

Suburban Friendship League
2416 Rosedown Drive
Reston, VA 20191-1620
September 5, 2011

Dear Coaches and Club Officials:

This season the SFL has over 525 youth teams and we would like to extend a special welcome to those who are new to the SFL and hope that you have an enjoyable season. We would also like to welcome back the returning teams.

It is the SFL's goal to provide timely and accurate information to the clubs and teams playing in this league. Our Web Site (www.sflsoccer.org) helps us accomplish this objective. Our Email address is sfl@sflsoccer.org. The Web Site contains most of the information in your package and we will try to keep it updated. We would appreciate any comments you may have on how the league operations can be improved. Additional information about the season's operations and our web site is discussed below.

MAILING PROCESS

Our mailings are divided into two parts. This mailing contains what is considered the "standard package" and contains the following:

- Season letter
- Information from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention on concussions
- Listing of SFL Age Group Commissioners, SFL Club Representatives, and Club Age Group Representatives. This listing provides the contact points for each age group. **You should contact your SFL Club Representative concerning questions that arise during the season. The SFL Age Group Commissioners will formally respond only to matters referred to them by the appropriate SFL Club Representative.** (This information is not published on the web site version.)
- Listing of team contacts and phone numbers. (This information is not published on the web site version).
- Rules for the current season. These rules were approved by the club representatives during the preseason meeting and are generally consistent with those of the prior seasons. However, we encourage you to take the time and read the rules.

You will also receive another package with individual specific information. This mailing will contain:

- Cover letter.
- Data confirmation card.
- Team Schedules and Field Directions (Coaches Only). These schedules may be different than those originally posted on the Web Sites. However, the web site's home page will tell you the date and time that the web site was updated with the version that was used to prepare these schedules. In addition, changes are sometimes made after the schedules are prepared. These changes are also posted to the web site with the date and time of the change. Therefore, we would suggest that you check your schedule on the web site to determine if any changes have been made. **If you have a problem contacting a coach, call the applicable SFL Club Representative or Club Age Group Representative using the information contained in the standard package.** In some cases, the club was unable to provide the game time for a game. Once the time is known, the web site will be updated.

We expect these letters to be mailed this week.

Key Dates

The following are some of the key dates:

<u>Date</u>	<u>Event</u>
September 9	Coaches provided approved rosters by SFL Club Representative depending on the date of the team's first game.
September 10	First game weekend.
September 15	Initial Master Player Roster (with uniform numbers) sent to the SFL.
September 25	Last day to make changes to a team roster without approval of the applicable SFL Age Group Commissioner.
September 30	Final Master Player Roster sent to the SFL.
October 8	Holiday – No games
November 12/13	Tournament weekend. If your team is unable to play this weekend, please let us know as soon as possible.

PLAYER HEALTH AND SAFETY

As many of you know, on-field player sports injuries have been a hot topic in the news over the past few months. The National Football League, for example, has made a concerted effort to address their problems with head injuries and concussions. They have instructed referees to strictly enforce the rules on striking the opponent in the head and using the helmet as a striking implement.

The National Federation of State High School Associations estimates that 9.3% of all high school soccer injuries are concussions. While we have received few reports of severe injury during SFL games, we should ensure that we are doing what we can to minimize the risk of injury to the players in our league. In addition, players, coaches, and parents are becoming more sensitive to this issue and will ‘be on the lookout’ for anything that might be serious or even appears to be serious. Any incident reported, whether real or imagined, results in an investigation and significant time devoted to its resolution, so it is in our best interests to stop ‘rough play’ before it begins. Not only are we protecting our children (which is our main concern), we are also minimizing any ‘nuisance complaints’.

We urge each Club to take the following steps to help ensure a safe playing environment for our players:

- **Coaches:** train your players in proper and legal technique. For example: go straight up for headers; cleats down on slide tackles; avoid tackles from behind. If a player is injured during a game, get them proper care and do not allow them to return to play if there is any doubt about their condition.
- **Referees:** make player safety a point of emphasis this season. Injuries are more severe when one or both players are permitted to go up for a head ball at an angle rather than straight up. Tackles with studs up, or from behind and through an opponent's legs increase the likelihood of injury. Be prepared to stop play quickly if a player appears to be injured.
- **Parents:** soccer is a contact sport. If your child is injured, you and your family doctor are the best judges of when it is safe for your child to return to the field. Our advice is – **WHEN IN DOUBT, SIT THEM OUT.**

In this package we have included a handout from the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention that provides more information on this important topic and a “clipboard” page. We also suggest that you visit their site (www.cdc.gov/concussion/) for additional resources that include an online training course.

