

*Suburban Friendship League*  
**Discussion Topics for Rule and Process  
Changes for the Spring 2018 Season**  
(as of February 12, 2018)

**OVERVIEW**

We received a number of proposed changes this season to the various procedures and process documents, rules, and web site. On February 9, 2018, the SFL Commissioner met to discuss these issues. Based on this meeting, the SFL Commissioners reached consensus on whether to recommend approval to each proposals for all but one item – the proposed tournament format. Consistent with past practice, a final decision on all the proposed changes will be made by the clubs at the Spring 2018 preseason meeting.

The proposals received affect the following.

- Limitations on players being allowed to play up
- Sharing of players
- Substitutions
- Tournament format Changes

This document is broken down into two sections. The first section summarizes the proposal received and whether the proposal is recommended for adoption. If the proposal is recommended for adoption, then it summarizes the proposed change. The second section describes each proposal in detail and provides the rational used when deciding the proposed course of action on a given proposal.

| Issue/Proposal  | Summary of Recommended Change  |
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| <b>Rule Changes</b>   |  |
| <p>Issues related to players being allowed to play up one or more age groups. About one percent of the players play up two or more SFL age groups. Examples of playing up one SFL age group include.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• U10s could play on U11 teams but not on U12 teams.</li> <li>• U14s could play on U16 teams but not on U19 teams.</li> </ul> | <p>The SFL Commissioners discussed a number of options and are recommending the following.</p> <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>• For the Spring 2018 season only, players may only play up more than two age groups with the appropriate SFL Age Group Commissioner’s approval for teams in the Under 11 through Under 14 age groups. This is to allow those players approved in the fall 2018 season to play up more than two age groups to continue playing on their same team for the Spring 2018 season. Players playing on Under 16 and Under 19 teams may only play up one age group.</li> <li>• The following rules apply to the Fall 2018 season and later. <ul style="list-style-type: none"> <li>▶ Players playing on Under 11 through Under 14 teams may play up no more than 2 age groups with the club’s permission, e.g., Under 11s can play on Under 13 teams but not on Under 14 teams.</li> <li>▶ Players playing on Under 16 and Under 19 teams may only play up one age group, e.g., Under 13s cannot play on Under 16 teams while Under 14s can play on Under 16 teams but not on Under 19 teams.</li> </ul> </li> <li>• For the Spring 2018 season forward, clubs no longer have to obtain a SFL Age Group Commissioner’s approval to allow players assigned to Under 11 through Under 14 teams to play up one or two age groups.</li> </ul> |

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| <p>Sharing of players has evolved over time. The SFL is routinely receiving requests to for teams to share players between age groups, e.g., Under 13 age players on a Under 14 team be allowed to play on an Under 13 team. This season we have received a number of complaints about teams allowed to share players and this is perceived as providing the team an unfair advantage.</p> | <p>The SFL Commissioners are recommending that the ability of teams to share players be eliminated.</p>   |
| <p>The SFL rules regarding unlimited substitutions has been abused and needs to be changed to limit the substitutions to specific situations.</p>  | <p>The proposed rules have been changed to identify the specific conditions where substitutions are allowed. This proposal was made to preserve the integrity of the game so that play is continuous without the constant interruption of play and the wasting of time. The SFL has received several complaints that the combination of unlimited substitutions with substations being allowed at any stoppage of play have been used to slow the game down, stopping an opponent’s attack on goal, etc.</p>  |
| <p>Tournament Format Changes</p>   | <p>The ability of the clubs to support the tournament in its current format requires a massive commitment in terms of fields and officials. Between 18 and 20 percent of the SFL games in a given season consist of tournament games, i.e., a significant percentage of the season's games are played on one weekend. As noted at the Spring 2017 preseason meeting, it is not a question of “if” but “when” the SFL tournament in its current format can no longer be supported.</p> <p>The SFL received four proposals for changes to the tournament. These options were then evaluated using the Fall 2018 tournament, i.e., what would have happened if each of these proposals had been implemented for the Fall 2018 tournament. The SFL Commissioners then evaluated the each option against the primary criteria of (1) reducing to number of tournament games to</p> |

something closer to a normal SFL game weekend and (2) having a process that provides reasonable assurance that teams participating in the SFL tournament are scheduled to play one game per SFL game weekend.

Based on this evaluation, the SFL Commissioners were able to recommend that the clubs choose between two of the four options since the remaining two options did not address the primary problem of the current tournament structure – reducing the demand for game officials and fields to an acceptable level. Specifically, the two options recommended for consideration are as follows.

