

By The Book - The Game Of Soccer

Soccer is a simple game. It requires a field, a ball, two teams of players and their equipment, and a referee.

Soccer is played by two teams on a field approximately the size of a football field. Smaller fields may be used for younger players.

The game is played in two timed halves of equal length. To advance AYSO's "Everyone Plays" commitment, quarter breaks are made within each half to allow for player substitution. The length of each half is determined by the age of the children playing.

Physical size is not an important factor in becoming a skilled and successful soccer player. Because of the game's pace, every child participates in the action while on the field.

Soccer Skills

The sport involves several basic skills: passing/shooting, dribbling, and controlling (or trapping) the ball.

These skills can be learned at any age, and a good soccer player works continually to improve them.

Passing

Passing is kicking, pushing or heading the ball to a teammate or to a space where a teammate can run to the ball. A player may lightly tap the ball to a teammate several feet away or kick it strongly to move it down the field. The ball may scoot along the ground or may be kicked into the air.

Most players use two types of kicks to pass to a teammate or shoot towards the goal. One is the instep drive which is a powerful kick. The other kick is called a push pass. Performed using the inside of the foot, the push pass is much more accurate than the instep drive, but is less powerful.

Dribbling

Dribbling is transporting the ball under control from one area to another. Soccer players cannot use their hands. Players dribble the ball with their feet, using light taps on the ball to move it along the ground.

Controlling

Controlling (or trapping) is stopping the ball in flight or on the ground, and then controlling it by either dribbling or passing the ball to teammates. There are many ways to trap a ball: (1) allowing it to hit the chest at an angle that deflects the ball to the ground where it can be controlled; (2) allowing it to hit the thigh or bent knee to deflect the ball to the ground where it can be controlled; or (3) using the foot to stop the ball.

Heading

Heading is unique to the game of soccer. When a ball is too high to kick, players "head" the ball to pass to a teammate or score a goal.

The Laws (Rules)

There are 17 of them and they are easy to understand. Their purpose is to make the game fun, safe and fair.

The object of the game is for the players to get the ball into their opponent's goal using any part of their body except hands and arms. Only goalkeepers may use their hands while inside their own penalty area.

Generally, the Laws require that referees stop the game when something has happened which is unfair or unsafe. Important elements of the Law to be familiar with include Ball In and Out of Play, Fouls, Misconduct and Offside.

Kick Off

To start the game or the second half, and after each goal, a kick off is taken from the center circle.

Throw In

After the ball has completely crossed the side boundary lines - called touch lines - a throw in is awarded against the team that last touched the ball. The throw in is taken from where the ball left the field and must be thrown with two hands from behind and over the head, while both feet are on the ground on or behind the touch line.

Goal Kick

The goal kick is taken by the defending team each time the ball crosses the goal line without a goal being scored and was last touched by an attacking player. The ball may be placed anywhere in the goal area and is not considered back in play until it has been kicked out of the penalty area.

Corner Kick

This kick is taken by the attacking team each time the ball is kicked by the defense over its own goal line without a goal being scored. The ball is placed within the three-foot arc in the corner of the field (nearest to where the ball went out of play) and kicked into play by the attacking team.

Penalty Kick

A penalty kick is awarded when a defending player commits one of the 10 penal (major) fouls within his or her own penalty area while the ball is still in play. The penalty kick is taken by a player from the offended team from a spot 12 yards from the goal. All players must remain outside the penalty area, 10 yards from the ball, and behind the penalty kick mark until the kick is taken, except for the kicker and the goalkeeper. The goalkeeper must remain on the goal line until the ball is kicked. Once kicked, the goalkeeper may try to stop the ball from entering the goal. The kicker, after waiting for the referee's signal, may score by kicking the ball directly into the opponent's goal.

Misconduct

There are two kinds of misconduct: (1) when an action results in a caution (yellow card) from the referee, and (2) when an action results in a player being sent off or ejected from the field (red card). A referee may also warn a player to improve his or her conduct (or unsporting behavior) before a caution is issued.

The referee also has the authority to suspend or terminate play because of misconduct or interference on the part of coaches or spectators.

