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Suburban Friendship League
Discussion Topics for Rule and Process
Changes for the Fall 2022 Season
(as of July 15, 2022)

Note: Minor editorial changes are not shown.

OVERVIEW

We received a several proposed changes this season to the rules, the Club and Coach Guide, COVID Guide, and SFL operations. Based on these proposals, the SFL Commissioners reached consensus on each item and are able to provide a recommendation on all the proposals. Consistent with past practice, a final decision on all the proposed changes will be made at the Fall 2022 preseason meeting.

The proposals received affect the following.

- Limiting the number of former travel players that can be placed on a SFL team.
- Allowing coaches to waiver the requirement to have game officials present.
- Allowing teams to waive the mandatory game termination requirement and eliminate the game forfeit penalties when teams do not comply with game termination requirements.
- Assessing Team Demerits when clubs do not provide the SFL the actions they plan on taking relating to individuals, other than coaches and players, that are suspended from games.
- Eliminating the Special Bonus Season Games from the Fall 2022 season.
- Eliminating the COVID Guide as a separate document.

The following discusses each of these suggestions.

1 **ADMINISTRATIVE RULES FOR THE LAWS OF THE GAME**

2
3 **Limiting the Number of Former Travel Players On A SFL Team**

4
5 **Current Wording**

6
7 Section III.B.1.b.

8
9 If a player played on a travel or select team during the previous season, the player should
10 complete SFL Form 3 (Player No Longer Playing Travel or Select Soccer). This form should
11 also be signed by the Coach and SFL Club Representative. A copy should be sent by Email
12 to the SFL with the original maintained by the coach. Players appearing on this form and
13 complying with its certifications are not considered travel or select players.
14

15 **Issue/Proposal**

16
17 When the SFL adopted this rule many years ago it was envisioned that a team would not have
18 very many former travel players on it. However, this may not always be the case. For
19 example, in the Spring 2022 season at least one team had over 10 former travel players on it.
20 While not a full team, the majority of the team consisted of former travel players
21 supplemented by some true recreational players. The club stated that the primary reason that
22 the team wanted to play in the SFL was because the team was not planning on playing travel
23 this season and many of the players wanted to play their final season together before
24 graduation. In past seasons, other clubs have registered teams whose players were primarily
25 travel players for much the same reason. While technically this is a recreational team, in
26 reality it is a travel team and defeats the objective of the SFL being a place for recreational
27 teams. Accordingly, the SFL should implement a rule that places a limit on the number of
28 former travel players that may play on a given SFL team.
29

30 **Discussion**

31
32 The club registering this team notified the SFL that they were planning on registering this
33 team and that the majority of the players were associated with a travel team that was
34 disbanding. The former travel team was associated with the club registering them in the SFL
35 so the club knew that the players were no longer playing on a travel team. The club also
36 noted that the reason they wanted to add the team to their team registration was that the
37 players wanted to play one final season together before they graduated. When registering the
38 team, the club requested that they be notified in advance if the SFL had an issue with this so
39 that they could (1) withdraw the team without penalty and (2) make a decision on what to do
40 with the non travel players they planned on assigning to it so that the team would have a
41 viable number of players. A decision was made to accept the team since (1) non travel
42 players would be assigned to the team which increased to overall number of non travel

1 players that the club could accept for its SFL teams and (2) the rules did not limit the number
2 of former travel players that could be assigned to an SFL team.

3
4 In the past, the SFL has accepted similar teams without incident. A review of the team’s
5 record showed that it did not dominate the teams it was playing. For the five games it
6 actually ended up playing, it had a record of one win and four losses. The one win was by six
7 goals and the losses had goal differentials ranging from one to four goals with most games
8 having a one goal differential. The team was also assessed a forfeit, like the team they
9 played, for playing a game in a thunderstorm when the game officials concluded that unsafe
10 playing conditions existed. After this event, the club removed dropped them from the Special
11 Bonus Season Games.

12
13 **SFL Commissioners’ Recommendation** – The SFL Commissioners recommend that this
14 proposed change not be adopted for reasons that include the following.

- 15
16 • It is unclear what should be considered an acceptable number of former travel players to
17 set as a limit. The former travel players assigned to the team in question consisted of
18 about 50 to 60 percent of the players assigned to the team. The remaining players were
19 recreational players and had not played travel in the previous season. However, the
20 team’s record did not indicate that an unfair advantage was obtained by having this many
21 travel players.
- 22
23 • How should “former travel players” be defined? Is a “former travel player” only those
24 individuals who played travel in the previous season or should it go back for more than
25 one season? If more than one season, then how many seasons should be included?
- 26
27 • How can the SFL measure compliance with any given rule? The number of forms
28 received for former travel players, excluding this team, numbered less than five for all
29 other teams. We also know that a club did not submit a form for at least one individual
30 that played travel in the previous season and played on a SFL team. This was not an issue
31 since we also know the player was not playing on a travel team.

