



Guidebook and Rules for the U8 Referee

Acknowledgements: This U8 Referee Guide was originally created in 2005 by MSC Referee Coordinator Matt Corley, along with input from veteran referee Steve Depetris.

This version has been formatted for single-sided printing.

Welcome. This manual is designed to help guide you through the special rules, interpretations, and game management skills required to officiate our Under-8 matches in the Montclair Soccer Club. Keep in mind that prior experience is not necessary to become an effective referee at this level. Refereeing U8 soccer in the Montclair Soccer Club only requires a short introductory class and a positive attitude. Bring your enthusiasm for the game and a desire to learn and improve to every match. Focus on keeping the game safe, fair, and fun for the players on both teams. And when you're ready, talk to your Club referee coordinator about upgrading for the following season.

The manual itself is divided into different sections corresponding to the different soccer laws as applied to this age level. Extra guidance is provided in various places to address common situations that require judgment on your part. Where needed there are also some comparisons between these U8 rules and the "standard" soccer laws for further clarity.

Remember, help is available when you need it. You can speak with your coaches and other referees, or contact the Under 8 (U8) Program Coordinator or the Club Referee Coordinator. The addresses/contact numbers for the coordinators can be found at the www.montclairsoccer.org website.

We thank you for taking an active interest in your child's soccer experience, and for providing this valuable service to your child's soccer program.

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The Soccer Hierarchy

Where are you in the maze of youth soccer?

- The Montclair Soccer Club is one of 8 youth soccer clubs in the Jack London Youth Soccer League (JLYSL – www.jlysl.org). The other clubs are Alameda, Oakland, Piedmont, Rockridge, Grass Valley, West Oakland and Bay Oaks.
- JLYSL belongs to the California Youth Soccer Association (CYSA). CYSA covers Northern California, which is in turn divided into several Districts. JLYSL, along with 16 other leagues and clubs in Alameda and Contra Costa County, are in District IV.
- CYSA belongs to the United States Soccer Federation (USSF).
- USSF belongs to the Federation Internationale De Football Association (FIFA).

The Laws of the Game that we follow are established by FIFA and are updated annually. USSF issues yearly memorandum to provide interpretations of the FIFA rules for the US, which may include permitted modifications. CYSA then further modifies the rules for our youth soccer matches which are in turn may be further modified by JLYSL to perfect the rules at the league level.

All of our licensed referees are administered by USSF. As a U8 referee you are administered by the Montclair Soccer Club, and our rules are the modified JLYSL rules that we have adapted for the U8 game. Sound confusing? Don't worry about it – it's more important right try to learn how to deal with a scrum of six-year olds than trying to absorb the rulemaking hierarchy!

The Referee's Role

The U8 soccer division at our club is a strictly recreational division. This is known as Class 4 soccer. Skilled players looking for greater challenges will eventually be able to try out for our Montclair Clippers teams at the U10 level, or even for the most competitive Class 1 Bay Oaks teams. But for now the emphasis is on learning the game, developing both personal and team skills, and on having fun. The referee's role at this level reflects that emphasis. As it is at all levels of soccer, the referee is still clearly the person in charge of the match and is charged with ensuring that play is safe, fair and enjoyable. At the U8 level the emphasis is not necessarily on penalizing infractions of the Laws of the Game, but rather on explaining and teaching those Laws to these young players.

U8 teams tend to have very little time available to absorb the basics of soccer play during practice. As a result, much of a young player's understanding of the rules of the game will be absorbed during matches. Helping these players to learn the Rules of the Game -- fouls and legal techniques associated with throw-ins, goal kicks, and kick-offs -- is an important role for the U8 referee. The U8 referee must balance this teaching with an impartial view toward enforcing safe and fair play, while at the same time minimizing unnecessary interferences in the flow of the game.

Even if you are a first-time parent with no playing experience, you will still be able to be an effective U8 referee. Keep at it, learn from mistakes, and don't forget that you will be the only parent at the game that actually gets to be on the field during the match! You've got the best seat in the house.

