

MARIN MIDDLE SCHOOL ATHLETIC LEAGUE

Soccer Rules & Expectations

What Middle School Soccer Is All About

The purpose of middle school athletics is to provide a fun, safe, positive, and educational experience that promotes skill development, personal growth, and healthy competition. Through participation, student-athletes develop confidence, character, discipline, teamwork, and respect for others while learning the values of sportsmanship, responsibility, and perseverance. Middle school athletics are designed to foster a lifelong appreciation for physical activity and encourage every participant to reach their full potential in a supportive and inclusive environment.

AT A GLANCE

Format	11 vs. 11 (including goalkeeper) — boys and girls play separately
Half Length	35-minute halves (running clock)
Halftime	5 or 10 minutes depending on scheduling and time constraints
Overtime	None — regular season games may end in a tie
Start Time	4:00 PM for first games unless arranged otherwise
Minimum Players	7 players needed to start and continue a game
Standings Points	Win = 3 pts • Tie = 1 pt each • Loss = 0 pts
League Champion	Team with the most points at end of season

How Soccer Works

- NFHS Rules: Games are played under current NFHS Soccer Rules unless modified by the league rules.

The Clock & Game Time

Soccer uses a running clock — it does not stop when the ball goes out of bounds or play is paused. Instead, the referee tracks any time lost during the half and adds it to the end as "stoppage time."

- Clock runs continuously throughout each half
- Stoppage time is added at the end of each half to account for injuries, substitutions, or goal celebrations
- There is no overtime in the regular season — games can end in a tie

Substitutions

Substitutions are unlimited, which means coaches can rotate players freely throughout the game. Subs may only happen at specific moments:

- On your team's throw-in
 - Either team's goal kick
 - After a goal is scored
 - At halftime
 - For an injured player
 - At the referee's discretion
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Scoring & Standings

A goal is awarded when the entire ball crosses the goal line between the goalposts and under the crossbar.

League standings points:

- Win: 3 points
- Tie: 1 point for each team
- Loss: 0 points

If teams are tied in the standings at the end of the season, MMAL tiebreaker rules (as described in the league by-laws) will be used.

Offsides — The Rule Everyone Argues About

The offside rule is one of the most misunderstood rules in soccer. The basic idea is that a player cannot be in an advantageous position when the ball is played to them.

- The offside rule is enforced according to NFHS rules.
- A player is in an offside POSITION if they are in the opponent's half of the field and closer to the goal than both the ball and the second-to-last defender (usually the last outfield player).
- Being in an offside position is NOT automatically a penalty.
- An offside CALL happens only when the ball is passed to that player in a way that gives them an unfair advantage.

Short version: if a player is lurking behind the defense waiting for a pass, the referee may call them offside. If the ball came to them by chance or they weren't involved in the play, it may not be called.

Fouls & Cards

When a foul is committed, the referee awards a free kick. There are two types:

- Direct free kick — the ball can be kicked directly into the goal without touching another player first (awarded for more serious physical fouls)
- Indirect free kick — the ball must touch another player before a goal can be scored

Cards:

- Yellow Card = a caution/warning. The player stays in the game.

- Two Yellow Cards in the same game = automatic Red Card and ejection
 - Red Card = immediate ejection. The team plays with one fewer player for the rest of the game — no replacement is allowed.
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Mercy Rule

If a team leads by 6 or more goals in the second half, coaches are expected to prioritize sportsmanship and player development. Intentionally running up the score is not in the spirit of the league.

Officials & Scorekeeping

- The goal is to have one referee per game (These officials must be a high school student or older and must have some officiating experience)
 - Referee decisions are final
 - Coaches may politely ask for rule clarification — they may not argue judgment calls
 - The home school provides the official scorekeeper at all games.
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Ejections & Conduct

If a player, coach, or spectator is ejected from a game:

- The home team reports the incident to the league commissioner within 24 hours, including the person's name and role
 - The ejected person may not attend or participate in the next league contest
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Safety Rules for Everyone

- Players must wear proper soccer attire and athletic shoes
- Shin guards are required — no exceptions
- Goalkeepers must wear a jersey that clearly distinguishes them from other players and officials
- Jewelry is not permitted during games
- Heading restrictions follow current league and state guidelines
- Any athlete showing signs of injury, illness, heat-related concerns, or concussion symptoms will be removed from competition and evaluated according to school and league protocols.
- No spectator may enter the field unless a player is injured and they are a parent or trained medical professional

Hot Weather Policy

- Player safety comes first. When temperatures are high, the game structure changes:

90–100°F:

- Each half is 35 minutes with a 5 minute hydration break at the midpoint
- Halftime is extended to 10 minutes

100°F and above:

- Games should be rescheduled

Uniforms & Equipment

- A standard soccer ball is used for all games
- Two full-size soccer goals are used — all goals must be properly anchored before play begins
- The home team and visiting team shall wear jerseys.
- Jersey numbers shall meet rulebook requirements. If the school has no approved jerseys they may, by consent of the league prior to the season, use their current jerseys.
- If both teams have similarly colored jerseys, it shall be the responsibility of the home team to change jerseys.
- No two players on the same team in any one game shall have the same number.

Sportsmanship

Coaches, players, and spectators are all expected to demonstrate good sportsmanship at all times. This includes:

- Respect for officials, opponents, teammates, and facility staff
- Unsportsmanlike behavior can result in yellow cards, red cards, ejection, or further disciplinary action
- Coaches are responsible for the behavior of their players and their team's spectators

League Champions

- League Champions will be the team with the most points at the end of the season.
- Championship banners will be awarded to League Champions in each division.
- The winning team of the match will be awarded 3 points. The losing team will be awarded 0 points. In case of a tie, each team will be awarded 1 point.
- The MMAL tiebreaker described in the by-laws will be used in case of record ties.

Fun • Safety • Skill Development • Confidence • Character • Teamwork • Sportsmanship