

Northern Monmouth Soccer Association League Local Practices and Laws of the Game (updated August 2026)

I. NMSA LEAGUE CODE OF CONDUCT

Participant Code of Conduct

1. Try your best in every game to win within the rules.
2. Show good sportsmanship, no swearing, foul language, fighting, or disrespect for coaches or officials will be tolerated.
3. Never argue with the officials' decisions.
4. Cooperate with your coach and teammates; be a team player.
5. Be sporting to your opponents both in victory and defeat.
6. Learn from your mistakes and work hard in practice to improve your skills and decision making.

Parent Code of Conduct

1. Do not force an unwilling child to participate.
2. Encourage your child to play by the rules.
3. Turn defeat into victory by helping your children work towards skill improvement and good sportsmanship. Do not ridicule, criticize or yell at your child or any other child for making a mistake or losing a competition.
4. Children learn by example. Applaud good play by your team and opponents.
5. Do not publicly question the officials' judgment or integrity.
6. Recognize the value and importance of officials and volunteer coaches. They give of their time and resources to provide recreational activities for your child.
7. Do not argue with other parents or coaches over things that happen on the field/court. Derogatory comments and taunting directed at players from any team will not be tolerated.
8. Parents are responsible for supervising siblings during practices or games. You are responsible for their safety, to keep them off the fields/courts, and to make sure they do not damage or disturb borough's/school property.
9. Do not drop your child off for practice or games unless your coach is there.

Coaches: Your job is to incorporate the Participant & Parent Code of Conduct (above) in your on-field behavior, at all times. Remember this is Recreation soccer and is meant to be instructional. Review the following and reach out to your corresponding coordinators with any questions you may have.

II. OBJECTIVES:

The Northern Monmouth Soccer Association is comprised of the various recreation soccer programs of Eatontown, Fair Haven, Little Silver, Monmouth Beach, Oceanport, Red Bank, Rumson, Shrewsbury, Tinton Falls, Long Branch and West Long Branch. The Northern Monmouth Soccer Association members have established a league that is intended to provide informal, recreational soccer opportunities for the youth (3rd grade through 8th grade) of the member communities. No win/loss records or divisional standings shall be kept. Games shall be played to a win, loss or tie within the allotted time only.

III. SPORTSMANSHIP AND GAME COMPORTMENT:

All coaches, players, and spectators are expected to promote a positive, respectful, and development-focused game environment. This includes maintaining control of scoring and ensuring that all participants have an opportunity to learn and enjoy the game.

Lopsided scores can diminish the recreational experience and are to be actively avoided. While no formal mercy rule exists, coaches must take proactive steps to prevent games from becoming excessively one-sided. Prior to each match, coaches should communicate with one another and confirm expectations regarding scoring etiquette and sportsmanship.

If a team wins by more than a 7-goal margin, the winning coach must report to their town coordinator detailing any steps taken to manage the score differential. Coordinators are responsible for monitoring these situations and may request additional information from coaches as needed.

Once a game reaches a 6-goal differential, coaches should use strategies that promote fairness and learning rather than scoring. Recommended approaches include:

- Assigning weaker scorers to forward positions to provide development opportunities.
- Rotating players into new or less familiar positions such as goalkeeper or fullback.
- Requiring the leading team to complete a specific number of passes (e.g., five) before taking a shot.
- Encouraging shots only from outside the penalty box to reduce close-range scoring chances and promote skill development.

Good sportsmanship is an expectation for everyone involved. Coaches should model respectful behavior, encourage positive reinforcement among players, and prevent taunting, showboating, or any actions intended to embarrass an opponent. Teams should celebrate effort, improvement, and teamwork rather than focusing on large scoring margins.

Both teams/coaches will be on the same side of the field, and parents from both teams will be on the opposite side.

III. GAME SCHEDULING & CANCELLATION:

The home team coach must confirm the game location and game time each week no later than Wednesday.

The home recreation department and the home team coach must jointly decide before the game starts whether the game is canceled. Decisions should be made for valid reasons only.

Visiting teams must attend all scheduled games unless the home team coach provides advance notice of cancellation.

If a team does not appear for a game that was not canceled, if referees fail to appear, or if the home coach does not give proper cancellation notice, disciplinary action will apply:

1. Five (5) total occurrences of any of these violations—by coaches or by an NMSA member community—will result in probation for all teams in that community the following year.
2. Any additional violation while on probation may result in an NMSA Coordinators' vote on further disciplinary action, up to and including removal of that community from the league for the next year.
3. If a visiting team fails to appear for a game that the home team did not cancel, the visiting team must reimburse the home team or home recreation department for referee costs.
4. In the event of a rainout, the home team coach must contact the visiting team coach to attempt to schedule a weekday makeup game. If a weekday makeup is not possible, the game will not be rescheduled.