- Only use four team single elimination tournament divisions. Essentially, this proposal has the same number of Saturday tournament games as a regular season weekend and the number of Sunday games is slightly reduced. Historically, supporting the Sunday tournament games has not been as problematic as supporting the Saturday tournament games.
- Conducting the tournament over two weekends by eliminating one regular season game weekend. This proposal significantly reduces the number of games that a club has to support on a given game day.

While both of these options have benefits, they also have significant limitations and the approach and issues for each of these as well as the other two options complex. Rather than attempt to include all the information and rational used evaluate each option and to arrive decision to recommend the two options to be considered by the clubs, a separate

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|   | <p>document was developed and included in the preseason package and posted to the web site on the SFL Documents page.</p>   |
| <p>Propose that if SFL does not provide 9 game weeks of play, the fees member clubs pay to SFL should be reduced. It seems only fair that if SFL is not providing a full season's worth of support, SFL shouldn't get paid for a full season.</p> | <p>At the request of the club making this proposal, this has been included in the proposed changes even though it has already been implemented.</p> <p>The SFL develops its budget based on its expected expenditures for a given season. This budget is then used to determine the registration fees. In some Spring seasons, the SFL only schedules games for 8 weeks rather than the normal 9 weeks. This decision is driven by when the majority of the clubs have fields available to support the Spring games. Specifically, because the Easter weekend varies from year to year attempting to schedule 9 game weeks is problematic in some seasons.</p> <p>Registration fees normally do not change when the SFL only schedules games for 8 weeks since the SFL has two types of costs – fixed and variable. The majority of the regular season costs are fixed. For example, the costs to mail the packages, schedule games, etc. do not change regardless of the number of regular season games played. Rather they are dependent on the number of teams that participate. However, the costs to the clubs do depend on the number of games scheduled by the SFL with the primary costs being game officials. Accordingly, when the SFL only schedules 8 game weeks instead of 9, the clubs automatically benefit by this reduction through lower game officiating costs. The majority of the SFL registration fees go to pay for the costs associated with the tournament. Since these costs do not depend on the number of regular season games played, these costs are unchanged.</p> |

## LIMITATIONS ON PLAYERS BEING ALLOWED TO PLAY UP

### Section II.C.

#### Current Wording

A player must meet the USSF birth date requirements for their age group.

1. The SFL encourages the clubs to only assign players whose birth dates comply with their team's age group, e.g., U11 age players are assigned to U11 teams, U15/16 age players are assigned to U16 teams, etc. If a club needs to assign a player to a team that would result in not complying with the applicable SFL policies, then the SFL Club Representative should request a waiver BEFORE the season begins. The approval of this request will be shown on the SFL Team Roster. Until the SFL Team Roster shows this approval, the coach should not use the player.
  - a. The club may allow a player to participate on a team in an age group older than the player (commonly referred to as playing up) when the player's age group is one year younger than the team's age group without having to request a waiver from the SFL, e.g., the club may decide to assign U11 age players to U12 teams, U14 age players to U16 teams, etc.
    - (1) Clubs must request waivers that allow a player to play up two (2) or more SFL age groups. Such waiver requests must include a signed statement from the club's Board of Directors/Executive Director that they have reviewed the application and believe that the player should be allowed to play up two (2) or more SFL age groups and that the club accepts all the risks associated with allowing players to play in an age group that is older than the player's birth date would dictate. The individual signing this determination must (1) be a Board Member/Executive Director and (2) someone other than the SFL Club Representative or a coach in the SFL.
      - (a) If a club has more than one player, then all the players may be submitted on one list. For example, assume that the club is requesting waivers for 3 players that are playing on U11, U14, and U19 teams. All 3 players can be shown on one waiver request.
    - (2) Clubs must submit a request each season for age waivers even if a request has been approved in the prior season. The submission requirements are the same as if a request has never been submitted in a prior season.
    - (3) All requests for age waivers must be submitted prior to March 31 for the spring season and August 31 for the fall season.