The Team

A team has a maximum of 11 players on the field at any one time, although a game can be played with as few as seven players on a team. Regions use short-sided teams in younger age divisions. Players get more "touches" on the ball, learn skills quicker and have more fun using this method.

Each team offers the following positions:

- The Goalkeeper is responsible for guarding his or her team's goal and preventing the other team from scoring.
- The Defender's primary duty is to prevent the opponent from having a good shot at the goal. This player also works to gain possession of the ball and pass it to a teammate for an attack.
- The Midfielder (or halfback) plays a "transitional" game from defense to offense and vice versa. Usually the midfielder is the most active player on the field and key to maintaining team continuity.

- The Forward's primary responsibility is to score, and also assists the midfielder in shifting play from defense to offense.
- It's important to keep in mind that any player on a team may score a goal, regardless of position.

The Officials

AYSO recommends the use of three game officials--one referee and two assistant referees.

The Referee is the ultimate authority during the game. The referee's chief responsibilities are to make the game as fun, fair and safe for the players as possible. The referee enforces the rules - which, in soccer, are called "Laws" - by calling offenses and determining if goals have been scored.

Assistant referees provide vital assistance to the referee by signaling when the ball has gone out of play and which team gets possession. Assistant referees also assist with substitutions and the general control of the game.

Equipment: What Players Need

Soccer has limited equipment requirements. However, most AYSO teams play in uniforms (shirt shorts and socks) supplied by the local region. Shin guards are mandatory during practice and games. Full-coverage shoes are required, and it is advisable to use shoes designed specifically for soccer. Regions also provide field equipment, such as goals, nets and flags.

The field is divided in two halves. The center circle in the middle of the field is used to start the game, to start the second half and to restart after a goal has been scored.

There is a large rectangular area and a smaller rectangular area found at each end of the field. These are vital areas for both teams, and are where penalty kicks are taken.

The four corners of the field are inscribed with three-foot arcs where corner kicks are taken.

Offside

A player is offside if he or she is ahead of the ball at the moment the ball touches or is played by a member of the same team, except if that player.

- Is in his/her own half of the field.

- Has two opponents even with or between him/her and the opponent's goal line. The referee's "moment of judgment" is the instant the ball is played, not when it is received.
- Is the first to receive the ball from a throw-in, corner kick or goal kick.
- Is not involved in active play by interfering with play, interfering with an opponent, or gaining an advantage by being in that position.

The Fouls

Penal (Major) Fouls

There are 10 major fouls that result in a direct free kick (DFK), and from which a goal may be directly scored against the opponents.

The 10 penal fouls are divided into two groups. Six within the first group require that the foul be committed carelessly, recklessly, or with disproportionate force:

- Kicking or attempting to kick an opponent.
- Striking or attempting to strike an opponent.
- Pushing an opponent.
- Charging an opponent.
- Tripping or attempting to trip an opponent.
- Jumping at an opponent.

The other four require only that they be committed:

- When tackling an opponent, making contact with the opponent before the ball.
- Spitting at an opponent
- Holding an opponent
- Handling the ball deliberately (except for the goalkeepers within their own penalty areas).

Non-Penal (Minor) Foul

There are eight minor fouls that result in an indirect free kick (IFK). At least one additional player of either team must touch the ball before a goal can be scored from an IFK.

Playing in a Dangerous Manner Including high kicking near another player's head or trying to play a ball held by a goalkeeper.

Impeding the Progress of an Opponent Getting between an opponent and the ball when not playing the ball.

Preventing the Goalkeeper from releasing the ball from his/her hands.

Goalkeeper Offenses an IFK is also awarded to the opposing team if a goalkeeper, within his/her own penalty area, commits any of the following five offenses.

- Takes more than six seconds while controlling the ball with the hands.
- Touches the ball again with the hands after it has been released from the keeper's possession and has not touched another player.
- Touches the ball with the hands when ball is deliberately kicked to the keeper by a teammate.
- Touches the ball with the hands after receiving it directly from a throw-in taken by a teammate.