II. REFEREES:

The referee is in charge of the game, from the time he/she walks onto the field. Assistant Referees/Line Judges assist the referee by signaling balls that go out of play and signaling offside; but the referee is the final authority.

The home team shall be responsible for providing referee(s) and assistants for each game. One of these officials should be an adult. For all 7th/8th grade level games, the referee should be an adult or be a qualified minor of at least high school age. Referees are required to be licensed through a recognized certification program, the higher the level of certification the better. The minimum certification is the Recreational Referee certification.

If there is a protest or complaint regarding the officiating at a particular game that complaint shall be brought to the Town Soccer Coordinator of the team on whose behalf the protest is made. He/she shall then speak with the coordinator to whom the referee or linesman reports. The two Coordinators shall determine what the relevant facts are and what action, if any, is to be taken. Their determination shall be communicated back to the original complainant.

Referees are required to report any and all red cards (including players' names) to their Town's Referee Coordinator, who will in turn report the red card(s) to the NMSA Coordinator.

No coach may refuse to provide any player's name to the referee. Red-carded players are required to be suspended from the next game by their coach unless the Red-card violation was of a violent nature (i.e. fighting) in which case it is a mandatory 3 game suspension.

Coaches will be responsible for unruly or abusive parents. The referee may suspend play pending resolution of such situations involving unruly or abusive parents.

VI. LEAGUE STRUCTURE:

There shall be six divisions of teams: 3rd/4th Grade, 5th/6th Grade, and 7th/8th Grade with each grade level having separate divisions for boys and girls. Girls may play on a boys' team but not vice versa. Players may play on a level above their current school grade (i.e. a 6th grade player may play on a 7th/8th grade team,) but not below.

VII. SEASON & RULES OF PLAY:

All games shall be played on Friday evenings or Saturdays beginning in September and running for seven weeks.

Games called due to inclement weather or other reasons may be made up by arrangement between the two coaches. Home coach to contact visiting coach, attempt to schedule weekday make up if possible. If neither team has enough players to reschedule, game is not made up.

Borrowed Player Policy:

- Eligibility & Registration: Borrowed players must be registered on another team within the same town.
- Division Restrictions: Borrowed players are permitted to play up in a higher division/grade level but are strictly prohibited from playing down in a lower division.
- Roster Shortages: Borrowed players may only participate if a team does not have sufficient rostered players present at game time to field a full team.
- Late Arrivals: Borrowed players serve as temporary substitutes only. If a rostered team member arrives late to the match, the borrowed player's eligibility ends immediately, and they must be replaced by the arriving rostered player.

All games shall be played according to FIFA rules with the following exceptions to the specified Laws of the Game:

1. The Field of Play: The field shall be of regulation size for all 7th/8th grade division games. A smaller size field may be used for 5th/6th playing 9v9 and 3rd/4th grade division playing 7v7 games.
2. The Ball: A regulation size soccer ball shall be used for all games as follows:

Size #4 - Grades 3/4 and 5/6

Size #5 - Grades 7/8

3. The Start of Play: The game starts at midfield at the beginning of the game, after a goal is scored, and at the beginning of each period. The ball must be touched by a player on the kicking team before it can be played again.
4. Ball In and Out of Play: The ball is out of play when it has COMPLETELY CROSSED the sideline or goal line, in the air or on the ground, or when the game has been stopped by the referee. It is in play at all other times.
5. Method of Scoring: A goal is scored by sending the ball COMPLETELY over the goal line between the posts and under the crossbar.
6. Offside: A player that is ahead of the ball without two opponents ahead of him is in OFFSIDE POSITION {which is not illegal by itself}; if this player is involved in the offensive play, he is then OFFSIDE (which is illegal), and the defending team is awarded an indirect free kick. A player cannot be offside in his own half of the field, or if he receives the ball from a throw-in, goal kick, corner kick, or from a defending player. The offside is judged at the MOMENT THE BALL IS PLAYED.
7. There shall be no limit on the number of players available to be substituted.
8. Players substituted for shall be allowed to re-enter the game.
9. Third/Fourth grade games will be played in a small-side format, with six field players and a goalkeeper.
10. Fifth/Sixth grade games will be played in a small-side format, with eight field players and a goalkeeper.
11. Every player present at the start of the game shall play at least half the game unless sick, injured, or subject to disciplinary action. The coach administering such action will advise the opposing coach before the start of the game of the identity of the disciplined player(s) and the degree of restriction that will be imposed on his/her play.
12. Unlimited substitutions shall be made with the permission of the referee at the following times:

- ♣ At ANY stoppage for an injury

- ♣ On kick-offs and goal kicks by either team

On throw-ins by the team in possession of the ball.

