

Suburban Friendship League
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Process and Procedure Observations

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

The National Capital Soccer League (NCSL) confirmed in November 2023 that NCSL would be subsuming the SFL's recreational soccer program starting with the Spring 2024 season. The SFL believes that this can be a positive step forward for recreational soccer and be used as an opportunity to address many issues that have faced the SFL in recent years regarding such items as, discipline, field availability, referee availability, system improvements, etc. It also provides an opportunity to take a "clean sheet" review of the SFL's processes and procedures to determine whether the current requirements (1) are still "value added" and (2) may need modifications to better address the current operational environment. Expecting NCSL to adopt the requirements embedded in the SFL's processes and procedures are unrealistic and significantly limits the benefits that can accrue from NCSL subsuming the SFL's mission. Accordingly, it is expected and reasonable that the NCSL will use different systems and detailed processes to accomplish the mission of supporting recreational soccer.

Managing how an organization meets its operational needs and expectations is a constant theme of successful organizations. Over the past 30 plus years, the SFL has made numerous changes to its operations to embrace the desires of its member clubs and improve the efficiency of its operations. Fundamental to making these changes was obtaining an understanding on "what" is expected from the change since that guides the "how" a given system or systems will achieve a given result. An evaluation of the requirements generated from this process provides an understanding whether a given approach will provide reasonable assurance that the mission expectations from a given change can be accomplished.

The SFL has reviewed its operations over the past few seasons and has identified several mission requirements embedded in the SFL's process and procedures that the clubs may want to focus on when deciding how the recreational program should operate in the future. These include the following.

- Score reporting
- Standings
- Team placement into divisions
- Game rescheduling
- Managing disciplinary infractions and complaints
- Team Rosters

These issues were selected since (1) they have data available in many cases that can be used to help quantify the issue and (2) the interrelationships between the various mission areas may not be readily apparent. Accordingly, any changes to the underlying requirements need to be considered from an overall system perspective rather than a given functional area. Examples of these interrelationships include the following.

- Score reporting issues may result in disciplinary actions not be taken in a timely manner and web site results that do not reflect “actual game field performance”. When the web site does not reflect a team’s “actual game field performance”, a separate process is required when this information is needed, e.g., recommending division placement for teams, and additional administrative efforts are required to respond to questions on about why a team is ranked a given way.
- Game rescheduling issues result in web site results that do not reflect “actual game field performance” which requires a separate process when this information is needed, e.g., recommending division placement for teams. Additional administrative efforts are also required to respond to questions relating to the game rescheduling process, e.g., when is a game going to be rescheduled, why was a game rescheduled and my team not notified, why is my team assessed a penalty when the game was rescheduled, etc.

In performing its review for this paper, the SFL did not focus on “stand alone” requirements that may be of interest to the clubs since those are expected to be covered in the discussions between the clubs and NCSL. Examples of such items include deadlines for administrative activities such as registering teams, specific penalties associated with a given disciplinary infraction, referee scheduling, etc. The SFL would envision that these “stand alone” items would be covered in a transition plan so that the clubs would understand the concepts that will apply to these matters. The SFL has encouraged NCSL to develop a transition plan that would help the clubs understand what SFL requirements will be retained and which ones will be eliminated or changed.

INTRODUCTION

The SFL has always been a “bottom up” organization where the member clubs have been the source of the processes and procedures used. The SFL’s processes and procedures have evolved over its 30 plus years of existence based on what the clubs desired at a given point in time. However, while an attempt was made to ensure that a given change was internally consistent with other processes and procedures, the operational impacts of a given decision may have resulted in unintended consequences. The elimination of Wayne Gilbert Memorial Tournament and the Special Bonus Season Games are a good examples of this. These events provided an incentive to comply with the requirements to report game scores, play scheduled games, report discipline issues, and reschedule games that may have been cancelled due to weather or other reasons. However, since these special games were eliminated, compliance with the requirements for reporting scores, playing games, and rescheduling games has decreased significantly. Failures to comply with these requirements have operational impacts in other mission areas such as capturing data on disciplinary infractions that require game suspensions and recommending the division placement for teams in the following season.

