



Coach Responsibility For Bench Decorum Reinforced In High School Soccer Rules Changes

Beginning next school year, soccer head coaches may be warned, cautioned or ejected for misconduct committed by bench personnel in the team area. The increased responsibility of head coaches for team conduct highlights the 2025-26 high school soccer rules changes.

In all, six rules changes were recommended by the NFHS Soccer Rules Committee at its February 10-12 meeting in Indianapolis. All rules changes were reviewed and approved by the NFHS Board of Directors.

Rule 12-4-4 was amended to support positive bench decorum and reinforce the head coach's responsibility for the conduct of their team and bench personnel within the team area. The new language allows officials to take action against the coach in addition to any cautions or ejections issued to the sanctioned offender.

"The 2025-26 rules changes emphasize accountability and sportsmanship, reinforcing the head coach's responsibility for team conduct," said Gibby Reynolds, chair of the Soccer Rules Committee and an administrator with the Oregon School Activities Association. "Head coaches have a high degree of responsibility for their team areas and bench behavior and are to be held accountable now that officials are allowed to warn, caution or eject head coaches for misconduct committed by bench personnel. This change promotes a culture of respect and positive behavior on the sidelines. These updates, along with the other approved changes, continue our commitment to improving the high school soccer experience for players, coaches and officials."

The committee also addressed behavior toward officials aiming to reduce unnecessary confrontations. Rule 7-2-4 was added and stipulates that no coach, player, substitute or other team personnel other than the team captain can approach or speak to officials during the interval between periods, unless beckoned by the official. This action will now result in a yellow card to the offending individual.

A change to Rule 3-3-2 clarifies that if an official beckons a coach or appropriate health-care provider for an injured player – including the goalkeeper – that player must leave the field regardless of the reason the clock is stopped.

Teams will now be allowed to substitute when a game is temporarily suspended thanks to a change to Rule 3-3-2. Often games are paused for water breaks in hot weather. Teams will now be permitted to make substitutions during these stoppages.

Rule 4-1-2 was edited to clarify that the number required on the front of the uniform may be on the jersey and/or the shorts.

Finally, Rule 18, which listed definitions, has been eliminated from the NFHS Soccer Rules Book. All relevant definitions were relocated to their corresponding rules, and redundant or outdated terms were removed. In addition, the index was expanded to better serve as a reference tool.

"Over the past few years, the rules committee has been committed to streamlining the rules book for greater clarity and ease of use" said Julie Cochran, NFHS Director of Sports and liaison to the Soccer Rules Committee. "By integrating Rule 18's terms and definitions directly into their corresponding rule sections, we continue this effort – eliminating redundancy, resolving potential conflicts and ensuring consistency. The result is a more intuitive and efficient resource for all users."

A complete listing of the soccer rules changes will be available on the NFHS website at www.nfhs.org. Click on "Activities & Sports" at the top of the home page and select "Soccer." The print version of the 2025-26 Soccer Rules Book will be available for purchase in late May at www.NFHS.com, and the digital version will be available in May via NFHS Digital at www.NFHS.org.

According to the most recent NFHS High School Athletics Participation Survey, soccer is the fifth-most popular sport for boys with 467,483 participants in 12,754 schools nationwide. For girls, it ranks third with 383,895 participants at 12,307 schools.