GAME SAFETY

A continuing point of emphasis from VYSA is the need to ensure that the goals used on a game field are properly secured. VYSA and the SFL are asking that all clubs, coaches, referees, parents, and players to pay close attention to the safety of the goals on the fields you are using. A few years past, a young player was killed by a goal that fell on him. Shortly after that incident another player was injured by a goal falling, only this one had a better ending. We are asking all those involved to make goal safety a top priority.

Do not let another tragedy occur. Take a few moments to make sure that all the players are safe by inspecting (1) all goal posts and nets for safety (including making sure that they are they are properly anchored and secured) and (2) the field and areas around the field that is being used. While it is our understanding that the referees should be checking the goals to ensure that they are properly secured and the field is safe, we would also like both coaches to check the goals to make sure that they are properly secured and if you have any questions, ask the referee. If there is still a question, then do not play the game. The Consumer Product Safety Commission has also published a goalpost safety manual. (<http://www.cpsc.gov/CPSCPUB/PUBS/Soccer.pdf>).

INCOMPLETE GAME AND FIELD INFORMATION

We did not receive all the game field and time information for some of the games scheduled for Sunday since some clubs are waiting for the travel schedules to set these games to maximize the referees and field slots. Once we are provided with this information, we will update the web site. In addition, several clubs did confirm that the field slots provided were still correct prior to the publication of the game schedules. Accordingly, please check the web site before your game is played to make sure that most current information is being used. Furthermore, some field directions have changed since the original schedules were posted and used for the game schedules mailed to the coaches. Accordingly, we suggest that you use the updated field directions contained on the web site.

INCOMPLETE TEAM INFORMATION

You will note that we did not have a number of team colors or in some cases the even the name of the coach or the phone number. Please complete the confirmation card enclosed in your package as soon as possible so that we may update our records. If you do not receive a confirmation card, then check with your SFL Club Representative since if we did not have a reliable mailing address, we sent the card to the SFL Club Representative. Also, if you would like to receive weekly game results by Email, please note this on your card. The enclosed material provides more information on this service. **You must register for this service each season.** If we did not have the necessary address information, we did not attempt to mail the standard package. You should contact your SFL Club Representative to obtain the phone numbers included in the package. The remainder of the material is on the web site under SFL Documents.

Each season we have attempted to wait until the last moment to put the team contact information in the package since we know how disruptive it is to try and contact someone (1) who is not in the phone listing or (2) has an incorrect number. However, it seems as if some clubs just cannot get us the necessary information in time. If you have a problem contacting a coach, then call that individual's SFL Club Representative. This package also has standard Email addresses that can be used to send the SFL Club Representatives an Email.

In the cases where a valid team contact and phone number was not provided in time for this package, we used the SFL Club Representative's information. Accordingly, when you check the web site and see a team contact is different than the information in this package, you can still contact the SFL Club Representative since when the correct information is provided to us, we have told the club that the new coach should contact the opposing teams and let them know the correct information. Also, **if your name or phone number is incorrect or missing, then you are required to contact each of your opposing teams as soon as possible and let them know the correct information. Although we post the team color and name information on our Web Site, we do not post phone numbers, Email addresses, or mailing addresses due to privacy considerations.** Our web site contains our privacy policy and it can be found at www.sflsoccer.org/privacy.htm.

RULE CHANGES AND RULE REMINDERS

RULE CHANGES

Please pay particular attention to the rules that we adopted for this season. Most of the rules are the same as last season, however, some rules have undergone some significant changes and we suggest that you take some time to review them. The following are two of the significant changes. I would also like to emphasize some rules that have caused some confusion in the past

Significant Rule Changes

1. A new section IV.K. has been added. This section discusses removing players from the field and holding down the game scores. Also, added section IV.K.1. which implements a "mercy rule".
2. Section IX – Discipline. This section has undergone significant changes and should be reviewed in its entirety. The following highlights these changes.
 - The term "Team Red Card Points" has been changed to "Team Demerits" since this eliminates any confusion that a penalty is being assessed even when red cards are not shown. Although the term is being changed, the rules have retained the penalty that if a team averages one Team Demerit per regular season game, then that team is (1)

suspended from all tournament games and (2) all remaining regular season games. For example, if the regular season is 8 games and a team accumulates eight Team Demerits in week 2, then it would be suspended from the remaining six regular season games and the tournament. On the other hand, if it accumulates the eight Team Demerits in week 8, it would be suspended from the tournament. In addition, as currently called for in the rules, that team would be placed on probation.