The SFL has encouraged NCSL to develop a transition plan to help the clubs to understand what mission requirements will be retained, modified, or added. Such a document should provide the functional needs, commonly referred to as the “what” is going to be done rather than the detailed specifics. The latter are commonly referred as the “how” the functional need or capability is going to be addressed. To illustrate, the following is a conceptual example that may contained in a transition plan to describe the functional capability associated with rescheduling games to accommodate a schedule conflict that may arise by one team.

Rescheduling Games Due to Team Requests – Once games are scheduled, teams may request changes. The basic process is (1) the team contact requests a change and provides the desired change, e.g., game time needs to be moved to late afternoon, game date needs to be changed because of team availability, etc., (2) the opposing team and home team club are notified of the rescheduling request and decide whether to comply with the request and, if agreeable, provide the specific change that they are willing to support, e.g., game can be played at 4:00 PM rather than the currently scheduled 8:30 AM start time, and (3) the requesting team contact approves the change and the game schedule is changed. If the change is not agreeable to the opposing team and home team club, then a change is not made and the team requesting the change is notified that the change could not be accommodated and that the team is expected to play the game as scheduled.

Defining the functional needs allows all parties to understand the expectations associated with a given mission activity and whether those expectations are (1) internally consistent and (2) will meet the mission needs.

REPORTING GAME SCORES

Since the SFL began its operations, like most sports leagues, game results have been captured and teams have been ranked. The basic approach has been for the teams to report their scores and any disciplinary issues warranting game suspensions to the SFL directly rather than depending on a third party, such as the club hosting the game, providing this information. The SFL’s processes and procedures include “incentives” for the teams to comply with this requirement. Many of these incentives are related to whether a team could participate in special games at the end of the season and how a team’s results are displayed on the web site. As shown in Table 1 below, prior to the elimination of the Wayne Gilbert Memorial Tournament after the Fall 2021 season¹ and the Special Bonus Season Games after the Spring 2022 season because the clubs could no longer support these special games², the compliance with the score reporting requirements decreased significantly.

¹ The SFL did not conduct operations during the Spring and Fall 2020 seasons due to COVID concerns.

² The rationale for eliminating the Wayne Gilbert Memorial Tournament and the Special Bonus Season Games can be found on the SFL website at www.sflsoccer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/02/spring-2022-proposed-rule-changes-1.pdf and www.sflsoccer.org/wp-content/uploads/2022/07/fall-2022-proposed-rule-changes-1.pdf.

Table 1: Compliance with Game Score Reporting Requirements

Season	Scores Not Reported	Scores Reported Late	Total Score Reporting Issues	Total Games With Scores Expected
Fall 2019	19 (0.8%)	100 (4.2%)	119 (4.9%)	2,410
Spring 2021	8 (0.8%)	36 (3.5%)	44 (4.2%)	1,037
Fall 2021	18 (0.9%)	152 (7.2%)	170 (8.1%)	2,111
Spring 2022	46 (2.6%)	204 (11.4%)	250 (14.0%)	1,787
Fall 2022	33 (1.8%)	204 (11.4%)	237 (13.2%)	1,794
Spring 2023	61 (3.2%)	240 (12.5%)	301 (15.6%)	1,926
Fall 2023	36 (1.9%)	196 (10.4%)	232 (12.3%)	1,890

Note: The statistics for the Fall 2019, Spring 2021, and Fall 2021 seasons include the tournament games while the statistics for the Spring 2022 season include the Special Bonus Season Games.

