

17 Basic Rules of Soccer

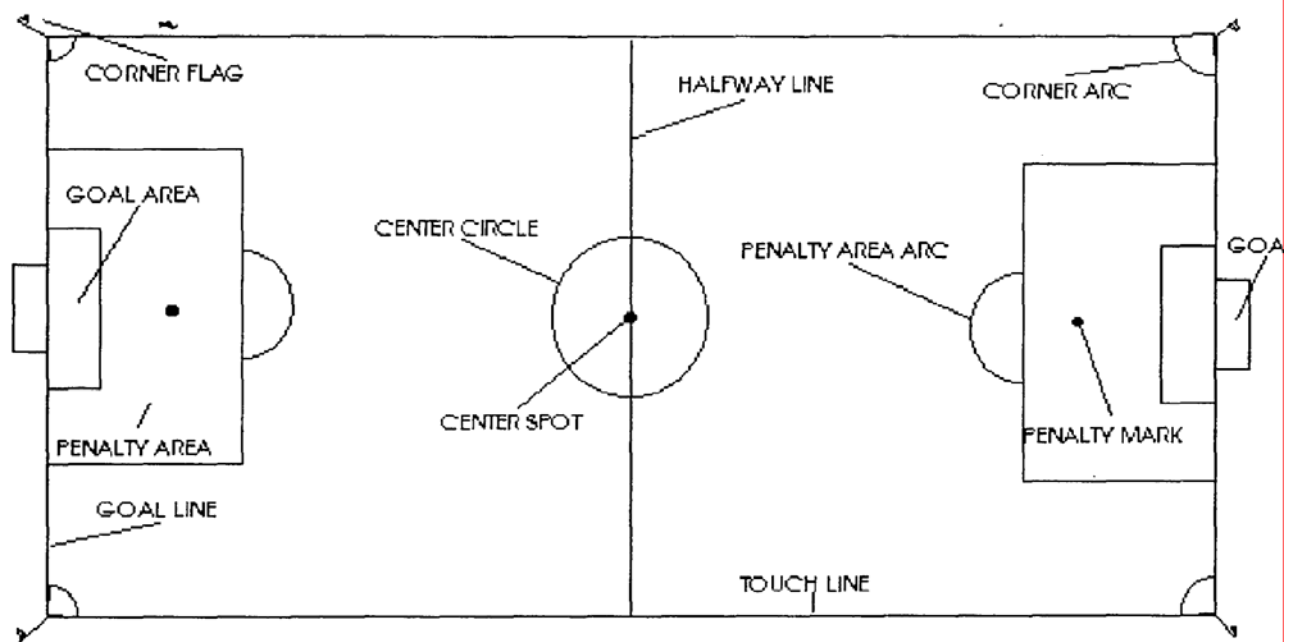
Soccer has 17 laws or “rules” by which the game is played. Most of these laws are easy to understand. The laws are designed to make soccer fun, safe, and fair for all participants.

The object of soccer is for a player to get the ball into the other team’s goal by using any part of the body except the player’s hands and arms. The goalie is the only player allowed to touch the ball with the hands and arms and then only while he is located in his own penalty area.

A referee is in charge of the soccer game. A referee’s main objective should be the safety of the players. It is the referee’s responsibility to ensure that the game remains fun for everyone. This includes players, spectators and the officials.

You will undoubtedly question some of the officiating calls as you watch a soccer game. This is only natural. To be fair to the referee you should read and understand the 17 laws so that you have a good understanding of the rules of soccer. Try to keep in mind that everyone who is watching a game has a different perspective. Spectators will be most likely, rooting for one team or the other. This will influence how they view the game. The spectators will more than likely have a family member playing in youth soccer. Also keep in mind that everyone will be viewing the game from a different angle. Try to give the referee the benefit of a doubt. The referees are much closer to the play than spectators. They should be trained in the laws and impartial to the game’s outcome.

The 17 laws described below are the basic laws of soccer accepted throughout the world. These laws are usually altered slightly so the game is more fun and beneficial for young players. Each league should have a specific set of rules it will follow. These rules should be distributed to the coach. Look over the rules of your league to make sure you fully understand them.



LAW 1 - The Field of Play

This is the basic layout of a soccer field. The size of the field will vary from league to league, usually depending on the age of the players.

LAW 2 - The Ball

A regulation size soccer ball is a No. 5 ball. Youth leagues may use different size balls, such as a No. 3 ball or a No. 4 ball, depending on the age of the children.

LAW 3 - Number of Players

There must be no more than 11 players on the field of play for either team. A minimum number of players is usually 7. Some youth leagues encourage games with less than 11 players to help in the development of young players. One player from each team must be designated as a goalkeeper. The goalkeeper must wear a different color shirt from his teammates so that everyone can easily distinguish the goalie. The goalie can only use his hands inside the penalty area.

LAW 4 - Player's Equipment

Players must wear the same colored jersey or shirts. All youth programs require shin guards to be worn by all players. If your players will be wearing cleats, make sure they are soccer cleats. A soccer cleat does not have a cleat at the front edge of the shoe like a baseball cleat. This is for safety.

