game time is never stopped but runs continuously throughout a half. However, the center referee has discretion on how much time to add time at the end of the game or half to compensate for lost time due to injuries, substitutions, or any other delay of the game as determined by the center referee.

In high school or college there will sometimes be an official game clock.

Question: If a ball bounces off of a defender and goes in their goal, does it count?

Answer: Yes, it is a – GOOAAAALLLLL!! However, if on a goal kick a wayward defender miss-kicks the ball and it goes into the goal it doesn't count. Play would resume with a corner kick.

Question: What is the minimum number of players?

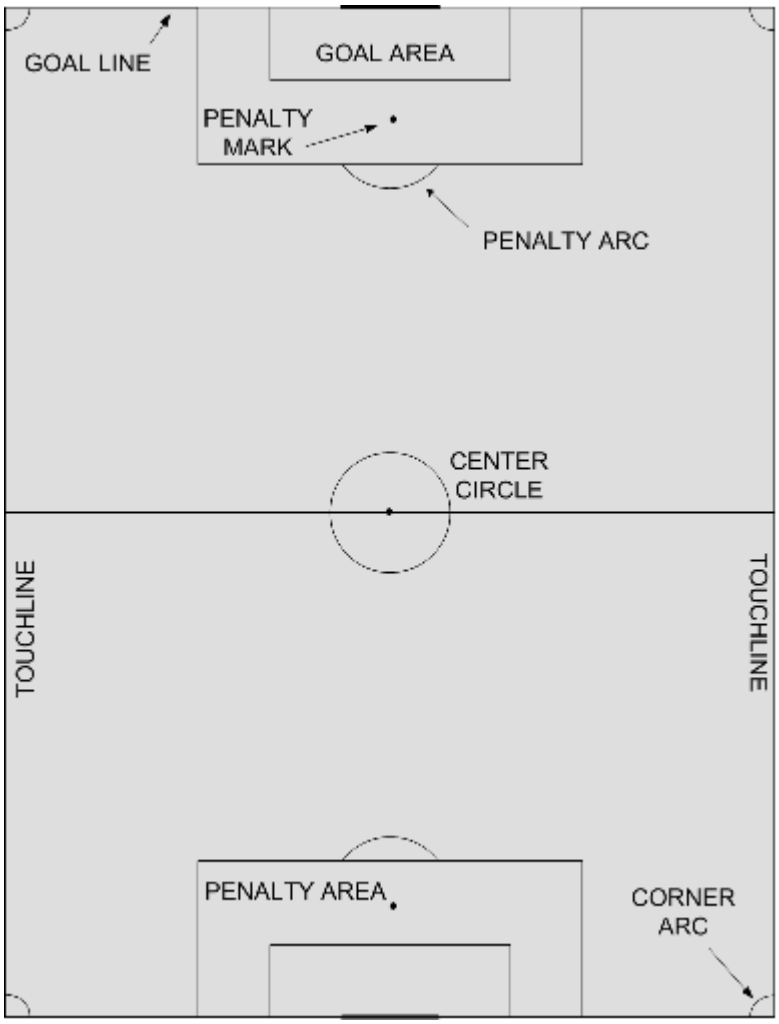
Answer: The minimum number of players is left to the discretion of the local, state, or national association. Certainly in youth soccer the number will vary with age level. For regulation play above U-12, seven is considered the minimum number.

Question: Can my child use his/her baseball cleats?

Answer: No. Baseball or softball cleats have a toe cleat which is dangerous in soccer. These shoes are usually allowed if the toe cleat is cut off.

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Soccer Field Diagram



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