**Issue/Proposal** – In the Fall 2018 season the SFL adopted new rules on players playing up more than one age group. This change was made because of the SFL’s concern on the undue risks associated with players making a significant jump in age groups. The rule change was designed to focus the attention of club management on conditions where players were playing up two or more age groups. It was expected that this should significantly reduce, if not eliminate, players playing up two or more age groups. The data shows that this objective was partially accomplished. However, we also saw indications that (1) some clubs seem to “rubber stamp” any of these requests and (2) the SFL Commissioners adopted inconsistent opinions when the waivers should be approved which caused some confusion for the clubs. For example, the SFL Commissioner for one age group may routinely grant waivers for players to play up two or more age groups while another would not. In the latter case, the rationale for not granting the waiver was related in many cases to the ages covered by division. For example, waivers for Under 13s to play on Under 16 teams may have been denied since the player was really jumping up 3 age groups rather than 2 age groups since the Under 16s cover Under 15 and Under 16 age players. This is in contrast to an Under 12 playing up two age groups on an Under 14 team which involves playing up 2 age groups.

A proposal was received to better standardize the “playing up” process so that it is more consistent and better protects the players from inadvertent injury. The following options were proposed.

- Return to the previous policy of letting the clubs decide when players can play up and the SFL is not involved with the approval of any players playing up 2 or more age groups. It is unknown how many players additional players would have been added if this proposal was adopted. We do know what over 20 waiver requests were denied by the SFL Commissioners for players to play up 2 or more age groups.
- Only allow players to play up one SFL age group, e.g., Under 11s could play on Under 12 teams and Under 14s could play on Under 16 teams. Clubs would not have get approval from the SFL for these players which is consistent with the current rules. This change would have affected 53 or about 0.6 percent of the players for the Fall 2017 season.
- Players may play up one age group without obtaining SFL approval. Players may also play up two SFL age groups for the U11 through the U14 age groups using the existing rules, i.e., senior club officials and the applicable SFL Commissioner must approve the request while players assigned to teams in the Under 16 and Under 19 age groups may only play up one age group. This change would have affected 7 (about 0.1 percent) of the players in the Under 16/19 age groups and 6 (less than 0.2 percent) of the players in the Under 11 through Under 14 age groups.
- Allow players to play up two age groups in the Under 11 through Under 14 age groups without SFL approval. No players will be allowed to play up more than two age groups.

This change would have affected 7 (about 0.1 percent) of the players in the Under 16/19 age groups and 6 (less than 0.2 percent) of the players in the Under 11 through Under 14 age groups.

- “Grandfather” players that have previously played up two or more age groups. All other players may only play up one age group. This would be a time consuming manual task and it may be unclear to the clubs why some clubs are allowed to have players on their roster playing up two years when they are not allowed to do the same.
- Phase in the requirement that no player may play up more than one age group in the Under 11 through Under 14 age groups, e.g., in the Fall 2018/Spring 2019 seasons no player in the Under 11 age group could play up more than one age group, in the Fall 2019/Spring 2020 seasons, no player in the Under 11 or Under 12 age groups could play up more than one age group etc. This change would take until the Fall 2021 season to fully implement the rule no player is allowed to play up more than one age group. While this may be a transition period for club that have their Under 11s with the SFL, it would still be an initial change for those clubs that start having their teams participate in the SFL at the Under 13/14 level.

**Comments** – It has been a common practice for clubs to allow players to play up one SFL age group so that teams have enough players. The following table shows how many players played up during the Fall 2017 season.

| <b>Age Group</b> | <b>Correct Age Group</b> | <b>Playing Up One Age Group</b> | <b>Playing Up Two or More Age Groups</b> |
|------------------|--------------------------|---------------------------------|--|
| Under 11         | 734                      | 47                              | 6  |
| Under 12         | 923                      | 143                             | 20                                       |
| Under 13         | 1,503                    | 154                             | 11                                       |
| Under 14         | 1,367                    | 246                             | 9  |
| Under 16         | 2,056                    | 186                             | 6  |
| Under 19         | 1,390                    | 274                             | 1  |
| Total            | 7,973                    | 1,050                           | 53                                       |

As shown above, about 0.6 percent of the players were playing up two or more age groups.

## Proposed Change

### Section II.C.

A player must meet the USSF birth date requirements for their age group.