32 33 **Waiving the Requirement for Game Officials**

34 35 **Current Wording**

36 37 Section V.C.

- 38
39 1. It is recognized that, in most cases, the coach of the home team has very little, if any,
40 control over whether officials will be present for a game. Therefore, should a situation
41 arise in which at least one USSF certified official is not present by game time plus 15
42 minutes, the visiting team is encouraged to select one of the following options rather than
43 accepting the forfeit and leaving the field of play.

1 a. **Option 1** – Reschedule the game for a later date. (In this situation, the home team
2 may want to consider offering to play at the visiting team's home field.)
3

4 b. **Option 2** – Except for the Under 16 and Under 19 age groups, play the game using
5 team officials agreeable to both coaches. Should this option be adopted, the game
6 results are binding and neither team may request a forfeit.
7

8 (1) If the two coaches believe that a safe and effective match can be played, then they
9 should play as long as the safety and the rules of the sport are not sacrificed. If
10 either coach believes that the match cannot be safely and effectively played, then
11 the coaches should consider a rematch. However, the visiting coach does have the
12 right to accept a forfeit.
13

14 (a) If a forfeit is accepted because either coach does not believe that a safe and
15 effective game can be played, then the teams should leave the field. In other
16 words, the teams should not use the game as a scrimmage. If the teams do decide
17 the scrimmage, then both teams are assessed a forfeit.
18

19 (2) If a properly qualified center official is not present for an Under 16 or Under 19 game
20 then the home team forfeits and both teams should leave the field, i.e., the game
21 should not used as a scrimmage. In addition, should the teams not leave the field,
22 e.g., use the game as scrimmage, both teams will be assessed a forfeit.
23

24 **Issue/Proposal**

25

26 Obtaining game officials for games is a problem and getting agreement on rescheduling
27 games and officials as required for Under 16 and 19 games is also a problem. A better
28 approach is go back to the prior rule which states that as long as both coaches agree, then a
29 game can be played without independent game officials.
30

31 **SFL Commissioner's Recommendation**

32

33 The SFL recognizes that getting at least one independent game official for games is becoming
34 more of a problem. The SFL Commissioners are recommending that the requirement to have
35 an independent game official present for Under 16 and 19 games be removed and, if both
36 coaches agree, then the game can be played without any officials.
37

38 Section V.C.

- 39 1. It is recognized that, in most cases, the coach of the home team has very little, if any,
40 control over whether officials will be present for a game. Therefore, should a situation
41 arise in which at least one USSF certified official is not present by game time plus 15
42 minutes, the visiting team is encouraged to select one of the following options rather than
43 accepting the forfeit and leaving the field of play.

- 1 a. **Option 1** – Reschedule the game for a later date. (In this situation, the home team
2 may want to consider offering to play at the visiting team's home field.)
3
- 4 b. **Option 2** – Play the game using team officials agreeable to both coaches. Should this
5 option be adopted, the game results are binding and neither team may request a
6 forfeit.
7
- 8 (1) If the two coaches believe that a safe and effective match can be played, then they
9 should play as long as the safety and the rules of the sport are not sacrificed. If
10 either coach believes that the match cannot be safely and effectively played, then
11 the coaches should consider a rematch. However, the visiting coach does have the
12 right to accept a forfeit.
13
- 14 (a) If a forfeit is accepted because either coach does not believe that a safe and
15 effective game can be played, then the teams should leave the field. In other
16 words, the teams should not use the game as a scrimmage. If the teams do decide
17 the scrimmage, then both teams are assessed a forfeit.
18

19 **Game Termination**

20 **Current Wording**

21 Section X.A. Mercy Rule

- 22
- 23
- 24
- 25 1. When the goal differential between two teams has reached four(4), the winning team
26 is obligated to remove a player from the field.
27
- 28 a. For every goal that the losing team scores, the winning team may add one player.
29
- 30 b. At any point when the goal differential reaches four (4) or more, the losing coach
31 may terminate the game without penalty. The game is terminated when the coach
32 or team captain informs the referee. The score reports should include that the
33 game was terminated early because of the mercy rule.
34