LAW 5 - Referees

The referee enforces the 17 laws. There is one difference between soccer and most other sports played in America. In soccer, the referee may let play continue and not call a foul if he or she thinks that stopping play would give an advantage to the team committing the foul. This is called the "advantage clause". The referee should say "play on" when this occurs.

LAW 6 - Linesmen and Lineswomen

Two linesmen may assist the referee in controlling the game. The linesmen's duty is to signal to the referee when the ball is out; to indicate a corner kick, a goal kick or to designate which team is entitled to the throw-in. The linesmen may also signal offsides, fouls or misconduct if a goal has been scored or when substitution is desired.

The referee on the field makes the official and final decisions. The linesmen are there to assist the referee; the referee may or may not act upon their advice. Coaches should not expect to have linesmen at their youth soccer games. Sometimes you are lucky to have a single referee. I have coached games where the opposing coach and I had to take turns being the referee, because an official never showed up.

LAW 7 - Duration of the Game

The duration of the game will depend on the age of the children. Older children will more than likely have two halves. Younger children often times play four quarters. Your league will determine whether quarters or halves are played and how long each will be.

LAW 8 - Start of Play: Kick Off and Drop Ball

A kick off is taken to start a game, to restart play after a goal has been scored or to start the second half or a new quarter. At kickoff all players must be on their team's half of the field. The ball is placed on the center spot in the middle of the center circle. The ball must be kicked forward at least one full rotation into the opponents' "half of the field." The team that kicks off to begin the game is determined by a coin toss between the captains and the referee. After a goal the team that was just scored upon starts the kick off. For new quarters and halves, the team, which did not kick off the previous quarter or half will kick off. A goal cannot be scored by kicking the ball directly into the goal on a kick off.

A drop ball is played when the referee stops play for a reason other than a rule infraction. An injury is a good example. The referee restarts play by dropping the ball between two players, one from each team. A dropped ball may not be played until it touches the ground. The first player playing the ball is allowed to play the ball again without it having to be touched by another player. This means the player may dribble, pass or shoot the ball after touching it.

LAW 9 - Ball In and Out of Play

The ball is out of play whenever it is completely outside the outside edge of the touchline or the goal line either on the ground or in the air. Also it is out of play when the referee stops play for any reason.

The ball is in play if any part of the ball is inside or touching the touchline or goal line. The ball is considered in play after bouncing off of a goal post, cross bar, corner flag, linesmen or referee if the ball remains on the playing field.

LAW 10 - Method of Scoring

A goal can only be scored if the entire ball goes completely over the outside edge of the goal line, under the cross bar and between the goal posts while it is in play. Any player may score goals, including the goalie. Except when taking a free kick, throw-in, goal kick, penalty kick or kick off, a ball played by a player directly into his own goal is a score for the opposing team.

LAW 11 - Offside

An offensive player must have two opponents including the goalkeeper between himself and the goal line at the moment the ball is passed to him. Offside is determined when the ball is passed to the player, not when the player receives the ball.

Offside position and offside are not the same. It is not against the rules to be in an offside position. It is against the rules to be offside. Here is a definition of these two concepts.

Offside Position - A player is in the offside position if he is:

- ahead of the ball and
- in the opponents half of the field and
- there are fewer than two opponents even with or ahead of him.

Offside -A player who is in the offside position becomes offside when

- he participates in the play or
- he interferes with an opponent or
- otherwise tries to take advantage of being in the offside position.

Exceptions - A player in an offside position is not to be called offside if he receives the ball directly from:

- a throw-in or
- a corner kick or
- a goal kick.

LAW 12 - Fouls and Misconduct

There are two kinds of fouls in soccer:

- Penal or Major Fouls.
- Non-Penal or Minor Fouls.

There are nine penal or major fouls.

These fouls must be committed intentionally and may result in a Red Card". The fouls are as follows:

- Kicking a player.
- Jumping up at a player.
- Charging a player in a rough way.
- Charging a player from behind.
- Tripping a player.
- Hitting or spitting at a player.
- Pushing a player.
- Holding a player.
- Handling the ball. (Except by a goalkeeper). This foul is called if the player is trying to control the ball with his hands or arms.

If one of these nine penalty fouls is committed and the referee blows his whistle and calls a foul, the opposing team gets a direct free kick. A "direct" kick means the opponent can try to score a goal directly from the kick. If the player committing the major foul receives a "red card" from the referee, he must leave the game, and is not allowed to return.

There are five non-penal or minor fouls.

If a player commits a minor foul he may receive a "Yellow Card" from the referee.

The five minor fouls are:

- Dangerous play. Examples of a dangerous play are: high kicking near another player's head, or trying to play a ball held by a goalie.
- Fair charging, but with the ball out of playing distance.
- Illegal obstruction. When a player intentionally takes a position between the ball and an opponent, when not within playing distance of the ball.
- Charging the goalkeeper in the goal area.
- Goalkeeper Infringements.
- Goalkeeper taking more than four steps while controlling the ball.
- Goalkeeper playing the ball with his hands when the ball is kicked by a teammate.
- Intentionally wasting time.

