



MSSA Association Rules

Revised 02/26/25

Purpose

The purpose of the Association is to provide middle school aged players with the opportunity to continue to play the game, on a recreational level. The objective is to have fun. Anyone exhibiting behavior to the contrary may be asked to discontinue their participation. *The Sponsoring League for teams playing in MSSA is responsible for adherence to the Purpose and Rules of the Association and the Laws of the Game.*

Sanctioning Body

Games are played as "friendlies", as defined by the Ohio Soccer Association (OSA) and considered under-15 as an age group. All teams (players) are expected to be affiliated directly with the OSA or do so through a league that is. Teams (players) that are not affiliated through OSA must have adequate liability coverage.

Team Formation

All players who register to play should be included on a team; provided a sufficient number of players register to form a team and a coach can be secured for the team. Teams may not be formed based on a tryout.

Team Declarations and Division Placement

Team Declarations and subsequent Division Placement is the responsibility of the respective Sponsoring League's MSSA Coordinator. The MSSA Administrator has the authority to override the League Coordinator's decisions in this regard if the Administrator has reason to believe an error in placement may have occurred. The MSSA Administrator will discuss the matter with the respective League Coordinator before a final placement decision is made. MSSA League Coordinators should review the Association's document titled, "Team Placement Guidelines" before making placement decisions.

Player Eligibility

The Sponsoring League is responsible for assuring that ONLY eligible participants are playing in MSSA. If any dispute arises regarding player eligibility, the Sponsoring League is responsible for documenting their player's eligibility. The teams must be comprised of middle school age players (i.e. sixth, seventh or eighth grade) and within the USSF U-15 age group requirement.

An exception may be made for a U-15 aged player that is now enrolled in high school. The exception must be requested, in writing, by the League MSSA Coordinator of the sponsoring league and approved by the MSSA Administrator.

Per OSA Rules, U-11 players can play up to U-12, but may NOT play up with U-13 players. Ergo, U-11 players may NOT play in MSSA, regardless of their grade level.

When a community has enough players to form a Girls Team, but not enough boys to form a Co-Rec Team, girls may play on both teams so that the boys can play, PROVIDED THAT, both the Girls Team and the Co-Rec Team have sufficient players to play their Saturday games without having to re-schedule either game. It should be noted that the opposite situation is not allowed. That is, when a community has enough players to form a Co-Rec team, but not enough girls to form a Girls Team, boys are NOT permitted to play on both teams.

Team members may play on recreational teams outside of the MSSA. Players may not play on a select, travel or Club Team; or a School Sponsored Team that is a member of the Ohio High School Athletic Association (OHSAA) at the same time they are playing on an MSSA team.

Players must be listed on the team roster issued by the respective league to be considered legal players. “Sharing” players between teams is not permitted. However, if a team will not have enough players to play a game, rather than re-scheduling the game, they may “borrow” players from another MSSA team in their league, PROVIDED they discuss it with the opposing coach and the opposing coach does not object.

If it is documented that a team is in violation of these player eligibility rules, all of the games played while in violation of these rules will be declared a forfeit and the team may be dropped from the Association.

Laws of the Game

USFF Laws of the Game for U-15 play will be followed, except as noted in these rules. Per USFF Laws of the Game, SLIDE TACKLES ARE ALLOWED.

Heading the ball

U-12 and U-13 players may head the ball in games but are limited in practices. As recommended and established by USSF, U-12 and U13 players are prohibited from deliberately striking a soccer ball with any portion of their head, (a.k.a. heading), during any practice session:

- a. for more than an accumulated, maximum total of 30 minutes during any 7-day period,
- b. AND for an accumulated, maximum of 15 to 20 head-to-ball contacts during any 7-day period.

There are no limits or restrictions on heading in practice or in games for players U-14 and older.

All coaches of U-12 and older teams are to instruct, teach and emphasize the importance of proper technique for the heading of soccer balls.

Coaches and parents are responsible for adherence to these restrictions.

Playing Time

As a recreational association, all players should play at least half of each game. If a violation of this rule is documented, that game MAY be declared a forfeit. League Coordinators and Coaches are responsible for the implementation of this guideline. Ideally, all players will get EQUAL playing time.

Substitution Rule

An unlimited number of substitutions may be made (with the referee’s permission) as follows:

1. Before a throw-in in your team’s favor. If a player for the opposing team is at the mid-field flag waiting to be a substitute when the team that is awarded a throw-in has a substitute to enter the game, the substitute for the opposing team may also enter the game. If the team that has been awarded a throw-in does not have a substitute, then neither team may substitute a player.
2. Before a goal kick for either team
3. After a score by either team
4. Prior to kick-off of the second half
5. After an injury, if the injured player is substituted

Team Uniforms

The respective team's jersey colors should be confirmed by both coaches. If there is a color conflict, the HOME TEAM must change colors or wear pinnies. All jerseys should be of the same design, numbered, and should not have any duplicate numbers.

