



## **Fouls And Misconduct Clarifications Headline Soccer Rules Changes For 2023-24**

High school soccer officials will now have a set of criteria to consider when determining misconduct for a player “denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity” (DOGSO), as well as added definitions for fouls involving physical contact.

These changes are two of 11 revisions recommended by the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) Soccer Rules Committee at its February 5-7 meeting in Indianapolis. All changes were subsequently approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

Rule 12-8-4 was added and includes four criteria to consider when determining if a goal-scoring opportunity was denied: the distance between the offense and the ball, the general direction of the play, the likelihood of keeping or gaining control of the ball, and the location and number of defenders. The rule also outlines the resulting consequences if DOGSO is determined to have occurred.

“Denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity (DOGSO) is currently stated under ‘misconduct’ but the rules offered no guidance to officials for how to determine when a DOGSO foul has occurred,” said Julie Cochran, NFHS director of sports and liaison to the NFHS Soccer Rules Committee. “These criteria now help officials identify a DOGSO foul and the corresponding penalties.”

A new section on Fouls was created for Rule 12-1-1, which defines the seven direct free kick fouls and provides consistency for officials when interpreting misconduct. The corresponding definitions for Careless, Excessive Force, Serious Foul Play, Tactical Fouls and Violent Conduct were adjusted in Rule 18-1-1.

“When determining if a foul has been committed, officials must also consider the degree of contact used when committing the foul,” Stan Latta, chair of the Soccer Rules Committee, said. “These definitions within the rules for direct free kick fouls will provide consistency for officials when determining misconduct.”

Multiple changes were made to Rule 3 regarding substitutions and injured players. Determining when an injured player must leave the field of play was addressed in Rule 3-3-2b. If the referee stops play for an injured player, the player must only leave the game if a coach or health-care professional is beckoned from the sideline.

Rule 3-4-1e was added to clarify that a player being replaced shall exit the field on the bench side unless an injury prohibits it. This would avoid unnecessary interaction with opposing teams and fans, limiting the potential for unsporting behavior. Rule 3-3-7 was amended to clarify that players must

re-enter a game from the official area after being beckoned in. This change helps avoid potential confusion when a player re-enters after exiting the game elsewhere on the field.

Other rules changes include:

- Rule 11-1-5 defines the criteria for deliberately playing the ball when determining an offside infraction. A player must have the time and space, and sufficient sight of the ball, to control the ball and have the possibility of passing the ball to a teammate or gaining possession of the ball.
- Rules 12-2-2 and 12-2-3 were added to indicate that a player shall be penalized for handling even if the contact is accidental, eliminating the need for referees to determine the intent of hand or arm contact.
- Rule 12-7-5 adds language and direction for officials when a goalkeeper illegally handles the ball both inside and outside the penalty area. If a goalkeeper handles the ball inside the penalty area when not permitted to do so, an indirect free kick is awarded but given no disciplinary sanction. However, if the violation is playing the ball a second time (with or without the hand/arm) after a restart and before touching another player, the goalkeeper shall be cautioned if stopping a promising attack. The goalkeeper is ejected if denying an obvious goal-scoring opportunity while improperly handling the ball.

A complete listing of the soccer rules changes will be available on the NFHS website at [www.nfhs.org](http://www.nfhs.org). Click on “Activities & Sports” at the top of the home page and select “Soccer.”

According to the 2021-22 NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, soccer is the fifth most popular high school sport for boys with 436,465 participants in 12,539 schools nationwide. Soccer is the third most popular sport for girls with 374,773 participants in 12,071 schools.