The Referee's Equipment

- After completion of the MSC's U8 training class you will be issued a Montclair Soccer Club U8 **Referee T-Shirt**. This shirt is to be worn at all matches to clearly distinguish you as a game official. This helps the kids and the coaches. During colder days wear the extra layers under your official shirt – just like the players – and wear your Referee T-Shirt on the outside so it's visible.
- **Comfortable running shoes**. Turf shoes are great for 90% of the days, provide greater traction than running shoes, and are more comfortable than cleats. Plus they will look like referee shoes. Cleats are superior for muddy conditions, but we rarely let games proceed on really muddy fields because we need to protect our scarce fields.
- **Whistle**. Each team is issued a whistle, but for hygienic reasons you may want to acquire your own. Remember to practice with your whistle, annoying as that might be. Good strong whistles sound confident.
- **Coin** – for the coin toss.
- **A watch** with a count-down (or count-up) feature.
- Whatever shorts, warm-ups, or pants that you are comfortable running in. Referee shorts typically extend to just above the knee.

Pregame Preparation and Player Check-In.

Try to arrive at least 15 minutes before the scheduled start. Your coach will probably want your child there much earlier anyway, and they will probably be thankful if they don't have to worry about the referee showing up.

There are several things that you will have to do before the game can begin. Generally they can be done in any order – but keep your eye on the clock and get the game started on time.

- **Introduce yourself to the other coaches and obtain the roster. Ask the coach (or the players) to line up for check-in.** Check-In is usually accomplished right on the field where the teams are warming up. Ask the players to **tap their shin guards** (see Law IV Players' Equipment) and then turn around so that they can lift up one foot for **cleat inspection**. In the early part of the season use this opportunity to remind the players to stop play whenever the whistle is blown. Read off the names and check the number of each player to complete the process and then hand the roster back to the coach. The actual player number is only a formality at this level, but it will have significance later on.
- **Obtain the game ball** from the home team's coach (see Law II below).
- **Check that the goals and corner flags are positioned correctly, safe, and suitable for play** (see Law I below)
- **Check the field for unsafe conditions.** Work with the coaches to find a solution to any hazards found.
- **Conduct the coin toss** (see Law VIII below).
- **Whistle and call for the players to take the field a few minutes before game time.** Coaches always have just one more thing to say, and players always take a few minutes to settle in. Budget time for this – it's traditional, but ask again if they aren't responding at all. Count the players and make sure each goalie is ready – ask them to signal to you if you are not sure. **Don't forget to start your stopwatch** just before you blow the whistle to commence play.

The Fields of Play (FIFA Law I and JLYSL Rules of Play)

- For U8, the field dimensions are 50-60 yards long and 30-40 yards wide. The field should be lined appropriately when you arrive so the dimensions normally don't need to be checked. If the dimensions are off a little – play on! If the field is not lined at all for some reason use cones to mark the boundaries and use your own judgment as to where the Goal Area Lines should be.
- The lines that define the outer edges of the field are called **Touch Lines** (down the sides) and **Goal Lines** (across the ends).
- The field should be marked with a **Halfway Line**, a **Center Circle** with a radius of 6 yards, four **Corner Arcs** with a radius of 1 yard, and a **Goal Area**. The Goal Area is the lined box in front of the goal. Technically it is defined by a **Goal Area Line** that starts on the Goal Line 8 yards from one Goal Post, extends 8 yards into the field of play (perpendicular with the Goal Line), continues across the field (parallel with the Goal Line), and then extends back to the Goal Line to a point that is 8 yards from the other Goal Post. U8 fields do not have a **Penalty Area**. On a larger field the penalty area is the bigger box around the goal, and the goal area is the smaller box just in front of the goal. If any of these markings are missing or worn out just use your own judgment as to where they should be.
- All of the lines are part of the area they define, so the Touch Lines and the Goal Lines are completely in the field of play and the Goal Area Lines are part of the Goal Area. Balls and feet that are just barely touching the outside of the boundary lines are in the field of play. Note that players can leave the field as a consequence of normal play – and you can let them play the ball even if most of their body is outside of the lines. The position of the ball is what matters, not the player.
- The **Goals** are about 5 feet high and 15 feet wide. Nets are highly recommended, but not required. Goals must be securely anchored to the ground. **Never allow players to hang on or climb on the goals** – falling goals kill and injure children every year. The goal is properly positioned if the back of the goal posts are even with the outside of the goal line. This is important because the goal posts must be fully in the field of play. Balls that rebound off the goal and land in the field of play are still live balls.
- **Corner Flags**, if used, must be on posts that are at least 5 feet tall to prevent injury. The corner flags, like the goal posts, must be positioned so that the outside of a pole is even with the outside of the lined corner. The corner flags are also in the field of play.