(These three Goalkeeper Infringement fouls will not usually be called in young children's games.) When the referee stops play by blowing his whistle for a minor foul, the opposing team is awarded an indirect free kick. A goal cannot be scored directly from an indirect free kick. The ball must be played by a player other than the one taking the indirect kick, before a legal goal can be scored.

Misconduct - There are two kinds of misconduct:

- When an action results in a caution or a "yellow card" from the referee. A referee may warn a player to improve his conduct before a caution is issued.
- When an action results in a player being ejected from the game, a "red card". The referee has the authority to "red card" coaches or spectators because of misconduct or interference of the game.

LAW 13 - Free Kick

There are two type of free kicks: Direct and Indirect. The types of fouls that result in a free kick are described in LAW 12.

Direct Free Kick:

On a direct free kick, the ball may be kicked directly into the goal for a score by the player taking the kick. The direct free kick is taken at the spot where the foul occurred, unless it is within the penalty box. Then a penalty kick is awarded.

Indirect Free Kick:

A goal can be scored only if the ball is touched by one or more players from either team, after it is kicked into play and before it enters the goal.

There are a few rules that are followed on a free kick, they are:

- The referee will signal an indirect free kick by putting one arm straight up into the air.
- The ball must be stationary when it is kicked.
- The team taking a free kick is entitled to have all opponents at least 10 yards from the ball when the free kick is taken.
- The kicker may kick the ball if the opponents are closer than 10 yards if he wishes.
- The kicker may ask the referee to move the opponents back 10 yards from the ball. The kicker must then wait until the referee blows his whistle before taking the free kick.
- If a free kick is taken within 10 yards of the opponent's goal, opposing players may stand on their own goal line between the goal posts.
- A free kick by the defending team within its own goal area may be taken from any point within the half of the goal area in which the free kick was awarded.
- An indirect free kick by the attacking team within the defending teams goal area is taken on the six yard line at the point nearest to where the foul was committed. (The six yard line is the line that outlines the goal area).
- The player taking the free kick must not play the ball again after it has been kicked into play until another player, from either team, has touched the ball.

LAW 14 - Penalty Kick

A penalty kick is awarded when a defender commits a penal or major foul with the penalty area. The team that was fouled is given a penalty kick from the penalty mark. All players except the goalkeeper must remain outside the penalty area and penalty arc until the kick is taken. The defending goalkeeper must stand on the goal line, between the goal posts and is not allowed to move until the ball is kicked. If the goalkeeper moves and the penalty shot does not score, then the penalty kick is retaken. Encroachment is when a player enters the penalty area or penalty arc before the ball is kicked. If a defender encroaches, then a scoring shot counts, a non-scoring shot is retaken. If an attacker encroaches, a scoring shot is disallowed and the kick is retaken. If the shot was non-scoring then the defending team gets an indirect free kick or a goal kick depending on where the ball is when the referee blows his whistle. If both teams encroach, the penalty kick is retaken whether it was a scoring shot or not. The penalty kick must go forward and cannot be played again by the kicker until another player has touched the ball.

LAW 15 - Throw-in

A throw-in is taken to restart a game after the ball goes out of play over the touchline. A throw-in is taken by a player from the team, which did not touch the ball last. The player throwing the ball in must have both feet on the ground and both hands on the ball over his head. Both feet must remain on or behind the touchline. The thrower must throw the ball with equal strength from both hands from the back of the head and over the top of the head. The thrower must not play the ball again until another player from either team has touched the ball. A player cannot score a goal directly from a throw-in. A player in the offside position receiving the ball directly from a throw-in is not offside.

LAW 16- Goal Kick

The box located directly in front of the goal is called the goal area. When the attacking team last touches the ball before it crosses over the goal line, the defending team is awarded a goal kick. A goal kick is taken by any player on the defending team. The ball must be played from within the half of the goal area on the side of the field where the ball went out of play. The opposing team must remain outside of the penalty area until the ball completely leaves the goal area. The goal kick is played again if the ball does not leave the penalty area, if the ball crosses the goal line before leaving the penalty area or if the ball is played again by a player from either team before it leaves the penalty area. The kicker may not play the ball again until another player from either team touches the ball. A player in the offside position receiving the ball directly from a goal kick is not offside.

LAW 17- Corner Kick

If a ball goes over the goal line and is last touched by the defending team, the attacking team is awarded a corner kick. The corner kick is taken from within the corner arc on the side of the field where the ball went out of play. The corner kick may be taken by any player on the attacking team. The kicker is allowed to score a goal by kicking the ball directly into the goal. The opponents must be 10 yards back from the ball on a corner kick. The kicker is not allowed to play the ball again until a player from either team touches the ball. A player in the offside position receiving the ball directly from a corner kick is not offside.