- An automatic 2 game suspension is being implemented to any non player (coach or spectator) who is asked to leave the field by the official regardless of whether a red card is shown. Two Team Demerits will also be assessed to the team for each individual asked to leave. For example, if the coach and a spectator are asked to leave, then four Team Demerits will be awarded to the team.
- Two Team Demerits are assessed to a team anytime a referee report includes a reference to the referee being harassed during or after the game by players, coaches or spectators. Examples include, verbal threats, being followed to the parking lot in an inappropriate manner, or other actions that would make a referee fear for his/her safety. This penalty would also apply to referee assault incidents, but additional disciplinary actions would also be required to be taken by the offending club in those cases.

Frequently Asked Questions

The SFL has developed a number of Frequently Asked Questions documents and posted them on the web site (<http://www.sflsoccer.org/faq.htm>). These documents cover such items as scheduling, reporting game results, and roster issues. We suggest that you take some time to review these materials and provide us feedback on additional questions and topics that should be covered. We have also prepared a document that summarizes the SFL Rules for referees. This can also be found on Frequently Asked Questions page. We hope that you find these documents useful and welcome suggestions on how to improve them.

Standard Email Addresses for Sfl Club Representatives

We have been requested to provide Email addresses of the SFL Club Representatives so that coaches and other SFL Club Representatives who are having difficulties contacting a team have a place to send their Email. The SFL's privacy policy does not allow the SFL to disclose the Email addresses without permission. In order to overcome this limitation and handle potential Email changes, the SFL has establish SFL Email addresses for each SFL Club Representative. Email sent to this address will automatically be forwarded to the applicable Email address(es) for that SFL Club Representative. **These standard Email addresses can be found in this package on the page that contains the SFL Club Representative Contact information.**

Exchanging Rosters

Coaches are required to provide a **copy** of their approved roster to the opposing team before the start of every game **regardless of the age group**. If a team is unable to provide a copy of their approved roster, the team is assessed a forfeit. Therefore, it is a good idea to provide copies of the approved roster to more than one individual on your team. Both teams are required to report the forfeited game.

As noted in the rules, only the SFL Club Representative or the Club Registrar may sign a roster. When a team's coach serves as the SFL Club Representative and Club Registrar, then another club officer must sign the Team Roster. The name of each club's SFL Club Representative is contained in your package. If you have a question on whether the individual approving a roster is the club's registrar, then send us the name and we will validate the name with the applicable club. Also, as in past seasons, each club must obtain approval for the use of substitute roster forms. The rules provide a list of the clubs that are allowed to use substitute roster forms.

Forfeits Relating to Roster Challenges

The SFL will decide when forfeits relating to roster challenges will be awarded. The primary purposes of the roster requirements is to (1) ensure that the players on the field were assigned to the team by the club and (2) encourage communication between the coaches to resolve minor problems when discrepancies arise. The roster process adopted several seasons ago have generally worked well and appeared to accomplish the first purpose **WHEN THEY ARE USED**. In order to prevent the roster process from being used to obtain victories through roster challenges that could not be obtained on the field or avoid playing the game the rules require (1) a formal roster check of both teams when either coach desires to challenge a roster with each coach reporting the results to the SFL, (2) the game to be played in its entirety, and (3) the results of the challenge to be reviewed by the applicable SFL Club Representative with a report submitted to the appropriate SFL Age Group Commissioner. The SFL Age Group Commissioner will then make a decision on whether a forfeit (or other penalties) will be assessed based on whether illegal players were actually used rather than honest mistakes. In addition, a coach is automatically suspended one game and the team assessed one team red card point when it is found that the team used an illegal player.

During our preseason meeting, this topic was discussed at length and it was noted that some teams believe that other teams use illegal players. However, in many cases these teams did not go through the roster challenge process to determine if illegal players were actually on the team. Our experience is that the roster challenge process is very effective at identifying when a team is using players not assigned to that team. We do not expect roster challenges to become a common occurrence. However, if you believe that the other team may be using illegal players, then we suggest that you use the roster challenge process contained in the rules.

Sideline Placement of Teams and Spectators

The SFL does not have a rule regarding the placement of teams and spectators on the sidelines. Some clubs have the teams placed on the same side of the field with the spectators on the other side of the field while others have the teams and spectators on opposite sides of the field. We had a great deal of discussion on this subject at the preseason meeting concerning whether the SFL should adopt a standard policy. The SFL Club Representatives reaffirmed their desired to leave this up to the home team's club on the placement of teams and spectators, e.g., both teams on the same side of the field, or teams on opposite sides of the field. If a club wants a standard approach, then that club should ensure that their coaches know the club policy and the home team coach should tell the other team. This topic should be discussed during the Wednesday phone call that the home team is required to make to the visiting team. Covering this topic during the weekday phone call should reduce any confusion.