The Ball (Law II)

- For U8, a **size 3** ball is used.
- The home team supplies the ball. If they don't have a suitable one, try the visiting team.
- The ball should be a standard soccer ball in good shape, round, not too hard and one that flies true (no wobbling). Don't use a ball that has peeling edges as they could injure a player while spinning in flight.
- Properly inflated, you should be able to press the surface of the ball in about ¼-inch.
- The referee is the judge of a ball's suitability and may call for a replacement ball as needed.

Number of Players (Law III)

- For U8 games, each team consists of **7 players**, one of whom must be designated the **goalkeeper**. Team members who are not currently playing are called **substitutes**. A team can play with as few as players as they feel comfortable although the normal minimum is 5 players. Start the game on time regardless of the number of players. If a coach cannot field a team, encourage both coaches to find a scrimmage solution.
- A player (someone that is already on the field of play) may change places with the goalkeeper at any stoppage of play, provided the referee is informed of the change.
- Substitutions:
 - A **substitution** occurs when a substitute trades places with a player (including the goalkeeper).
 - The referee must give permission for each substitution.
 - CYSA and JLYSL rules permit unlimited numbers of substitutions. However, substitutions may only take place in the following situations:
 - Prior to a throw-in in the team's favor.
 - Prior to a goal kick by either team.
 - After a goal by either team (before play is restarted).
 - When play is stopped for an injury (either team may substitute).
 - When a player is cautioned, the cautioned player may be substituted.
 - At half time.
 - JLYSL also has a special rule U8 matches that allows for a "substitution break" midway through each half. This break should be only 2-3 minutes in duration. Just enough time to take a swig of water and get the teams back on the pitch.
 - There are no substitutions at the taking of a corner kick.
 - Discourage substitutions within the last minute of any playing period.
 - If a substitution occurs without a signal from you encourage the coach to wait for your acknowledgment the next time around. There are more serious implications for this offence at higher levels so coaches also need to be trained on these procedures. It's fine for them to just call out "ref!" or "sub!" and wait for your signal.

Player's Equipment (Law IV)

- Each team must wear distinctive jerseys. If there is a color conflict, the HOME team must change. For the typical Montclair vs. Montclair match-up, the **home team** will be in **white** and the **visiting team** will be in **red**.
- Each goalkeeper must wear a jersey that is different from all the other players.
- Shinguards are absolutely mandatory and must be completely covered by the socks. Do not allow players to wear the shinguards on the outside of the socks, or to wear shinguards that are too short. They should be no more than about 2" above the ankles and 2-3" below the kneecaps.
- Players may not wear anything that is dangerous to themselves or to other players. This includes jewelry (necklaces, rings, earrings, etc.), watches, hard beads in hair bands, hats with hard bills, shoes with sharp cleats, baseball shoes with toe cleats, etc. Taping up earrings is not acceptable, wearing corrective lenses is – but they won't last long.
- Orthopedic casts are absolutely forbidden, even covered ones.

- Players must wear an athletic-type shoe (no street shoes, no bare feet), but the shoes do not necessarily have to be soccer cleats (tennis shoes are perfectly acceptable). Baseball cleats are not allowed since the extra toe cleat is perfect for scraping up opponents' legs.

