Soccer Rules Changes - 2026-27

Mon Mar 16 2026

4-4-1c: Clarifies that dark socks must be worn by the home team.

Rationale: The two teams must wear colors that distinguish them from each other. The addition of the word dark in the home team sock clarifies that only the visiting team may wear white socks.

4-2-7d,e (NEW): Offers guidance on appropriate tooth and mouth protector elements.

Rationale: The overall purpose and function of the tooth and mouth protector is to protect the teeth, the mouth, and lips if it has a lip guard. Items that are added or included on the tooth and mouth protector that do not serve a purpose or function in the protection of the teeth or mouth should not be allowed. Also, items that are a part of the tooth and mouth protector that are a health risk to the individual wearing it should not be allowed.

4-2-11a thru c NOTE 2 (NEW): Prohibits players from wearing audio or video devices while participating in a match.

Rationale: No athlete participating in a match is permitted to wear any type of audio or video device to record, transmit, or live stream. This language aligns with other NFHS rules books. The use of electronic communication devices with players on the field is still prohibited. State associations may further restrict electronic devices.

5-3-1f-j: Change updates the officiating procedures for issuing yellow and red cards by removing the term carded in favor of consistent terminology already used in the rules book; cautioned and ejected.

Rationale: This aligns terminology by removing the term “carded” and using language found within the rules book. Explicitly defining that cautions correspond to yellow cards and ejections correspond to red cards provide clarity. Repeated or redundant language has been reorganized into new sub articles to improve readability and consistency across the rule. Additionally, the revision clarifies that any player who is shown a card, yellow or red, must still leave the field of play and that officials are responsible for directing the player to do so.

8-1-2: Clarifies when a kickoff should be retaken, specifically when not all players are on their half of the field.

Rationale: This change provides clarity on the differing restarts regarding kickoff offenses. This change explicitly addresses situations when the kickoff should be retaken because players were not properly positioned on their half of the field.

12-1-2c: Emphasizes the importance of goalkeeper safety when in possession of the ball and improves clarity for consistent officiating purposes.

Rationale: Overall, this change aligns the rule with consistent officiating practice, removes redundancies and improves clarity without materially altering when a charge is or is not permitted. The change consolidates language referring to the goalkeeper controlling the ball with their hands, where the simplified language refers to the full, shared definition referenced in a later section. This change emphasizes the core safety concept that remains unchanged: the goalkeeper in possession of the ball with their hands cannot be charged or challenged.

12-2-3: Adds biting to direct free kick fouls.

Rationale: Incorporates biting into direct free kick fouls.

12-3-1 thru 3: Extends goalkeeper possession limit and adjusts the penalty when the time limit is exceeded.

Rationale: Reorganizes goalkeeper restrictions, extends goalkeeper possession limit from six to eight seconds and changes the penalty from indirect free kick at the point of infraction to a corner kick. It brings the rule in line with the spirit of the game and gives officials clearer authority and makes the punishment less severe when the goalkeeper clearly exceeds the time limit.

12-3-5: Clarifies considerations of dangerous play.

Rationale: Adds clarifying language to the considerations for dangerous play that include actions that prevent a nearby opponent from playing the ball for fear of injury.

12-3-6 & 7 (NEW): Offers flexibility for officials when addressing verbal offenses by categorizing them as indirect free kick fouls.

Rationale: By including "other verbal offenses" as an indirect free kick foul, this also gives more flexibility for officials when disciplining verbal offenses: they are now considered fouls at a minimum and may rise to the level of misconduct depending on the circumstances. New Article 7 then addresses any other reason for which play is stopped for misconduct; play is restarted with an indirect free kick.

12-6-1b (1-4) (NEW): Adds language to provide additional guidance regarding DOGSO.

Rationale: This change clarifies and simplifies the language surrounding DOGSO ejections by removing redundant wording, eliminating references to “attempted” DOGSO, since intent is not part of the decision, and aligns with previous rule wording within Rule 12. The updated structure provides four clear categories for denying a goal or obvious opportunity.

13-1 thru 3: Reorganizes free kick restart procedures into distinct categories, clarifying when, where, and how free kicks are awarded and taken, while incorporating guidance for situations involving outside agents, off-field offenses, thrown objects, and unauthorized field entry or exit.

Rationale: The revision of Rule 13 clarifies the procedures for restarts on free kicks by breaking the rule into distinct categories, outlining when and where free kicks are awarded, and detailing how they should be taken. It also specifies the correct restart locations and provides guidance for officials on managing these situations. Additionally, the update incorporates restart procedures for scenarios involving outside agents, offenses occurring off the field, thrown objects, individuals entering the field illegally, players leaving the field without permission, and offenses that occur outside the field of play.

Rule 14: Encroachment is now penalized only when it clearly impacts the kick outcome, and goalkeepers receive a warning for a first offense rather than an immediate caution. Deceptive movements and stutter-stepping remain permitted during the run-up, but feinting after the approach is completed is prohibited.

Rationale: The rewrite ensures that encroachment is now only penalized if the offense has a clear impact on the penalty kick. Goalkeepers will now receive a warning for a first offense rather than an immediate caution, acknowledging that such infractions often stem from mis-anticipation. Regarding the kicker, the revisions continue to allow for deceptive movements and stutter-stepping during the run-up; however, the change strictly prohibits feinting once the approach to the ball is completed. Finally, in rare instances where both the kicker and goalkeeper offend simultaneously, the kicker is penalized, as their illegal feinting is typically the catalyst for the goalkeeper’s infraction. The penalty chart is also updated and reformatted for clarity.