35 **Issue/Proposal**

36

37 The objective of the game should be to allow the players to play regardless of the score in
38 order to maximize the playing time. The rule for mandatory termination should be modified
39 to allow the game to continue when both coaches agree and no forfeits be assessed for
40 excessive game scores in such cases. Furthermore, forfeits should also be assessed when the
41 game official does not stop the game, i.e., the winning coach should no longer be responsible
42 for game termination.
43

1 **Discussion**

2
3 The SFL has received a number of complaints about this rule including complaints on the
4 inability of officials to understand and enforce the rule. It has been noted that the current
5 rules already allow a losing coach to terminate a game without penalty if that coach no longer
6 desires to play the game.

7
8 **SFL Commissioners' Recommendation**

9
10 Based on the experiences of the last few seasons the complaints about the complexity of the
11 current rules and teams being assessed forfeits for not complying with those rules is valid.
12 The SFL Commissioners are recommending that the rules be simplified by allowing the
13 losing coach to make a decision on when the game should be terminated because (1) the
14 opposing team does not reduce players when the goal differential exceeds three goals or (2)
15 the goal differential is excessive.

16
17 Section X.A. Mercy Rule

- 18
19 1. When the goal differential between two teams has reached four(4), the winning team
20 is obligated to remove a player from the field. This continues for each additional goal
21 scored until the minimum number of players needed to play the game is reached, e.g.,
22 seven (7) players for games playing the 11 v 11 format.
23
24 a. For every goal that the losing team scores, the winning team may add one player.
25
26 b. No forfeit may be awarded should a team not follow this rule. As noted below,
27 the losing coach may terminate the game without penalty when the game score
28 reaches four (4) more goals for any reason.
29
30 2. At any point when the goal differential reaches four (4) or more, the losing coach may
31 terminate the game without penalty. The game is terminated when the coach or team
32 captain informs the referee. The score reports should include that the game was
33 terminated early because of the mercy rule.
34

1 **Assessing Team Demerits When Clubs**
2 **Do Not Notify the SFL of the Actions**
3 **Taken Against Suspended Individuals**
4 **that Are Not Coaches or Players**

5
6 **Current Wording**

7
8 Section XII. discusses the Individual and Team Demerits assigned to individuals for the
9 various disciplinary offenses. This section also prescribes the penalties when any individual
10 fails to serve their suspension.

11
12 **Issue/Proposal**

13
14 While the SFL has a mechanism to determine whether a player or coach is serving a game
15 suspension, it does not have an mechanism to determine whether another individual
16 (commonly referred to as “other individual”), e.g., parent, spectator, assistant coach, etc., is
17 serving the suspension or whether the club has done anything about the behavior that caused
18 the original disciplinary infraction. Specifically, in the case of player and coach infractions,
19 the SFL sends out a notice to the opposing team about player and coach suspensions.
20 However, it only sends a notice to club and coach of the team associated with the “other
21 individuals” asking them to ensure that individual(s) do not attend the specified number of
22 games. In many cases the SFL is basically telling the club “do something about this” because
23 the SFL, and at least in some cases the team, has no idea who the individual that commits the
24 infraction is and the SFL never hears anything again. The SFL should require a response from
25 the club on each of the actions it plans on taking when “other individuals” commit
26 disciplinary offenses. Should the club not provide the desired information within a specified
27 period of time or cases where the promised actions were not properly implemented, then the
28 team should be assessed additional Team Demerits. While these Team Demerits should not
29 result in a team being suspended for regular season games, should they cause a team to
30 exceed the number of Team Demerits outlined in Section XII. of the rules, assigning these
31 Team Demerits would let the team and club know that they need to deal with “other
32 individuals” and that have bad behavior is a serious matter.

33
34 **Discussion**

35
36 This is a valid observation. Each season we have several instances where the coach and club
37 state that they are unable to identify the individual who was asked to leave the field by an
38 official and in almost all cases, the SFL did not receive a response its request to provide an
39 individual’s name. Furthermore, in only a very few cases did the SFL ever get notified of any
40 actions the club planned to take relating to the individual. However, it is unclear (1) how to
41 define what is considered an acceptable club response to the SFL that could be monitored and
42 (2) whether adopting the practice of assessing additional Team Demerits when club does not
43 follow a specified guideline would have any impact. Specifically, the impact of assessing

1 Team Demerits that do not impact a team’s ability to participate in the SFL have no impact.
2 Furthermore, another complicating factor is that in many cases, the SFL does not even
3 receive a report from the game official on the behavior causes the ejection. For example, in
4 the Spring 2022 season, the SFL did not receive referee reports for almost 40 percent of the
5 reported ejections.