Referees (Law V)

- The Referee's authority begins when s/he enters the field of play and does not end until s/he leaves the field of play.
- General Duties of the Referee for youth soccer:
 - Enforce the Laws of the Game – although again for the U8's the emphasis is not necessarily on penalizing infractions.
 - Refrain from penalizing when such a penalty would give an advantage to the offending team. This is known as awarding advantage. For the U8 game this will only apply if there is a significant goal scoring opportunity arising when a foul is committed by the defense. If a goal try is imminent then signal advantage by yelling "Play On" or "Advantage". If not, then call the foul. If a shot is not taken within a few seconds of calling for advantage, the advantage did not materialize and the play should be stopped for the original foul, and the ball should be moved back to the location of the original foul.
 - Refrain from penalizing for trifling offenses. Advise the players verbally instead and keep the game moving.
 - Keep track of the time. There is no score kept for U8 matches, but in higher levels the referee is required to keep an official record of the match. Time should generally not be added to the halves unless there has been significant time lost for injury or another cause. But again you must finish the match on time so that we can squeeze in all of the days' matches.
 - The referee has the discretionary power to stop the game for any infringement of the Laws and to suspend or terminate the match when deemed necessary for safety reasons (lightning, etc.) or interference from spectators, etc.
 - Referees are responsible for issuing Cautions (yellow cards) and send-offs (red cards) as required in any match (See Law XII). However, Yellow Cards and Red Cards are not used in the U8 division, and the referees are not trained in the proper use of the cards. Sorry, you'll have to wait until you are licensed. Any significant issues should be brought to the attention of the coaches, and if necessary to the age group coordinator and the referee coordinator. Coaches should be discretely advised to substitute players that have committed an infraction that ordinarily would have resulted in a yellow or red card per Law XII.
 - No person other than players may enter the field without permission from the referee. This includes coaches. Remind people of this rule when you have to, but remember to address the coaches and spectators with tact (even when they yell).
 - Stop the game quickly for any player that is down with an apparent injury. Signal for the coach if the child is not quick to get back on their feet. If blood is present the player cannot return until the blood has been washed from the uniform as well as from the player.
 - Signal for a restart after a stoppage of play. This can be verbal, with the whistle, or with hand signals. Verbal interaction is important at the U8 level.

- The Referee is part of the field of play. Although the trick is to stay close to the play without interfering with the play, the ball or the players, every referee gets hit by the ball eventually. Play continues if the ball hits you. If the ball hits you and goes out of bounds (known as going into touch) it would be treated the same as if the player had just kicked the ball out.

Linesmen (Law IV)

- Linesmen are not normally used in U8 matches, and the system of control is with a single center referee. As a result, referees in the U8 matches must try to stay close to the play. Stay within 10 yards of the action when you can, straddle the lines when necessary to clearly see the ball, and try to predict where the ball might go next (although predicting where the ball is going next can be very difficult at this age). If you can't decide if the ball was completely out or who touched it last, and you can't make an educated guess, you can always ask for help from the sidelines. You may not always hear an objective opinion, but it is unlikely to affect the game. Quite often the players themselves will give you an indication just by giving up the ball – but don't assume that the first player to pick up the ball is necessarily the team that should have possession. One thing to remember – at least half of all throw-ins will go to the other team at this age level, so being awarded the throw-in isn't necessarily an advantage in the U8's – but it can be important to the players nevertheless.

Duration of the Game

- **U8 matches consist of two 20 minutes halves.** Time may be added for time lost due to injuries, game-delaying tactics, etc. but with the tight scheduling we have it is recommended that time be added only in extreme cases, and only in small doses.
- The **half-time** interval should only be **3-5 minutes**.
- A “**substitution break**” should be called at the 10-minute midpoint of each half and should only last **1-2 minutes**. It is easier to call this break at a normal stoppage of play such as at a throw-in, a goal-kick, a corner-kick or a goal. In order to simplify the re-start after the substitution break we recommend that the game be re-started with a kick-off in favor of the team that would have been awarded the ball after the normal stoppage. The teams do not switch sides after the substitution break.
- Be conscious of game schedules and work with the coaches to get the match started on time.

