



Albany Youth Soccer



Dear Coach:

Friends of Albany Youth Soccer, Inc. ("AYS") sincerely thanks you for donating your time to coach AYS games. Without coaches like you, it would be impossible for this organization to fulfill its mission of educating the players about the game of soccer and ensuring that all players have a safe and enjoyable experience. The purpose of this letter is to assist you in your efforts by providing some guidance in the specific rules and procedures that we have developed for our games. This letter is not intended to be a comprehensive review of the laws of soccer or as a manual of soccer coaching, only a basic framework for conducting AYS games.

1. Schedules and Playing Time

AYS Game Lengths:

U6, U8, and U10: 2 – Twenty Minute Halves

U12 and U15: 2 – Twenty-Five Minute Halves

AYS Game Start Times:

U6: 9:30 AM Main Field

U8: 10:40 AM Main Field

U10: 11:50 AM Main Field

U12: 1:00 PM Main Field / Bowl Field

U15 12:00 PM Bowl Field

Game-day schedules are designed to allow for an adequate amount of time for the previous games' teams to clear the field and to allow the next teams to warm up. Please have your players at the fields at least twenty (20) minutes prior to your start time, so that you may warm up and prepare for the game and start on time. It is important to understand that if the games do not start on time, it may not be possible to play a complete game in your allotted time slot.

2. Fouls and Misconduct

AYS is a recreational, non-competitive league. Many of the players, however, go on to play for competitive and/or travel teams. To ensure that all players have an enjoyable experience, we have modified the laws of the game of soccer in such a way that the spirit of the game is preserved while we make allowances for the limited experience and ability of the younger ages players to understand many of the complex rules.

Referees in the younger age-group games are instructed to focus on calling blatant, intentional fouls, such as pushing, kicking, tripping and *intentional* handling of the soccer ball. Moreover, referees are told to stop play and award free kicks for dangerous play by the players (i.e.

high kicks or placing their head near the opponent's feet). More complex fouls, such as obstruction or off-side (off-side is discussed further below), may be called in the older age groups as the players become more sophisticated in their skills.

Referees are instructed to briefly explain the calls they make. Coaches are certainly allowed to question the nature of a call, but please understand that a lengthy explanation or argument about any given call is neither appropriate nor allowed. If, however, you have a specific question concerning a rule or interpretation of a rule of the game, please do not hesitate to discuss your question with a board member after your game or at another appropriate time.

3. **Free Kicks**

The laws of the game of soccer (as set forth by the United States Soccer Federation) provide for two types of free kicks—Direct and Indirect. Goals may be scored directly from direct kicks. The ball must be touched by a second player, however, before a goal can be scored from an indirect free kick. The laws of the game of soccer (as set forth by soccer's international ruling body, FIFA) provide guidelines for the type of free kick awarded for a given foul or misconduct:

A **direct free kick** is awarded to the opposing team if a player commits any of the following six offences in a manner considered by the referee to be careless, reckless or committed with excessive force:

- kicks or attempts to kick an opponent;
- trips or attempts to trip an opponent;
- jumps at an opponent;
- charges an opponent;
- strikes or attempts to strike an opponent;
- pushes an opponent.

A direct free kick is also awarded to the opposing team if a player commits any of the following four offences:

- tackles an opponent to gain possession of the ball, making contact with the opponent before touching the ball;
- holds an opponent;
- spits at an opponent;
- handles the ball deliberately (except for the goalkeeper within his own penalty area)."

An **indirect free kick** is awarded to the opposing team if a goalkeeper, inside his own penalty area, commits any of the following four offences:

- takes more than six seconds while controlling the ball with his hands before releasing it from his possession (**Note: this rule is not generally enforced in the U6/U8/U10 level games. If it is going to be enforced in the older age groups an AYS game, the referee will should ensure**

that the offending goal keeper is given a warning prior to being penalized);

- touches the ball again with his hands after it has been released from his possession and has not touched any other player ;
- touches the ball with his hands after it has been deliberately kicked to him by a team-mate;
- touches the ball with his hands after he has received it directly from a throw-in taken by a team-mate.

An indirect free kick is also awarded to the opposing team if a player, in the opinion of the referee:

- plays in a dangerous manner (i.e., attempting to kick a ball above an opponent's waist, or attempting to head a ball below a player's waist);
- impedes the progress of an opponent ;
- prevents the goalkeeper from releasing the ball from his hands;
- commits any other offence for which play is stopped to caution or dismiss a player.

A team is awarded an indirect free kick when a player of the other team is penalized for being in an off-side position.

When officiating AYS games, referees are encouraged to exercise level-appropriate discretion in deciding which calls to penalize and the type of free kick that is to be awarded. For example, in the lowest age groups, U6 and U8, only the most flagrant or intentional fouls should be called. AYS has adopted a policy of awarding indirect free kicks only in the U6 and U8 age groups. Additionally, in the U10 age group, free kicks closer to the goal line than mid-field must be indirect. The purpose of this restriction is to avoid full force shots at the goal from short range which could injure a defensive player.

Older players, including many of those playing at the U10 level, should be able to exercise sufficient control over their actions such that the referee should be able to call more subtle fouls. Referees of older age-group games, therefore, may take the time to distinguish between the direct free kick fouls and the indirect free kick fouls. It must be remembered, though, that the referee should educate the players as well as enforce the rules. Therefore, referees should make sure that the players understand the foul that was called and the procedure that must be followed for the free kick. If, as a coach, you believe that referees are not making appropriate calls, please bring your concerns to the attention of a board member.