6
7 **SFL Commissioner’s Recommendation**

8
9 The SFL Commissioners are recommending the adoption of this proposal. The following is
10 the proposed addition to section XII.B.1.b.(2)

11
12 **Section XII.E.**

- 13
14 1. The SFL currently has processes to notify the opposing team when a coach or player
15 receives a suspension warranting a one of more game suspension. However, the
16 notification of other individuals that receive these suspension only goes to the club. In
17 order to provide reasonable assurance that the club has (1) identified the offending
18 individual(s) and (2) taken the appropriate actions to ensure that the individual(s) are
19 suspended for the required number of games, the SFL Club Representative must report to
20 SFL by 6 PM on the Monday following each game the suspension applies to confirmation
21 that the individual(s) did not attend the game in violation of the suspension.
22
23 a. Should the club be unable to identify the individual(s) then two (2) additional Team
24 Demerits will be assessed to the team.
25
26 b. Should a club fail to provide the required report by 6 PM on the Monday following a
27 game, one (1) additional Team Demerit will be assessed to the team for each game
28 where a reporting requirement exists.
29

30 **CLUB AND COACH GUIDE**

31
32 **Eliminating the Special Bonus Season Games**

33
34 **Current Wording**

35
36 Section XII. of the Club and Coach Guide discusses the process used to schedule the Special
37 Bonus Season Games when it is decided to include these as part of the SFL program.

38
39 **Issue/Proposal**

40
41 During the Spring 2022 season, the SFL held the first Special Bonus Season Games to
42 replace the Wayne Gilbert Memorial Tournament. This decision was made because of the
43 resource limitations experienced during the Fall 2021 season to support the Wayne Gilbert

1 Memorial Tournament. Based the experiences during the Spring 2022 season, this was a
2 sound decision since the resource commitments available to support the Special Bonus
3 Season Games clearly showed that the clubs could not have supported the previous
4 tournament. However, resources were still an issue and a number of teams failed to
5 participate after the schedules were issued which caused teams desiring to play these games
6 to lose a game. Specifically, about 12 percent of the teams were not even scheduled because
7 the clubs dropped the teams from the scheduling process. More importantly, another 34
8 teams (about 8 percent) of the teams that were scheduled decided not play their games which
9 caused their opponents to lose a game even though these teams desired to play a game.

10 **Discussion**

11
12
13 Based on the issues experienced during the Spring 2022 season it is recommended that the
14 SFL adopt a regular season scheduling policy that only schedules eight regular season games
15 at the beginning of the season. Should an additional weekend be available for regular season
16 games, i.e., the weekend that historically was used for the Wayne Gilbert Memorial
17 Tournament or Special Bonus Season Games, that this weekend will be reserved for clubs to
18 use for rescheduling games that may be cancelled for weather related or other reasons.

19
20 **SFL Commissioners' Recommendation** – The SFL Commissioners recommend that this
21 proposed change be adopted for the Fall 2022 season following reasons.

- 22
23 • The resources available to support the Special Bonus Season Games were barely adequate
24 to support the number of games required. Specifically several clubs with a significant
25 number of teams were unable to provide any resources to support these games while
26 others did not have enough resources to support their teams. The only reason that teams
27 were not dropped because of these limitations was because of the large number of teams
28 dropping out prior to the scheduling process. Many of these initial dropped teams
29 appeared to be caused by end of school year events. Accordingly, if the same resource
30 limitations occur in the Fall 2022 season but a large number of teams do not drop out
31 before the scheduling process begins, teams will have to be dropped which will cause a
32 number of complaints.
- 33
34 • A key objective of the Special Bonus Season Games is to have teams of comparable
35 abilities play each other. This requires the SFL to have timely score information. During
36 the Fall 2021 season we did not receive the expected game scores in a timely manner for
37 about 2.6 percent of the games that should have game reports. During the Spring 2022
38 season this increased to 5.4 percent of the games where scores were expected. In
39 developing the initial Special Bonus Season Games several clubs were notified that teams
40 from their club would be dropped because of score reporting issues and the SFL was
41 requested to extend to score reporting deadline by two days from Monday at 6 PM to
42 Wednesday at 6 PM so that the affected teams would have an opportunity to correct score
43 reporting issues that had existed for weeks.