1. The SFL encourages the clubs to only assign players whose birth dates comply with their team's age group, e.g., U11 age players are assigned to U11 teams, U15/16 age players are assigned to U16 teams, etc.
  - a. **Under 11 through Under 14 teams** – A club may allow a player to participate on a team that is two age groups older than the player (commonly referred to as playing up) without having to request a waiver from the SFL, e.g., the club may decide to assign U11 age players to U13 teams, U12 age players to U14 teams, etc.
    - (1) For the Spring 2018 season only, clubs may request waivers that allow a player to play up more than two (2) SFL age groups. Such waiver requests must include a signed statement from the club's Board of Directors/Executive Director that they have reviewed the application and believe that the player should be allowed to play up two (2) or more SFL age groups and that the club accepts all the risks associated with allowing players to play in an age group that is older than the player's birth date would dictate. The individual signing this determination must (1) be a Board Member/Executive Director and (2) someone other than the SFL Club Representative or a coach in the SFL
  - b. **Under 16 and Under 19 teams** – A club may allow a player to participate on a team in an age group that is one (1) year older than the player (commonly referred to as playing up), e.g., the club may decide to assign U14 age players to U16 teams and Under 16 age players to Under 19 teams. No players may play on teams that are two or more age groups older than the player, e.g., Under 13s may not play on Under 16 teams and Under 14s may not play on Under 19 teams.

## Age Group Matrix

| <b>Team Age Group</b> | <b>Player's Actual Age Group</b> |
|-----------------------|----------------------------------|
| Under 11              | Under 9, 10, and 11              |
| Under 12              | Under 10, 11, and 12             |
| Under 13              | Under 11, 12, and 13             |
| Under 14              | Under 12, 13, and 14             |
| Under 16              | Under 14, 15, and 16             |
| Under 19              | Under 16, 17, 18, and 19         |

**Note:** Unless otherwise noted, clubs may not request waivers to these age group allowances, e.g., Under 8s playing on Under 11 teams, Under 14s playing on Under 19 teams, etc.

## SHARING PLAYERS

### Section III.

#### Current Wording

- A. Sharing players between two teams for regular season games.
1. Some clubs may allow a player to play on two teams which is not in accordance with the SFL rules that a player may only appear on one roster
  2. A club that has too many players for one team but not enough for two teams is allowed to form two teams and share players to ensure an adequate number are available for a game when the SFL approves the sharing of players between teams.
    - a. The applicable SFL Commissioner will consider a request to share players when the following conditions are met:
      - (1) The request must normally be submitted before the season begins.
      - (2) A club must make a good faith effort not to abuse this exception. For example, if a club has 52 players, they should establish 3 teams to make sure that enough players will be available to play each game. They should not establish 4 teams.

- (3) Each team must have at least 12 players in the Under 11/12 age groups and 14 players in the Under 13/19 age groups. Furthermore, if the combined number of players on the two teams sharing players is less than 26 for the Under 11/12 age groups and 30 for the Under 13 and older age groups, then the SFL may require the teams to play their home games on Sunday.

**Note:** The SFL makes no efforts to deconflict game schedules for teams authorized to share players.

- b. When the SFL approves a request to share players, the SFL Team Roster will show (1) when a team is authorized to "share players", (2) the team rosters that are authorized to be used when sharing players, e.g., Team 1 and Team 5 – Under 14 Girls, and any limitations or other comments, e.g., only being allowed to share players during the regular season games.
  - (1) The minimum number of players that are assigned to a team must be consistent with section above on the minimum number of players that must be on a team before the sharing of players is authorized, i.e., twelve (12) for U11/12 teams and fourteen (14) for U13/19 teams.
- c. The coach(es) sharing players must (1) provide copies of the SFL Team Rosters for both of the teams authorized to share players to the opposing coach during the roster exchange process and (2) notify the opposing coach and the officials before the game which players will play and which players are being added from the other team.

#### B. Combining teams for the tournament.

1. A team is not allowed to share players between teams for tournament play without express written permission of the appropriate SFL Age Group Commissioner.
2. The SFL Club Representative must prepare a "tournament roster" using a SFL approved team roster form before the tournament and provide it to the coach(es) of the teams showing the players that are eligible to play on each team. A name may only be shown once. For example, if Player A is shown on Team A's roster, Player A may not be shown on Team B's roster. A copy of the "tournament roster" shall be submitted to the appropriate SFL Age Group Commissioner at least one week before the first tournament game is scheduled to be played by Email with a copy provide to the coach of each team. The SFL Club Representative should make sure that the coach(es) understand that they are not allowed to share players for tournament play.
  - a. If a club decides that it cannot field all the teams that have been allowed to share players during the regular season for tournament play, then the SFL Club

Representative is responsible for notifying the SFL prior to the tournament scheduling process the team(s) that should not be scheduled for tournament play. The players on the regular season roster of the team(s) not scheduled to play in tournament may be added to the other team(s) tournament roster.