The Laws of the Game of Soccer allow a referee to refrain from stopping play for a foul when doing so would negate an advantage held by player upon whom the foul was committed. This is known as the "Advantage Rule" and is designed to prevent unnecessary stoppage of the game. In the lowest levels, U10 and below, the Advantage Rule will be applied only to the most

obvious situations (i.e., the player that was fouled is in the process of scoring a goal). If there is a question, the referees are instructed to explain why a particular foul was not called. In the older age groups, the referees will apply the Advantage Rule as appropriate keeping in mind the seriousness of the foul and the likelihood of the players understanding the benefit of the decision not to call a particular foul. Finally, referees are instructed to allow the games to flow as continuously as possible. To that end, referees are told to avoid stopping play for trivial, non-dangerous fouls.

4. *Throw-ins, Goal Kicks and Corner Kicks*

a) *Throw-ins*

Throw-ins are awarded when the ball crosses the touch line (i.e., the lines along the side of the field). A proper throw-in requires the player to keep both feet on the ground while throwing the ball with both hands over the player's head. Although, as a coach, you have instructed your players in the proper technique for making a throw-in, many improper throws will occur during the course of the games. This is especially true in the U6 and U8 divisions. Because this league is designed to encourage and teach the players before penalizing the players for infractions of the rules, the following throw-in procedures and policies have been established for AYS games:

- Players in the U6 level will be given on-field instruction in proper throw-in technique by the referee and/or coaches and enough opportunities to make a proper throw-in;
- Players in the U8 level will be given one additional opportunity after an improper throw-in before the ball is awarded to the other team. This opportunity may be preceded by additional throw-in technique instruction by either the referee or the player's coach;
- Players in the U10 level will be given one additional opportunity to make a proper throw after making an improper throw before the ball is awarded to the other team *during the first half of a game only*. In the second half of the game, players in the U10 level are expected to use proper throw-in technique or the ball will be awarded to the opposing team;
- Players in the U12/U14 level and above are expected to make proper throw-ins. The referees have been instructed to award the ball to the opposing team in the event of an improper throw-in.

Note: A goal may not be scored directly from a throw-in.

b) *Goal Kicks*

Goal kicks are awarded when the attacking team last touches the ball before it crosses the end line. The Laws of the Game of Soccer allow a goal kick to be taken from anywhere in the goal area of the team taking the goal kick. No player is allowed to touch the ball until it has cleared the penalty area. Most AYS games, however, are played on fields without markings identifying the goal or penalty areas. Referees, therefore, are instructed to assist the player taking the goal-kick with the proper placement of the ball and to enforce an appropriate area in front of

the goal that the ball must clear before being played by either team. Coaches in the younger age levels are asked to assist the referee in creating an appropriate space between the player taking the goal-kick and the other players on the field.

c) Corner Kicks

Corner kicks are awarded when the defending team last touches the ball before it crosses the end line. Referees and coaches should ensure that the appropriate team takes the corner kick and that the defending team remains a proper (age-appropriate) distance from the ball until it has been kicked. A goal may be scored directly from a corner kick. Referees and coaches should be particularly vigilant for pushing and other types of inappropriate play directly in front of the goal during corner kicks.

5. Off-Side

A player is in an off-side position if he is nearer to his opponents' goal line than both the ball and the second last opponent. A player is not in an off-side position if he is in his own half of the field of play; he is level with the second last opponent; or he is level with the last two opponents. A player is not penalized for merely being in an off-side position. A player in an off-side position is only penalized if, at the moment the ball touches or is played by one of his team, he is, in the opinion of the referee, involved in active play by interfering with play; interfering with an opponent; or gaining an advantage by being in that position.

AYS referees are instructed not to call off-side penalties in the U6 or U8 age levels. Coaches are asked, however, not to take advantage of this rule modification by placing an offensive player in an off-side position so that the player will be in a better position to score. The referees have been instructed to ask the coach to refrain from using that particular strategy and to refer the coach to a board member in the event that coaches continue to employ such a strategy. Referees in the U10 level will penalize players for off-side if it is apparent that the players are deliberately trying to realize an advantage from being in an off-side position (or the player actually realizes an advantage from being in the off-side position). Referees will call appropriate off-side penalties in the U12/U14 level whenever the play justifies such a call.

6. Substitutions

AYS allows substitution any time the ball is out of touch (i.e., before a throw-in) or over the goal line (i.e., before a goal kick or corner kick) at all age levels. Referees, however, are warned to be alert for inappropriate substitutions intentionally designed to stop play for a team's advantage. No substitution may be made without the referee's approval. Referees may, if they deem it appropriate, deny a particular substitution and make a team wait until the next appropriate substitution time if that referee believes a team is making inappropriate substitutions.

7. Miscellaneous Issues

- a. **Shoes:** All players must have sneakers or non-metal cleats. No player may participate wearing sandals or cleats that may pose a danger to other players.

- b. Shin Guards:** Shin guards are required and must be worn properly by players at all times.
- c. Jewelry:** Players must remove all rings, necklaces (religious medals are allowed if taped securely inside the player's shirt), earrings, and bracelets. Referees will not hesitate to send a player off of the field to remove jewelry. This policy protects all players from injury and the jewelry from unnecessary loss.
- d. Coaching:** Coaches may coach from the field during U6 and U8 age level games. Coaches are not permitted to be involved in the play and should stay well clear of the ball and the players. Referees will alert the appropriate age-level coordinator to any coach who inappropriately participates or interferes with the play of a game.

The board of directors of the Friends of Albany Youth Soccer, Inc., truly appreciates your commitment to the children AYS serves. If you ever have any questions or comments about the games, coaches, or parents, please do not hesitate to approach a board member and make your questions or concerns known.

Very truly yours,

Friends of Albany Youth Soccer, Inc.