13. For short-sided games the following additional rules for substitution shall apply:

- ♣ On a throw-in, if the team in possession substitutes, then the defending team may also substitute.

- ♣ When the ball does not go out of bounds for long periods of time and thus creates NO substitution opportunities, the coach shall make the referee aware of the situation so that the referee may stop play for substitution purposes only.

14. Players must be substituted for when:

- ♣ There is bleeding or an open cut. The referee will not allow the player to go back onto the field until the bleeding has stopped and the wound is properly covered.
- ♣ A player is unconscious, “shaken up”, or mentally confused. If the player was unconscious, he/she may not return to the field for the remainder of the game.
- ♣ A player has received a yellow “caution” card.

15. Fouls and Misconduct:

- A penalty kick is taken from the penalty spot (12 yards from the middle of the goal) when one of the "direct kick" fouls is committed inside the penalty area. When the kick is taken, all players except the goalie and the kicker must be outside of the penalty area and the penalty arc. The offenses listed here must be judged intentional and must give the offending team an advantage. These offenses result in a DIRECT free kick for the opposing team (the ball can go directly into the goal).
 - Kicking an opponent • Tripping • Jumping at an opponent • Charging from behind • Striking an opponent • Holding • Pushing • Handling the ball • Unsportsmanlike conduct
 - The ball is placed at the point of the infraction (with a few exceptions in the goal area); the ball must be still before the kick; the ball must travel one revolution before it is in play; and the kicker may not play the ball again until another player touches the ball. The following offenses result in an INDIRECT free kick (the ball must be touched by another player from either team before going into the goal).
 - • Goalkeeper infractions {taking more than 4 steps, handling a teammate's back-pass, etc.) • Dangerous play • Offsides • Obstructing an opponent without playing the ball • Flagrant offenses may be cautioned by the referee using a "yellow card".. Repeated or unsportsmanlike offenses may be indicated by the referee with a "red card", ejecting the offending player from the game without replacement.
16. Throw-ins: If the ball leaves the field across the touch (side) line, the team that did not touch it last throws the ball in from the point where it left the field. The thrower must be facing the field, have part of each foot on the ground and either on the line or behind it, and the ball is to be thrown from behind and over the head with both hands.
17. No heading until 7th/8th grade level.
18. Punting: 3/4th Grade- Not Permitted 5/6th Grade - Permitted 7/8th Grade Permitted
19. Slide Tackle: 3/4th Grade- Not Permitted 5/6th Grade – Permitted 7/8th Grade – Permitted

20. Goal Kicks: If the attacking team last touches a ball before it goes over the goal (end) line, the defensive team takes a goal (direct) kick from any place in the goal area. The opposing team must wait to pressure the ball until the intended recipient of the goal kick has their first touch. Once first touch on the receiving end of a goal kick is complete, the opposing team can break through the buildout line. ♣ 3/4th Grade-Buildout Line- During a goal kick, the opposing team must wait to pressure the ball until the intended recipient of the goal kick has their first touch. Once first touch on the receiving end of a goal kick is complete, the opposing team can break through the buildout line.
21. Corner Kicks: If the defensive team last touches the ball over the goal (end) line, the attacking team takes a corner (direct) kick from the closer corner.

VIII. PLAYER'S EQUIPMENT:

- a. No player, with the exception of the goalkeeper, shall wear any apparel that differentiates him/her from any other player on his/her team.
- b. Shoes with metal spikes are prohibited. Shoes with screw-in spikes must have the screw post attached to the spike, not the shoe. c. Long-sleeved shirts, sweatshirts and/or sweatpants may be worn under the normal playing uniform during adverse weather conditions. The referee shall be responsible for determining whether the team and/or player are attempting to gain a playing advantage by wearing these garments. If so, in addition to restarting play with an indirect kick by the opposing team, the player(s) must either remove the garments or be substituted for.
- d. Any child who wears corrective eyeglasses while participating in soccer shall be required to wear protective eyewear that meets the frames standards of the American Society for Testing and Materials (ASTM) F803 and lens standards of the American National Standards Institute (ANSI) Z87.1. These are commonly known as sport specs. Insofar as protective eyewear is mandated by the laws of the State of New Jersey, it shall be the responsibility of the coaches to enforce compliance. To that end, it is the coach's responsibility to ensure that all of his/her players are wearing sanctioned protective eyewear. In the event that a referee advises a coach that a player's eyewear is non-compliant, it shall be the responsibility of the coach to remove the player from the playing field and explain to the player and/or parent(s) of the player why the player was removed. e. All players must wear shin guards

IX. DURATION OF GAMES

Grades 7 & 8 - two halves of 35 minutes each

Grades 5 & 6 - two halves of 30 minutes each

Grades 3 & 4 - two halves of 25 minutes each