

Coaches Survival Guide – Fall 2026

Calendar

Date	Event
September	
September 2	Coaches meeting
September 17–20	Introduce yourself to your players
September 19	Coaches training
September 21	Practices begin
October	
October 3	Regular season games
October 10	Regular season games
October 17	Regular season games
October 24	Regular season games
October 24	Picture Day (to be confirmed)
October 31	Regular season games
November	
November 7	Regular season games
November 14	Regular season games
November 21	Regular season games
November 23–29	Thanksgiving Week — No Practices or Games
December	
December 5	Regular season games
December 12	Regular season games for U6 and younger
December 12	Tournament Day (U7 through High School only; all other divisions have regular games)

Website

We recommend that you regularly check the Optimist Soccer website – www.optimistsoccer.org. It is updated weekly, as needed, and more often during the season and contains the following information (location):

- Program description (About Our Program)
- Contact information (Contact Us)
- Calendar (Calendar)
- Code of Conduct (Front Page, Registration & Forms, Parents, Coaches)
- Parent information (Parents – during season)
- Registration forms (Registration & Forms – pre-season)

- Which division? (Registration & Forms – pre-season)
- Coaches Survival Guide (Coaches – during season)
- Practice grid (Coaches – during season)
- Field map (Coaches – during season)
- Practice plans (Coaches, Main Menu – during season)
- Optimist rules (Coaches – during season)
- FIFA laws (Coaches – during season)
- Water break policy (Coaches – during season)
- Player list (Front Page – pre-season)
- Game schedule (Main Menu – during season)
- **Weather alerts (Front Page – up until 5:30pm on practice nights during season)**
- Picture Day schedule (Front Page – week before Picture Day)

Pre-Season

Please contact all of your players' parents no later than September 18, 2026.

Inform the parents that you are the coach for their player's team and confirm the best method of communication. We recommend that you create an email group to allow for efficient distribution of information.

Privacy

Personal information for parents/players including name, address, phone number, fax number and email address is not to be shared with anyone. All parent/player email addresses must be listed under BCC (Blind Carbon Copy) when sending group emails.

Send a follow-up email covering practice time and location. Your practice time and location will not change during the season. Your email should also cover proper attire for practices (cleats and shinguards must be worn at practices), the correct-size ball (properly inflated) and plenty of water. Please stress the importance of sufficient liquids.

Very Important

We have spent a considerable amount of time allocating players to teams according to information provided on their registration forms (e.g. ensuring that siblings are practicing on the same night). Therefore, any changes to team rosters will require a valid reason which does not include a player requesting a move to another team to play with a friend.

You should plan on having a parent meeting after the first practice. We recommend that you set expectations for the season and discuss the following:

- Code of Conduct
- Practice night routine including player attire, cleats, shinguards, ball, liquids, player drop-off and pickup (see player safety below)

- Regular season game day routine (arrival time, coaches and players on one side of the field/fans on the other side of the field)
- Snack schedule
- Picture Day
- [Optimist Soccer website – www.optimistsoccer.org](http://www.optimistsoccer.org)

Uniforms

Uniforms will be delivered to each coach (not players) during the second practice week (beginning September 28). Any undelivered uniforms will be available for pickup by coaches (not players) next to the concession stand at Vineyards from 8am to 1pm on the Opening Game Day (October 3).

Player Safety

You should plan on arriving early to every practice and game. If you are going to be late, please arrange for someone responsible to meet the team at the field.

You are responsible for all players until they are picked up after practice and games. Please ensure that parents inform you if they leave Vineyards during practice or games. Agree on a pickup time for their player.

Please ensure that parents inform you if their player is traveling with another family.

Pay close attention to the weather. You should check our website before going to the fields to ensure the fields are open on practice night or game day.

We have completed background checks for all of our coaches and assistant coaches. Please inform a director if anyone else wishes to help with your team during the season. We may need to complete a background check for them.

Please ensure only appropriate physical “contact” with your players (e.g. high five or pat on the head).

All players must wear cleats and shinguards (under the socks) at every practice and game. No exceptions.

No jewelry of any kind can be worn during a practice or game.

Only sports safety glasses are permitted on the field of play during practices and games.

All players should bring plenty of water to every practice and game.

Please ensure that players going to the restrooms are accompanied by an adult if in a PS through U10 team or by an adult or another player if in a U14 or HS team.

Please ensure that no one climbs or swings on the goals.

There is no parking on Vanderbilt Beach Road beyond the north boundary fence.

Lightning Policy

Vineyards Community Park has a lightning prediction system located on top of the community center building. A horn will sound and a strobe light will flash to signal it is not safe to be on the fields.

- One 15 second blast of the horn requires you to leave the fields immediately.
- A strobe light will flash until it is safe to return to the fields.
- Seek shelter (the concession stand or trees are not shelter).
- Three 5 second blasts of the horn will signal it is safe to return to the fields.

The lightning prediction system is sensitive and practice time and playing time may be lost during the season due to lightning. As frustrating as it may be to leave the fields when there are no obvious signs of lightning, if the strobe light is flashing you must be off the fields, **this is not optional**.

Practice

We recommend that you send a reminder email the day before your practice night to ensure that your players arrive in appropriate attire (cleats and shinguards) and bring plenty of water.

Your practice space may not have any goals. We recommend that you bring cones to practice.

Generally, you will be sharing a field with another team in your division. We recommend scrimmaging with the other team at the end of your practices.

Please teach your players to respect the fields at Vineyards. A large amount of time and expense is spent in keeping the fields in reasonable playing condition. Please do not allow your players to cause damage to the grass.

Games

We recommend that you send a reminder email the day before your game to ensure that your players arrive in appropriate attire (uniform, cleats and shinguards) and bring plenty of water.

Make sure that your team is ready to play at least 10 minutes prior to the start time of your game (proper attire, no jewelry). This will help ensure that games will start on time.

Games will start on time. The clock does not stop during the mandatory water breaks.

Bring a correct-size ball (properly inflated).

All games must be played with the same number of players on each team, unless a player or players have been ejected by the referee.

A U14 or HS team with fewer players than the number designated for the division will forfeit the game. Each team must have at least one substitute. However, the game may still be played with the same number of players on each team.

Every player must play a minimum of 50% of the game.

No punting by goalkeeper is allowed for U12 and younger divisions. When a goalkeeper punts the ball, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense. If the punt occurs inside the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the point nearest to where the infringement occurred.

Build Out Line (U7 to U10 divisions). When the goalkeeper has the ball, either during play (from the opponent) or from a goal kick, the opposing team must move behind the build out line until the ball is put into play. Once the opposing team is behind the build out line, the goalkeeper can pass, throw or roll the ball into play (punting is not allowed). After the ball is put into play by the goalkeeper, the opposing team can cross the build out line and play resumes as normal.

No deliberate headers are allowed for U12 and younger divisions. When a player deliberately heads the ball, an indirect free kick should be awarded to the opposing team from the spot of the offense. If the deliberate header occurs inside the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the point nearest to where the infringement occurred. If a player does not deliberately head the ball, then play should continue.

No slide tackles are allowed.

Substitutions shall be unlimited and may be made at any stoppage with the referee's permission.

We have designated one side of the field for coaches and players (see field map). All spectators must watch the game from the other side of the field. No exceptions.

After each game shake hands with your opponents and thank the referee(s).

Clear the sidelines as soon as possible for the next game. **Properly dispose of all your trash.**

Standings

No scores or standings are kept for any divisions.

Issues or Concerns

Finally, please always use common sense and contact us with any issues or concerns.

Thank you for your contribution to the soccer program.