Religious Clothing

According to Law 4, The Players' Equipment:

A player must not use equipment or wear anything which is dangerous to himself or another player. The basic compulsory equipment of a player is a jersey or shirt, shorts, stockings, shin guards, and footwear. There is no provision for a player to wear a skirt or similar clothing. However, in an analogous situation, in respect of certain religions that require members to wear head coverings, the Secretary General of the United States Soccer Federation has given permission to those bound by religious law to wear such head coverings, usually a turban or yarmulke, provided the referee finds that the headgear does not pose a danger to the player wearing it, or to the other players. This principle could be extended to other clothing required of members by their religion.

Length of Games

Regular Season games will consist of two (2), thirty (30) minute halves, with a running clock, except for serious injuries. In which case, the Head Referee may add time to the game to account for lost time due to serious injuries only.

1. Preliminary round, tournament games will be shortened to two (2) twenty-five (25) minute halves. Tournament Championship Games will be the same as Regular Season Games, thirty (30) minute halves.

The start of the game may be delayed up to fifteen (15) minutes from the scheduled start time, to allow for the arrival of both teams, before a forfeit is ruled. A minimum of 7 players is required to start and continue a game. Games SHOULD NOT BE STARTED without both teams' coaches being present. If a coach is not present, a parent from that team may assume the coaching responsibilities.

Schedules and Communication

MSSA, the Association Administrator, schedules only the games; the date and the home and visiting teams. The participating Leagues/Teams will schedule the fields, times and referees for their HOME games. The home team is responsible for paying referee fees.

The HOME TEAM COACH is expected to contact the Visiting Team Coach to advise as to the field location/number and the time of the game. These contacts should be made as soon as possible at the beginning of the season, rather than on a week-by-week basis.

Game Days

Games will be scheduled to be played on Wednesday evenings for the Girls Division, Thursday evenings for the Co-Rec Division, and Saturdays (preferably mornings) for both Divisions. Due to field and referee availability, some games may need to be played on different days. Teams are allowed to change the days for only their home games. We hope such changes are minimal AND determined as far in advance as possible. For example, instead of Thursday evenings, "All of team A's home games will be played on Wednesday evenings." When the need does arise, we ask for everyone's understanding and cooperation.

Game Times

Game times will be determined by the Home Team, based on field and referee availability. The recommended start time for weeknight games is 6:00pm. The recommended start time for Saturday games is 9:00 am or later. For a variety of reasons, Saturday morning start times are preferred. We ask that the Home Team consider the travel time of the Visiting Team when determining start times. We appreciate your consideration of the Visiting Team's start time request whenever possible. Visiting Teams also need to consider the limitations of field and referee availability when making specific requests.

Make-up Games/Re-Scheduling Games

Make-up games may be scheduled with agreement of both coaches AND WITH THE APPROVAL of the MSSA League Coordinator of the HOME TEAM. In the event an agreeable date cannot be reached, the team that could not make the originally scheduled date will forfeit the game.

We all understand that the need may arise to re-schedule a game due to a variety of factors. The "standard" game days are Wednesday and Thursday evenings and Saturday. Other leagues, coaches, and **especially parents** expect that games will be played on these days. Parents schedule other family activities with the expectation that their child will be playing on these days. Then they find out - usually at the last minute - that this game will be played on Monday, this game will be played on Sunday, etc.

Yes, there will be legitimate reasons to re-schedule games. However, we implore everyone to make sure the reasons are legitimate! The fact that your best players will not be able to play this game or that game IS NOT a legitimate reason to re-schedule. The fact that you will only have 5 players available to play on a particular day is a legitimate reason. The fact that you will only have 11 players to play a particular game IS NOT a legitimate reason. Play the game with the players that can be there - within reason, of course. Advise the other team's coach of the situation. Hopefully, they will be as understanding - as you would be - and not play 11 players against your 10 players, or 9 players, or whatever.

If you do have to re-schedule a game, PLEASE do so with as much advance notification as possible. Check your team's schedule NOW. Check with your parents NOW to see if there is going to be a scheduling problem at some point in the season. It will make everyone's life a lot less stressful!

Finally, please note the following "local policies":

1. Westerville (WASA) will NOT reschedule a game unless it was cancelled due to weather.
2. Dublin will re-schedule games. HOWEVER, the visiting team will have to pay for the referees unless at least 48 hours' notice is given.
3. Pickerington (PASA) will not reschedule a game, other than for weather cancellations, unless at least 48 hours' notice is provided and approved by the PASA Scheduler.

Reporting Game Scores

Tournament pairings are based on the results of regular season games. In the absence of game scores, a team may be penalized when tournament pairings are established.

