



2026-27 Soccer Points Of Emphasis

Properly Marked Fields

Administrators, coaches, and officials must prioritize the proper marking of team areas and the maintenance of the 10-foot buffer around the field's boundary lines to ensure a safe and professional environment for student-athletes. The Soccer Field Diagram in Rule 1 requires a minimum of 10 feet of space beyond the field boundary lines for spectators, fencing, or any objects. Any safety concerns should be identified by officials and brought to the attention of administrators or coaches for remediation.

Team areas extend 10 yards from each side of the halfway line for a total length of 20 yards and set back 10 feet from the touchline. On multi-use fields, football lines can provide a visual landmark: team areas extend from the 40-yard line to the 20-yard line. By rule, team areas must be clearly designated and marked by a solid line. Defining these spaces is essential for maintaining bench decorum, as all coaches and bench personnel are required to remain within these restricted areas during the contest. Properly marked areas allow officials to effectively manage the sidelines and ensure that personnel do not interfere with the game or the activities of the officiating crew. When conducting pre-game safety inspections, officials should identify any missing team-area markings and work with administrators or coaches to place cones as temporary boundaries. Any violations of Rule 1-5-3 must be reported to the state association.

Shared Professionalism and Bench Accountability

High school soccer serves as an extension of the classroom, requiring both officials and coaches to uphold the highest standards of composure and integrity. As adult leaders in education-based environment, everyone involved must contribute to a calm, respectful atmosphere that prioritizes student athletes. Professional communication should remain non-threatening and conversational, as raising one's voice, displaying frustrations or acting in a provocative manner only escalates conflict and distracts from the educational mission of high school athletics. When all participants prioritize a calm, cool, and collected demeanor, they ensure the focus remains on the student-athletes and maintain a respectful, professional, and safe environment for competition.

In situations involving misconduct, education-based principles require that interactions between coaches and officials remain brief, respectful and focused on facts. When a caution or ejection is issued, officials are trained to advise the head coach of the sanction using appropriate rulebook language, such as "unsporting conduct" or "dissent." Both parties share responsibility for ensuring communication remains professional. Officials must deliver information calmly and clearly and coaches must receive it without arguing, complaining or displaying unsporting dissent.

Any dissent or inappropriate conduct during these conversations should be addressed firmly and professionally by officials as maintaining order and respect is essential to the learning environment. Coaches are accountable for their behavior and must support the educational goals of high school athletics by modeling emotional control and sportsmanship. When both coaches and officials uphold these shared standards, the result is a safe, respectful and developmentally appropriate environment for student athletes.

Managing Goal Celebrations

Celebrating after scoring a goal is an integral part of the game of soccer. Reacting with joy is permissible provided it is not excessive and not accompanied by taunting. Officials should recognize that high school soccer is a players' game, and allowing student-athletes to celebrate success contributes to a positive educational environment. To this end, players are allowed to celebrate, and it is a reality that it takes some time to express emotions. Luckily, the clock is stopped after a goal and it also takes time for the defending team to regroup and collect themselves before their kick-off. Celebrations may include leaving the field momentarily, which is permissible so long as players make a prompt return to the playing field. Engaging in rehearsed or choreographed celebrations should be discouraged by officials. The line between allowable celebration and misconduct is crossed when a player or team prevents a timely restart by delaying excessively or by taunting their opponents or fans.

Illegal actions occur when celebrations become prolonged, excessive, or serve to focus attention upon the individual rather than the game. This is especially true if celebrating players ignore requests by the official to return to their half of the field. Any act that prohibits a timely restart is considered unsporting conduct and requires the official to intervene and issue a caution (yellow card). Examples include jumping over retention flagging or barriers, climbing perimeter fences, or removing one's jersey. Officials must stay vigilant following a goal, observing players to ensure that no taunting or other provocative gestures occur that could create a serious situation. By using preventive officiating to discourage time-wasting and holding players accountable for delayed restarts, officials maintain the flow of the game and uphold the spirit of safe and fair competition.

Penalty Kick Offenses and the Concept of Impact

For the 2026-27 season, Rule 14 has been revised to clarify that encroachment during a penalty kick is only penalized if the offense has a clear impact on the play. For the defending team, impact occurs if an encroaching defender clearly distracts the kicker or if they play a rebounding ball or challenge an attacker to prevent a goal-scoring opportunity. For the attacking team, impact constitutes clearly distracting the goalkeeper or if an encroaching attacker plays the ball or challenges a defender to score or create a scoring chance. If players from either team enter the penalty area or arc early but have no effect on the kicker, goalkeeper, or the immediate play, officials should allow the result of the kick to stand without penalty.

Officiating these offenses on a penalty kick requires officials to judge the consequence of the encroachment alongside the outcome of the kick. Encroachment by the defending team is never penalized if the goal is scored. If the kick is missed or saved and the defense encroached with impact, the kick is retaken. If the attacking team encroaches with impact and a goal is scored, the goal is disallowed and the kick is retaken; if they encroach with impact and miss, the restart is an indirect free kick for the defending team. Goalkeepers who encroach and impact the kicker or make a save shall receive a warning for the first offense in a game, with cautions reserved for subsequent infractions. While kickers are permitted stutter-steps and hesitation moves during their run-up, once the approach to the ball is complete, feinting to kick the ball is an act of unsporting conduct, that shall be cautioned and is enforced on the first and every subsequent occurrence.

Identification of the NFHS Authenticating Mark on Game Balls

The NFHS Authenticating Mark ensures easy identification of inflated and non-inflated balls used in interscholastic competitions for which the NFHS writes playing rules. All such balls are required to display the NFHS Authenticating Mark. The use of conforming equipment is essential to the integrity of contests played under the NFHS rules. This mark helps to promote a level playing field by ensuring consistency in the equipment being used. The mark allows for the development of more sophisticated standards in balls and clearly communicates to administrators, coaches, and officials that these standards are being met.

Non-compliance with these requirements will be reported to the state association for potential penalties following the contest. Administrators and coaches play a pivotal role in making sure all inflated and non-inflated balls meet these specifications. They must instill the importance of proper equipment use through consistent reinforcement during the pre-competition certification meeting and throughout the season. Game officials must also remain vigilant and report any non-compliant balls to the state association office.