



Some Coach Notes for the Hillsborough 8U Mini-Cup from a Veteran Hillsborough Referee

v1.0 Roger Avedon, 2024

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Hi Coach! Thanks for volunteering for Hillsborough AYSO. This is a quick write-up for some things to think through as you plan for the Mini-Cup based upon our experience as referees.

This is not a strategy guide! It's sort of a pitfall guide so that your team gets as far in the Mini-Cup as your performances earns.

Note that the Mini-Cup is quite new – just a few years running. It is intended to give 8U players a taste of competitive play before they move up to 10U. It has been very successful and fun so far.

The Mini-Cup uses a simple point system to determine who advances. Unlike the regular season, score matters. Whoever has the most points at the end of regulation time wins, with a few caveats which are explained below.

Substitution Issues

Don't play games with your line-up to sit weaker players more than you're allowed to, or to keep stronger players on the field. The referees are trained to watch for strict adherence to the substitution rules during the Mini-Cup.

If a player is upset about falling down or from a hard contact you can take the player off the field for a minute, play down with one less player on the field, and then ask the referee for permission to return that player at the next stoppage in play. This avoids substituting a player for injury who isn't really injured—just shaken up or upset. If you choose to *substitute* that player, they are considered to have played that entire quarter (for purposes of playing time) even though they are now sitting out for the rest of the quarter. The substitute going in is *not* considered to have

played that quarter (for purposes of playing time) even though they are playing for the remainder of the quarter.

Each match must have a winner (no tie games). Games that end in a tie after regulation time will be decided by Golden Goal ("sudden death") in a 5-minute extra period called Extra Time. No goals after the first 5-minute Extra Time will result in another 5-minute Extra Time. Extra Time has no restrictions on substitution and you can play all your best players without restriction.

Sportsmanship Issues

Everyone is generally very well-behaved in Hillsborough AYSO but it is important to understand that even adults can get emotionally overwhelmed in the moment and act irresponsibly, and this is more likely during intense competition. AYSO does not tolerate irresponsible behavior on the part of coaches or spectators in general but we take extra care to maintain a positive environment in tournaments like the Mini-Cup. So, don't get carried away. Keep your coaching positive. Don't be angry with your players, the opposing coaches or the referees.

The Laws of the Game (the international rules of soccer) require team officials to be sanctioned for verbal misconduct similar to adult players. The Mini-Cup tournament rules include this explicitly.

If you get *Cautioned* (Yellow Card) as a coach, that is equivalent to the other team scoring for purposes of your team's Mini-Cup advancement. This is intentional. It means that losing your temper or arguing with the referee about a call you think cost you a goal, *costs you the goal automatically*. There's no benefit.

AYSO considers spectators to be team officials with regard to sportsmanship. If you think you may have rowdy spectators, send an email *before the Mini-Cup* to remind them that their own actions can cost the team advancement. If a spectator can't control themselves, it is the coach who is cautioned with a Yellow Card and the team loses a point toward advancement. The referee will give you, the coach, a verbal warning if they're concerned about a particular spectator. Don't ignore that warning. Part of the responsibilities of an AYSO coach is to promote Good Sportsmanship, including spectators. We don't grind through these details to scare you, but rather to make it clear that it is everyone's responsibility to keep the game Fun, Fair and Safe™ :-)

Throttling Back When You're Winning By A Lot

The Mini-Cup is supposed to be fun for everyone. Although it is hard to control 8U players, if your team starts to open up a large lead, usually 5 goals, there is a strong expectation that you will take explicit steps to avoid running up the score further.

Player maturity determines a lot of your options (and these can be combined):

- 1) If most or all of your goals come from one or two players, instruct those players that they are no longer to shoot on goal and should pass to other players so their teammates can score.
- 2) If you have a lot of effective shooters (wow!), try:
 - a) no shots from inside the goal area ("the box")
 - b) Three or more successful passes before each shot - you may have to count out loud
 - c) if one or two players have never scored this season, only they can shoot on goal
- 3) If your players are mature enough to play positions you can also move shooters to defense and weaker players forward. You can also instruct your superstars not to cross the halfway line.

What the Other Referees Are For

Depending upon staffing, we may add Assistant Referees ("ARs") to semifinal and championship matches in the Mini-Cup. It is important to remember that ARs have no authority in soccer; their only job is to assist the Referee (the official on the field) with determining the restart when the ball goes out of play.

No matter who else is at the field, what their referee credentials are, or what AYSO position they hold, *no one* has any decision-making authority regarding your match *except* the Referee for your match. If an Assistant Referee (AR) indicates the direction of the throw-in, that has no authority. The Referee makes the decision. Similarly, goal kicks versus corner kicks, whether a goal is valid, or any other decision during the match is solely the responsibility of the Referee. This is also true of decisions involving player equipment such as jewelry (only special religious or medical allowed), bandages or braces, etc. Unless the Referee makes the decision, no decision has been made.

Coaches often ask how they can challenge a particular ruling. Unless and until we get VARs in Hillsborough (you laugh now...) you can't. Any possible benefit of correcting a real error is swamped out by allowing coaches to argue with the Referee. Don't even try. Also note that, in soccer, once play has restarted the Referee is *not allowed* to change a decision.

If you're honestly curious about a particular call, most referees, particularly more experienced ones, will happily explain how they applied the Laws to a particular call if you approach them politely after the match. For example: "Ref, on that goal kick in the 3rd Quarter, would you explain why it was a goal kick and not a corner?"

Good luck! Thanks again for volunteering!