- The willingness of some coaches to support the Special Bonus Season Games adversely impacts those teams who desire to play these games. It was clear that some of the teams that dropped out after the schedules were published was based on factors that included (1) not wanting to travel to the assigned game location, i.e., they wanted to play at home or close to home and (2) failure to discuss these games with their team to make sure they had enough players, e.g., graduation events.

The decision not support these games can be revisited each season. Accordingly, if the SFL Commissioners’ recommendation is adopted by the clubs, Section XII. of the Club and Coach Guide will remain in case it is desired to reinstate these games at a later time.

COVID Guide

Issue/Proposal

During the Spring 2022 season several clubs asked the SFL to issue “clarifying” guidance to COVID Guide to address more updated information and conditions. This guidance was issued and provided a framework that the clubs could use to address any confusion with the SFL’s COVID Guide and other COVID guidance. The SFL should eliminate the current COVID Guide and provide general guidelines in its Club and Coach Guide.

Discussion

In considering the rules and process changes for the Spring 2021 season, the SFL and clubs identified a number of unique rules, procedures, and processes (commonly referred to as rules) that appeared warranted because of the COVID conditions and guidelines applicable at that time. A decision was made that all changes would be included as a separate document rather than make the temporary changes in the various documents. The rules in this document would supercede the rules contained in other SFL documents unless otherwise stated. Since that time, a number of changes to the conditions and guidelines developed by national, state, and local organizations have occurred and continue to evolve. In addition the member clubs have also developed varying protocols. A set of general operating guidelines to cover the COVID situations involving the SFL games, much like the guidance issued during the Spring 2022 season, appears more relevant than the current COVID Guide.

The basic premise of the COVID Guide still applies – “The SFL does not have the resources needed to ensure compliance with applicable COVID guidelines without the clubs and teams being part of the solution.” Experience gained since the Spring 2021 season has shown that relying on the clubs to manage the applicable COVID guidelines appears to have worked well. For example, several clubs have taken the approach of (1) notifying the opposing team and the opposing team’s SFL Club Representative of their COVID situation and (2) asking the other team if they would still like to play the game or whether they would prefer to reschedule the game.

1 This approach embraces a fundamental concept of letting (1) the two affected clubs make the
2 decision on whether playing the game complies with a given club’s COVID guidelines and
3 (2) whether both teams believe that the game should be played. Accordingly, the SFL
4 Commissioners believes the approach where (1) the SFL is notified of a potential COVID
5 situation and (2) the applicable SFL Club Representatives and coaches are involved in the
6 ultimate decisions on how the situation is addressed is the best approach to ensure that a safe
7 environment is maintained by all and that the actions taken are compliant with the affected
8 clubs’ COVID protocols.
9

10 **SFL Commissioners’ Recommendation** – The SFL Commissioners recommend that this
11 proposal be adopted. The current COVID Guide will be dropped and the following proposed
12 addition will be added to Club and Coach Guide – Section VI. Game Responsibilities.
13

14 B. COVID Guidelines and Requirements – The SFL does not have the resources needed to
15 ensure compliance with applicable COVID guidelines without the clubs and teams being
16 part of the solution. Experience gained since the Spring 2021 season has shown that
17 relying on the clubs to manage the applicable COVID guidelines has worked well.
18

19 1. Club Requirements – Each club must provide the SFL a web link to its COVID
20 related protocols for its home games prior to the season start. These web links will be
21 published on the SFL website on the Club COVID Rules and Protocols page which
22 can be found on the SFL Documents page or directly at
23 <https://www.sflsoccer.org/club-covid-rules/>.
24

25 2. The basic approach that should be used when a team identifies a player or team
26 official that has tested positive for COVID includes (1) notifying the SFL, opposing
27 team and the opposing team’s SFL Club Representative of their COVID situation and
28 (2) asking the other team if they would still like to play the game or whether they
29 would prefer to reschedule the game. This approach embraces a fundamental concept
30 of letting (1) the two affected clubs make the decision on whether playing the game
31 complies with a given club’s COVID guidelines and (2) whether both teams believe
32 that the game should be played. Accordingly, the applicable SFL Club
33 Representatives and coaches are involved in the ultimate decisions on how the
34 situation is addressed and the best approach to ensure that a safe environment is
35 maintained by all and that the actions taken are compliant with the affected clubs’
36 COVID protocols and individual team concerns.
37

38 a. When a decision is made by either of the four parties that a game should not be
39 played, then the SFL is notified that the game status should be shown as
40 unscheduled. Neither team will be assessed a forfeit associated with this change.
41
42