The Start of Play (Law VIII)

- **Coin Toss:** The Visiting Team calls heads/tails. The winner of the toss may choose to take the opening kick off or to choose the goal that they will defend. The other team will be awarded the other option. At this level, if they cannot decide quickly, tell the winner of the toss that they should be the team that takes the kickoff, and assign a goal to defend to the other team.

- **Kick-Off:**
 - All players must be in their own half of the field.
 - The Referee must signal with a whistle before the taking of the kick.
 - The team opposing the kicker must be at least 6 yards from the ball (outside the center circle) and must remain there until the ball is kicked. Re-take the kick if the opposing players enter the circle before the kick (which cannot be taken before the whistle).
 - The ball must travel forward (retake the kick if the ball is moved backward, sideways is probably close enough to forward).
- After a Goal: restart with a kick-off by the team that was scored on. Note that there is no need to whistle after a goal. Whistles are used when the referee wants play to be stopped, or needs the attention of the participants.
- At the beginning of the second half the team taking the kick is the team that did not have the kick-off at the start of the first half. Remember that the teams switch sides at the half.
- The Kick-Off is one of only two direct kicks in U8 soccer. This means that a goal may be scored directly from the kick-off. (Corner Kicks are the other direct kick).
- For restarts not otherwise covered in the Laws (i.e. after stoppage for an injury or due to interference from a foreign object), restart with a Drop Ball.
- **Drop Ball Procedure:**
 - Taken at the place where the ball was when the play was stopped.
 - If within the goal area, move out of the goal area (to the goal area line that is perpendicular with the goal line at a point nearest where the ball was when the play was stopped).
 - Must touch the ground before it is played (drop the ball again if touched early).
 - The drop ball should be taken with one player of each team, and advise the other players to provide some breathing space. Remind the players to kick the ball (not each other) and to wait until it hits the ground.
 - The best technique is to have one hand on the bottom of the ball and one hand on top. Remove the bottom hand to let the ball drop – and then step back before you get kicked or the ball hits you!

Ball In and Out of Play (Law IX)

- The ball is out of play when:
 - It has **completely** crossed the goal-line or touch-line, whether in the air or on the ground. The ball is **in play** when it is on the goal-line or touch-line. In general wait until you can see turf between the ball and the line before calling it out.
 - When the game has been stopped by the referee.
- The ball is in play at all other times, including:
 - When it rebounds from the goal-post, cross-bar or corner flag onto the field of play.
 - When it rebounds off the referee when the referee is in the field of play.
- Player position does not matter: a player may stand on or behind the goal-line or touch-line and legally play the ball.
- The ball is still in play when being held by the goalkeeper – if the goalkeeper drops or sets the ball down, it is a live ball that anyone may play – but give the goalies a break here and help guide them through the process of putting the ball back into play fairly and safely.

Method of Scoring

- All *free kicks* (see Law XIII) in U8 play are **indirect kicks**. This means that the ball must touch another player after being kicked before going into the goal. If a free kick touches a goalie and then enters the goal the goal is valid. If a free kick enters the goal before touching a second player the re-start is a goal kick.
- Goals may not be scored from balls that are intentionally thrown or propelled by hand or arm of an attacking player (except from goalkeepers within their own goal area). This would be a handball. Note that a goalkeeper may score a goal on him/herself by propelling or carrying or falling with the ball into the goal. Yes it is a goal if the goalie steps or walks back into their own goal in such a way that the ball completely crosses over the goal line.
- The ball must travel completely across the goal-line, between the goal posts and below the cross-bar to be counted as a goal.
- The goal counts even if kicked by a player into their own goal. (Called an Own Goal).
- Score is not kept in U8 matches (except in the heads of the players and coaches!) But referees are required to track the score in order to enforce the Sportsmanship Rule (see below).