Game Scores are to be reported to MSSA via email by the HOME TEAM on the day the game is played. The away team is encouraged to report the score, as well, to ensure all scores are reported. When reporting scores, the following information should be included:

1. Scheduled date of game. (Which may or may not be the date it was played.)
2. Home Team Name (include Co-Rec or Girls), Team Number, and goals scored.
3. Visiting Team Name (include Co-Rec or Girls), Team Number, and goals scored.

Ohio Return-to-Play Law (regarding concussions)

1. All participating Leagues are responsible for the implementation of the Law for their League Sponsored Teams.
2. All participating Leagues are responsible for making sure their Coaches, Parents, Players, Other League Officials and Referees are aware of the Law and take the matter seriously. We have no choice in this. IT IS THE LAW.
3. *If a player is identified with the possible symptoms of a concussion by a Referee, the Coach of the player's team, or Other League Official; that player must be removed from the field and may not return to the field that day, nor participate in any future team practices or games, until being cleared, in writing, by one of the following:*
 - a physician. (M.D., or D.O.)
 - an athletic trainer whose work is supervised by a physician.
 - a physician's assistant.
 - a nurse practitioner.
4. *No Coach, Substitute Coach, Referee, or Club Assistant Referee shall be required to demonstrate or prove to any other coach, substitute coach, referee, club assistant referee, player, or parent that they are in compliance with the requirements of Ohio's Return-to-Play Law.*
5. *Coaches will have no standing to make an "official determination" as to whether **a player on another team** is exhibiting possible symptoms of a concussion.*

Rules Regarding Thunder and Lightning

Games (or practices) are to be stopped immediately and players/parents to take cover:

- If lightning of any sort is observed,
- If thunder is heard, even in the distance,
- If a lightning detector/predictor sounds an alarm
- If an audible tornado siren sounds an alarm

Return to the field and resume play (or practice) after:

- Waiting at least 30-minutes after the last observation of lightning of any sort, or
- Waiting at least 30-minutes after the last sound of thunder, even in the distance,
- Waiting at least 30-minutes after the initial alarm from a lightning detector/predictor, unless an all-clear has sounded,
- Waiting at least 30-minutes after the alarm from an audible tornado siren has last been heard,
- Whichever occurs last!

In the case of an audible tornado siren only, play may resume in less than thirty minutes if the warning/watch which initiated the siren has been discontinued or expired.

If the referee does not suspend play, coaches should remove their players from the field and take cover (cars).

Field and Goal Requirements

Each participating League and/or Team is to provide a field for their home games. The minimum recommended field size is 50 yards by 100 yards. Fields must be safe for play and properly lined and equipped, per USSF guidelines. Goal dimensions must be 8' x 24', with nets, and they must be securely anchored. The senior referee is responsible for adherence to these requirements.

Team and Spectator Locations

Both team benches must be on one side of the field and all spectators on the opposite side of the field. A maximum of three (3) coaches are allowed on the bench.

Noisemakers

The use of artificial noisemakers, i.e. air horns, vuvuzelas, tambourines, megaphones, bells, whistles, bugles, or other such devices are prohibited during MSSA tournament games by players, coaches or spectators. Leagues may prohibit their use during any regularly scheduled games. Referees may use their discretion as to whether noisemakers, visual materials or use of drones interfere with the game they are officiating.

Referees

The HOME team will schedule and pay for the referees. Certified (USSF/OHSAA) referees are expected for all matches. A two-person or three-person system of control may be used. If a two-person system of control is used, at least one referee should be an adult. It is preferable that both referees be adults. If a three-person system is used, the Center Referee should be an adult.

- A. Youth Referees should be at least TWO years older than the players on the field.
- B. If adult referees are not available for the game, both coaches must agree, at least 48 hours prior to the day of the scheduled game, to play the game with youth referees.
- C. Using either adult or youth referees who have a child or sibling on the field is **STRONGLY DISCOURAGED**. In the event this situation is unavoidable, both Coaches must agree to play the game under this circumstance, at least 48 hours prior to the start of the game.
- D. If no assigned, certified referees appear for a game, the two coaches may agree to play the game with ADULT, non-certified referees. The outcome of the game will be deemed official.

If only one referee is available for a game, two "Club, Assistant Referees" may be used, preferably one from each team. If Club Assistant Referees are used, they may only indicate when the ball has left the field of play.

Disqualifications (Red Cards)

Disqualifications must be reported to the MSSA Office after the game. The Head Referee of the match **MUST SUBMIT A WRITTEN REPORT** to the League Coordinator of the Home Team. The player's (or coach's) name and number, as well as the circumstances should be reported. The home League Coordinator will then forward this report to the MSSA Administrator.