- (1) Only players on the teams that are allowed to share players during the regular season may be merged onto a single team without the express written permission of the appropriate SFL Age Group Commissioner. The size of the combined roster may not exceed fourteen (14) players for the U11/12 age groups and sixteen (16) players for the U13/19 age groups.

### **Example 1**

Teams A and B are allowed to share players during the regular season and Team A decides that it cannot play in the tournament. Players from Team A may be added to Team B's tournament roster as long as the tournament roster does not exceed 14 players if the team is in the U11/12 age groups or 16 players if the team is in the U13/19 age groups. However, players from Team A may not be added to any other team's roster without express written permission from the appropriate SFL Age Group Commissioner.

### **Example 2**

Teams A and B are allowed to share players during the regular season and Team C decides that it cannot play in the tournament. Players from Team C MAY NOT be added to either Team A's or Team B's tournament roster without express written permission from the appropriate SFL Age Group Commissioner.

- C. The Process and Procedures – SFL Team Rosters document discusses other requirements that apply to sharing players and including (1) a limitation on the number of players that may play on the shared teams and (2) how to address the duplicate uniform issues that may arise.

### **Issue/Proposal**

Under current SFL application of the rule, an authorized team whose official SFL Team Roster is 14 and missing 2 players can bring any 3 players over, to play with 15. A team not so authorized must play with whatever players show up. For example, assume the team has 16 on its roster and 3 players do not show up. That team must play with 13 players while the team allowed to share players can play with 15 even if (1) 3 of the players on its roster do not show up or (2) its SFL Team Roster only shows fewer than 15 players assigned to the team. This does appear fair. In addition, we have seen that the “borrowed” players, whether one,

two or four, are the most competitive players from the other team, giving the team an additional advantage. A fairer application of the rule would allow the sharing of players to the lower of the number of players shown on the SFL Team Roster or 15 whichever is less for the Under 13s and above.

### **Comments**

The concerns raised appear valid. This season we received numerous complaints about this issue and how it was being implemented. While the coaches allowed to combine teams may be properly implementing the rule, the opposing coaches are confused by its complexities and believe that it gives a team an unfair advantage. Although changes were made in the Spring 2017 season to address concerns, these changes did not appear to address concerns raised in previous seasons, based on the comments received this season, it does not appear that the changes were effective to address the complaints.

### **Proposed Change**

It is recommended that teams no longer be allowed to share players.

### **Section III.**

#### **SHARING PLAYERS BETWEEN TWO TEAMS AND COMBINING TEAMS**

A. The sharing of players between teams is not allowed.

### **SUBSTITUTIONS**

#### **Section IV.F.**

##### **Current Wording**

F. Substitutions – Substitutions may be made in accordance with the current Laws of the Game as defined by US Soccer, US Youth Soccer, and VYSA. **Note: US Youth Soccer currently allows substitutions during any stoppage in play.**

##### **Issue/Proposal**

Substitutions at any stoppage of play works for leagues where the player is not allowed to return either during the half or the game. However, when this is combined with unlimited substitutions, as allowed by the SFL, this rule can really kill any natural flow to the game and gives coaches the opportunity to waste time legally, something which is not envisioned in the Laws of the Game. Even the most time conscious referee could not possible account for all

the time wasting in such situations. This is especially true during the SFL tournament where a running clock is in effect.

### **Comments**

This appears to be a valid concern. We have received several complaints about how this is being implemented by some coaches from other coaches, referees, and referee coordinators.

### **Proposed Change**

The following is the proposed text.

F. Substitutions may be made under the following conditions.

1. After a goal.
2. Prior to a goal kick.
3. Prior to the start of the second half.
4. Prior to a throw-in by the team in possession. The opposing team may only substitute if the team in possession substitutes.
5. For an injury when the injured player is replaced. The opposing team may also substitute a player at that time.
6. After a player caution, at the request of the player's coach. Only the cautioned player may be replaced with a substitute at that time.
7. At water breaks, if stoppage for the break occurs during one of the above substitution opportunities. Referees are encouraged to schedule water breaks during substitution opportunities for both teams.

**Note: US Youth Soccer currently allows substitutions during any stoppage in play. However, because the SFL allows unlimited substitutions, this rule can be abused which adversely affects the natural flow to the game and gives coaches the opportunity to waste time legally, something which is not envisioned in the Laws of the Game. Accordingly, the SFL restricts when players may be substituted to the above situations.**