Reporting Game Scores, Cards, and Rosters

Both teams are required to report any yellow or red cards awarded and the score regardless of whether they win, lose, or tie. We realize that this is duplication, however, this rule was adopted to avoid confusion on who was to report game results. The penalty associated with reporting scores late is **one game point**. Therefore, both teams will be assessed a game point penalty if we do not receive scores in a timely manner. **We would also like to request that whenever possible to use Email (sfl@sflsoccer.org) for reporting scores and include the game reference number in the subject field e.g., #4521.** Email is much easier for us to use and you get a confirmation that we have received your score. The Frequently Asked Questions page (<http://www.sflsoccer.org/faqscores.pdf>) contains examples of proper game reports. As can be seen in this document, the reports do not require much information or use a complicated format.

As noted in the rules, if one team does not have a roster and the other team plays the game, then the failure to provide a roster cannot be grounds for requesting a forfeit. However, the failure to provide a roster upon request should be included with the game report. See Section VII.A.2 in the rules.

Game Cancellations

The rules contain information on how teams can find out if games are canceled due to weather (Section V.). Our web site (www.sflsoccer.org/weather.htm) also has a page with the phone numbers that should be used. See discussion above on the requirements to change games and how games should be rescheduled. Remember, in most cases you only have until the Thursday following the scheduled game date to reschedule a game if it involves playing a team from another club. After that time, the SFL will attempt to automatically reschedule the game and no changes to games rescheduled by the SFL can be made. Therefore, it is in your best interest to reschedule the game yourself. We have developed a list of Frequently Asked Questions regarding scheduling and it is posted on our web site at www.sflsoccer.org/faqseasonsch.pdf.

This season several clubs are providing artificial turf fields. We have attempted to include in the field directions and field designation if a field is artificial turf, e.g., Poplar Tree T3. Games are played on artificial turf fields when games may be cancelled on conventional surfaces. Therefore, make sure that you understand when games are cancelled by a club whether those cancellations also apply to the artificial turf field you may be using.

AGE GROUP DIVISIONS

All age groups except the Under 19 Girls have divisions. The divisions for the Under 12s and Under 14s are based on age while the divisions for the Under 16s and Under 19 Boys are based on skill. The Under 12 age group plays an 8 v 8 format. The SFL Documents page has the USYS rules relating to Under 12s playing 8 v 8 (www.sflsoccer.org/8v8rules.pdf).

The SFL web site (www.sflsoccer.org/agegrp.htm) has the age criteria we provided to the clubs for assigning teams to an age group and division and an age group calculator. In the fall the clubs place their Under 16s and Under 19 Boys teams in divisions while in the spring the applicable SFL Age Group Commissioner makes the determination on the division assignments for the Under 16s and Under 19 Boys.

WEB SITE

Each team has an individual team schedule with field directions. These pages can be found by selecting **Team Information/ Schedules** and then selecting the **Individual team schedules with game results and field directions** for a given age group, e.g., Under 12 Boys, from the home page. **You may not add any team specific information to this page and the page cannot be customized for a given team.** A privacy policy has also been developed and we encourage you to take a few minutes to read it. The privacy policy link can be found on the left side of our home page.

FIELD DIRECTIONS

The SFL has well over 200 fields in its data base. Although not all of these fields are used each season, many are used for regular season and makeup games. Each season we ask the clubs to verify the directions contained in our data base during the team and club registration process. If you find an error, please let us know.

We provide map reference numbers for many of the fields contained in Loudoun County, Northern Virginia, and Prince William County. Hopefully, this information will assist you in finding the field on the applicable ADC maps. Although we may not have captured the exact map section, it should be “close enough” for you to find the field using the map and the directions provided. In addition, based on a suggestion received in a prior season, we requested addresses for the fields and have included the information received on the web site. We would welcome additional suggestions on how to make this process better as well.

Please review the information that pertains to you and your team(s) and **notify us immediately of any errors**. If you have questions on any of these materials, please call Chris Martin at (703) 476-6611 or notify us via the Web Site (www.sflsoccer.org) or by Email at sfl@sflsoccer.org. Please familiarize yourself with the information contained in this package and carry out your administrative responsibilities as soon as possible.

Good luck and we hope you have a successful and fulfilling season.

Jim Rodden
SFL Commissioner