Offside (Law XI)

The Off-side law is the most misunderstood (or the least understood) in all of soccer. It is intended to prevent a team from placing an undefended player near the goal and scoring easy goals from long passes from teammates. Off-side is not a rule in U8 soccer., and we encourage you to not worry about the law at all. The only exception to this is when a team appears to be coaching an obvious tactic of posting an attacking player in front of the goal (Cherry picking in front of the goal.) as described below.

- The full rule for offside involves quite a bit of interpretation. For simplicity the U8 offside should only be called if a player appears to have been coached to stand very near the goal well behind all of the defenders – and then only if that player is actually able to receive a pass, control it, and then fire an uncontested ball into the net. Should this happen, you'll be amazed, and if you feel that it was a coached play the re-start would be an indirect kick from the spot of the infraction.

A few notes on the “normal” offsides rule: Being in an off-side position is **not a foul in itself**. Hanging out in the attacking side without participating in the play is not a foul. Participation is always a key ingredient. There is no offside on throw-ins, corner kicks, and goal kicks, or from passes made by the opposing team.

Fouls and Misconduct (Law XII)

Deciphering soccer can be difficult for people new to the game. Soccer has certain elements of a contact sport and this often comes as a surprise. The contact must be fair of course, and as always it is the referee's job to keep the game safe and fair for all of the players. Every team will have aggressive players – including your own. Always try to remain neutral, and when in doubt about a particular player assume that the player is well-intentioned – but perhaps just a bit over-enthusiastic or clumsy. A few discreet words can

go a long way toward controlling over-exuberant behavior, and will likely be better than actually calling a foul.

Fouls

- It can be hard to properly see and react to fouls, and in general there should not be too many fouls in U8 soccer so there should not be a reason to blow your whistle for this very often. But to keep it safe for everyone call obvious fouls. If and hopefully when you become a licensed referee there will be more detailed training on calling fouls.
- To simplify things, if any of the following actions occur a foul may have been committed – but again your job is to keep the game moving and not worry too much about trifling fouls. . Whistling for a foul is at the referee’s discretion.
 1. Kicking or attempting to kick an opponent.
 2. Tripping an opponent.
 3. Intentionally Jumping at an opponent.
 4. Charging violently or dangerously. Charging in soccer is body contact. Players are always allowed to challenge for a ball and must rely on shoulder to shoulder contact to challenge fairly. Fouls should only be called on shoulder to shoulder contact if the contact is performed carelessly or recklessly and drives the other player off the ball. Any charge that appears to be aimed at a player rather than as an act to challenge for the ball is not allowed. (“Play the ball – not the opponent”). Remember to allow adjustments for the great variety in heights for children of this age if the charge would otherwise be legal shoulder to shoulder.
 5. Striking, or attempting to strike an opponent.
 6. Holding an opponent.
 7. Pushing an opponent. Any time the arms come up be ready to tell them to go back down. They usually end up pushing someone.
 8. Hand-ball: Deliberately playing, striking or propelling the ball with the hand or arm. Balls touch arms and hands all the time and are not necessarily hand balls. It is often better just to remind players (a lot) to keep their arms down rather than call inconsequential or non-deliberate handballs. But if the arms are up and flailing and the ball is touched you’ll have to call it – and remind them again.
 9. Dangerous Play. This comes in two familiar forms:
 - High-Kicking. If an opponent is too close when a kick extends the foot higher than the opponent’s waist than you may have a foul.
 - Slide-Tackling. In soccer a tackle is an attempt to tackle the ball – not the player. Any tackle that is accomplished by sliding must be whistled immediately. **Slide Tackling is not allowed under any circumstances in U8 play.** Slide tackling is an extremely dangerous maneuver at this level.
 10. Obstruction. Blocking another opponent from making a play on the ball – when the ball is not within playing distance.
 11. **Charging the goalkeeper. Protect the Goalies!** This is a very vulnerable position! We consider the goalie to be in control of the ball if s/he has only one finger on it. Charging is avoidable contact when the goalie has control of the

ball. We play “one finger possession”: even if a goalie has only one finger on the ball, the other players should not kick it. We want to protect the goalie’s hands during play. Watch this carefully and be quick to react to potentially dangerous situations.