A player, coach, other bench personnel, or spectator that has been disqualified from a contest, shall be barred from participating in the next contest. Additional game suspensions may be invoked after review by the MSSA Office and the League offices of the two teams involved.

Coaches will be held responsible for the behavior of their players and parents and may be asked by the referee to correct any undesirable behaviors. Coaches may be disqualified from a match due to the behavior of their parents or players.

Reporting Concerns and/or Complaints

If any Association Participant (Coach, Player, Parent, Referee, etc.) wishes to raise an issue regarding any matter related to the Association, they should first forward that issue to their respective MSSA League Coordinator for resolution. After review, the League Coordinator may choose to forward the issue onto the MSSA Administrator. The MSSA Administrator will review the matter with the League Coordinator and, together, they will determine the appropriate action to be taken.

If the issue involves another League or Team, the MSSA Administrator will forward the matter onto that League's MSSA Coordinator. Together, the MSSA Administrator and the League MSSA Coordinator will review the matter and together, determine the appropriate action to be taken. The MSSA Administrator will communicate what action has been taken to the League MSSA Coordinator that reported the issue.

Mercy Rule eliminated Spring 2025

The mercy rule—deemed ineffective by consensus—has been **eliminated** from the MSSA rules beginning spring 2025. Instead, coordinators are encouraged to counsel coaches on strategies for letting up if the goal differential reaches 4 so that everyone can leave the field with dignity.

Strategies such as requiring the ball to be passed back to a defender on each possession. Or, perhaps, require that each defender touch the ball before it can be brought forward. Requiring a certain number of passes before a shot can be taken sometimes works as well. I'm sure you can each think of many other restrictions that can be invoked.

Tactics such as these not only slow down the proliferation of goals, but also provide players on the winning team the opportunity to improve their game by being forced to operate under pressure, which was probably not happening without the coach invoking the restriction. Your players will be better for it and the opposing team's players won't be hurt by it.

Number of Players on The Field

While not required, coaches are encouraged to consider the number of players present on the opposing team, for a given game. USSF Rules require 7 players on the field to play a match. If one team is short handed on a given day, the other coach is encouraged to play down to the number of players present for the other team. If the team that was short players gains an advantage, the other team can always place more players on the field.

Sportsmanship and Fair Play

As indicated above, the purpose of the Association is to have fun. Behavior to the contrary only creates an unpleasant experience for everyone else. It should not be tolerated by participating leagues/teams. While everyone wants to win the game, that should not be the primary reason for playing it. As adults, it is our responsibility to instill a spirit of sportsmanship and fair play in our players and parents. That goal cannot be achieved if we allow players, spectators, ourselves, or our assistant coaches to behave in a manner contrary to that. So, let's be diligent in our efforts to create an atmosphere in which everyone can have fun and enjoy the game.

Season-Ending Tournament

An End-Of-Season tournament is held at the end of both fall and spring seasons. Specific tournament rules are contained in the Tournament Rules document.

Teams must notify the MSSA Administrators if they do not intend to participate. **A team that does not notify MSSA (email preferred) of their intention to drop out of the tournament by 11:59pm on the date specified on the webpage and MSSA agenda, will incur a \$200 fine. If that team, or the League through which they are registered, does not pay the fine, they will NOT BE ALLOWED to play in MSSA in subsequent seasons until the fine is paid.**

In addition, if a team forfeits one tournament game, they must forfeit all of their tournament games. However, once a team forfeits a game, that team may play the remaining scheduled games provided that playing a game does not result in their opponent having to play two games on a given day when other teams in their "Group" play only one game that day, unless the coach of that team agrees to play the game. If a team forfeits a game, they may not advance to either a Semi-Final Game or Championship Game. If a team cannot participate in the tournament, they remain eligible to receive their Tournament T-Shirts.

League Standings

Due to an abundance of requests, MSSA will post standings on the association's webpage beginning with fall of 2024. It is to be understood that since teams play inside as well as outside their assigned conference, standings may have limited value. Who a team plays, and the outcome of the game is useful data for tournament placement, but that is not reflected in "standings".

Public Health Emergency

Upon government declaration of a public health emergency, the MSSA Administrators, League Coordinators and coaches will coordinate and communicate specific protocols associated with a specific health emergency, such as Covid-19.

Coaches must discuss the protocols that are in place at the HOME Team Fields and communicate same to their parents. While they may all be similar, it will be important to understand any differences - PRIOR TO the Visiting team arriving at the fields. In the event there ARE differences in protocols, those protocols that are in place at the HOME Team Fields will prevail. *If the Visiting Team does not feel the protocols that are in place at the Home Fields provide a sufficiently safe environment to play the game, they may choose to not play the game without any resulting consequences. OR they may choose to work with the Home Team to establish Protocols that do provide for a sufficiently safe environment to play the game.*