- Special Goalkeeper Rules. The goalie can only touch the ball inside the goal area. The rule for regulation play is that the goalie has only 6 seconds to release the ball after gaining control and the play ends. Please, use your judgment in calling this, and don’t make a big deal of counting down the exact number of seconds unless there is a deliberate attempt to waste time. After gaining control the goalie must kick or throw the ball back into play (encourage the goalie to punt or throw the ball from the edge of the box). The goalie cannot pick up a ball that was deliberately passed by a teammate. All re-starts are with standard Indirect Kicks from the spot of the infraction.
- Remember the action must be directed against an opponent to be considered a foul.

Misconduct

The following types of misconduct should result in the player being substituted out (after a brief discussion with the coach). The player should generally sit out for a reasonable amount of time depending on the severity of the action:

- Persistent and deliberate fouling.
- Showing disrespect to or taunting players, coaches or referees.
- Using inappropriate language.
- Violent Behavior.

Spectator behavior is the responsibility of the coach of the team that they are associated with (as is the coach’s behavior of course). Please discuss spectator problems with the appropriate coach (yelling at players or referees or throwing things on the pitch for example). Report any problems to the Age Group Coordinator and the Referee Coordinator. In extreme situations the Referee has the authority to temporarily suspend or to cancel a match.

Free Kick (Law XIII)

- All free kicks at U8 are indirect, meaning a goal cannot be scored unless the ball has touched another player (including the goalkeeper) between being kicked and entering the goal. If the ball completely enters the goal without touching another player, restart with a goal kick. Goals may be scored directly from kick-offs and corner kicks.
- The Ball must be stationary on the ground.
- Opponents must be at least 6 yards away.
- Ball is in play when it has touched by a player on the kicking team (retake if a player rushes in too soon).
- The Kicker may not play ball a second time until touched by another player (indirect free kick to the other team if it happens).
- Free-kicks taken by defenders within the goal area may be taken from any spot within the goal area and must leave the goal area before the ball is in play.

- Free-kicks awarded to attackers within the goal area are moved to the point on the goal area line that is perpendicular to the goal line and nearest to the point where the foul occurred. Never allow free kicks or drop balls to be taken inside the penalty area.

Penalty Kick (Law XIV)

Penalty kicks are a special form of direct free kick and do not apply to U8 games. All free kicks are indirect in U8.

Throw-In (Law XV)

- This is the re-start when the ball completely crosses the touch-line, either in the air or on the ground.
- The Throw In is taken at the point where the ball went out of play by a member of the team opposite to the one that last touched the ball.
- Mechanics:
 - The thrower must face the field of play.
 - Each foot must be on or behind the touch line (touching any part of the line with the feet is ok)
 - Both feet must remain on the ground during the release motion.
 - The ball must come from behind the head and be delivered with even force using both hands.
- This maneuver is especially difficult for U8 players. For foul throws, the referee should demonstrate the correct mechanics and allow one or two retries. If the retries are also foul, let play continue and tell them to work on it. Remember that about half of all Throw-In's are recovered by the opposing team at this level.
- The player taking the throw-in may not play the ball again until it is touched by another player. (The penalty is an indirect free kick to the opponents).

Goal Kick (Law XVI)

- Occurs when the entire ball crosses the goal line having last been touched by an attacking player except for the case where a goal has been scored.
- A player of the defending team (not necessarily the goalkeeper) places the ball anywhere within the goal area and kicks it into play. The ball must leave the goal area before it is in play (retake the kick if this does not happen).
- Kicker must not play the ball a second time until it is touched by another player (indirect free kick to opponents).
- Opponents must be outside the goal area until the ball is in play.
- This is an indirect kick.
- Many re-starts are confusing to U8 players. When goalies make a save at this age they often confuse the need to just punt the ball back into play with the Goal Kick. If you see this happen give them a chance to correct the action before being set upon by attackers that know the difference. On goal kicks step in to help the kicking team to place the ball up at the edge of the penalty box for the re-start if needed.

Corner Kick (Law XVII)

- Occurs when the entire ball crosses the goal line having last been touched by a defending player (including the goalkeeper) except for the case where a goal is scored.
- A player of the attacking team places the ball within the corner penalty arc nearest to the point where the ball left the field of play and kicks it into play.
- The corner flag may not be moved for the taking of the kick.
- Opponents must be at least 6 yards from the ball.
- The ball is in play when touched by the kicker.
- The kicker may not play the ball a second time until it has touched another player.
- Corner kicks are direct kicks – a goal may be scored directly from the kick.

Sportsmanship Rule

In youth recreational soccer, the objective is make sure that teams are challenged *and* having a good competitive experience. We all love to win, but a team that wins all of its games in a season, or conversely loses all of its games, is not having an optimal experience. If a team is winning all of its games, players are likely not challenged enough. If a team is losing all of its games, players are probably feeling at times less like soccer players and feeling more like orange practice cones. The ideal outcome is for a team to win half their games and lose half their games in the season.

Good sportsmanship should be exhibited in all games. Coaches are required to follow a 3 Goal Rule (a.k.a. The Golden Rule). Although in U8 soccer we do not keep official score, the kids will notice if the game starts to become mismatched. Once a team is winning by 4 or more goals, the coach should take action to even up the match by removing a player for each goal over a 3 goal lead. If that doesn't help, the winning team should take steps such as:

- instructing players pass three times before they shoot
- having the lead goal scorer stay exclusively in his/her own half
- instructing more mature players to touch the ball only 4 times before shooting
- instructing players to have every player touch the ball before a shot is taken

The key here is to honor the intent, not the exact letter, of this rule: *evening up the match*. For example, removing one of the least skilled players would meet the rule nominally, but certainly would not be considered good sportsmanship. Good sportsmanship would involve taking steps to make the game challenging to **both** teams.

In games where there is a mismatch, the referee should DISCRETELY remind the coaches to so adjust. **Referees are required to enforce this rule during the game; coaches are expected to honor the intent of the rule.**

Teams are allowed to protect leads at full strength with up to a 3 goal lead. If the lead is 4 goals or greater the winning team must make an effort to balance the match. The minimum requirement is to remove a single player for each goal beyond the 3 goal lead. The winning team may add players appropriately as the lead diminishes. Coaches should be encouraged to find creative solutions to play imbalances that will lead to as much play time for as many players as possible.

Note that some clubs allow the team that is behind to add players rather than to have the team that is ahead to remove players. Although this tends to lead to more confused and

crowded play, avoid parental confusion by checking in with the coaches as play develops so that everyone is on the same page and in agreement as to how to proceed.

General Notes

- You will likely have to place the ball for these young players for all free kicks and place kicks.
- Talk to the players about minor or trifling fouls that you choose not to call.
- For injured players, call the coaches on to deal with the injury. You can help by keeping the other players away and watching the remaining players for other problems.
- Verbal commands (e.g. “Blue throw-in”, “goal kick”, “corner kick”) work better at U8 than hand signals. Players, coaches and parents tend to visually concentrate on the ball and therefore may miss any hand signals you give.
- You may enhance your credibility when you see a situation where something happens that is not a foul (e.g. player’s legs tangle and one falls down) by yelling “No Foul”. This may also help prevent players from stopping and waiting for you to call something.
- Players at U8 will sometimes stop for no obvious reason. If this happens, yelling “*the Ball is Still in Play*” will usually get them going again.
- Avoid coaching or cheering players while officiating – it totally blows your credibility with at least one of the teams. Do not offer strategic advice at any time except as already noted for the proper execution of re-starts and goalie punts, etc.
- Had enough of the rules yet? Don’t forget to enjoy yourself out there!