More telling is that more than 10 percent of the games in each season after the Wayne Gilbert Memorial Tournament was eliminated did not have scores reported by required reporting deadline.³ The apparent reason for finally reporting scores is that the rules require that scheduling forfeits be assigned to games expected to be played but where no score was reported. Specifically, when a game score or game cancellation is not properly reported each team is assessed a scheduling forfeit. Once a score is finally reported, each team is assessed a late score reporting penalty. However, these penalties still did not provide a sufficient incentive for at least one of the teams playing the game to report the game score in about 3.2 percent and 1.9 percent of the games for the Spring 2023 and Fall 2023 seasons respectively. This is well above the less than 1 percent rate when the special end of season games were held.

Scheduling Forfeits

The rules require both teams to report game scores and game cancellations by 6 PM on the Monday following the scheduled game unless a red card is issued. If a red card is issued, or someone is asked to leave the field, then the score and associated disciplinary infraction are required to be reported on the game day. When scores and game cancellations are not reported on time by at least one team, scheduling forfeits are assessed to both teams. The primary purpose of the forfeit requirement is to provide incentives to report game scores and game cancellations. For example, besides reducing a team's ranking on the web site, the forfeit (1) could eliminate a team from participating in the

³ Although the rules require both teams to report the game scores and discipline issues that may result in game suspensions, in practice, as long as at least one team reports the score, no penalties are assessed.

tournament and special end of season games and (2) prevent a game from being automatically be rescheduled as discussed elsewhere.

Late Score Reporting Penalties

Although the rules require most scores to be reported by 6 PM on the Monday following the game before assessing a late score reporting penalty, in practice, these penalties were not assessed until about 24 hours after the Monday deadline. This informal practice was adopted so that a team could check to make sure that their report had been processed and let the SFL know if an error had been made, e.g., the team thought that they had reported a score but the Email had not been sent, the SFL did not process a score report, etc. The penalty for reporting a score late is one game point and the loss of any bonus points. For example, if the score for a game reported late was 4 – 0, then the winning team would receive three game points rather than the normal four game points and no bonus points while the losing team would receive no game points. As discussed elsewhere, this practice only impacted the teams ranking on the web site, i.e., it did not affect a team’s “actual game field performance”. Accordingly, this penalty only impacted teams that cared about their standings as shown on the web site.

SEASON STANDINGS

The SFL computes a team’s standings two different ways depending on its needs. The standings on the web site reflect the team’s performance based on the game points earned as adjusted by any penalties called for in the rules, e.g., reporting scores late or being assessed a scheduling forfeit when a game cannot be rescheduled, etc. On the other hand, when the standings are needed to determine how teams should be ranked based on their “actual game field performance” adjustments are made to eliminate administrative penalties such as those associated with reporting scores late or scheduling forfeits. Attachment I provides examples of the impacts of the various penalties on the web site and “actual game field performance” on a team’s standings.

Standings Shown On the SFL Web Site

The SFL web site displays team rankings in the following order: game point percentage⁴, game points, bonus points⁵, and goals allowed. The rationale for this order includes the following.

⁴ The game point percentage is calculated as follows: game points earned divided by total games played times maximum number of points that can be earned for a game. For example, if a team plays 4 games, wins 2 games, ties 1 game, and loses the remaining game, its game point percentage would be calculated as follows: (11 game points earned (4 + 4 + 2 + 1) / 16 game points (4 games times 4 points per game)) = 68.8 percent. This assumes that the scores are properly reported.

⁵ Bonus points are limited to a goal differential of three. For example, if a game score is 5 – 0, the only three bonus points are awarded.

- **Game Point Percentage** – The game point percentage calculation is used to rank teams on a comparable basis based on the games actually considered played.⁶ Teams with identical records and have no score reporting penalties will have the same game point percentage, e.g., a team that wins all eight of its games will have the same game point percentage as a team that wins all seven of its games. On the other hand, assume that Team A played eight games and won seven games and lost one game while the Team B was only able to play seven games and won all its games. Using the game point percentage approach, Team B would be ranked higher than Team A even though Team B had more game points earned 29 game points while Team A earned 28 game points.
- **Game Points** – Game points are awarded for each game played as follows: 4 points for a win, 2 points for a tie, 1 point for a loss, and 0 points for a forfeit. As discussed elsewhere, game points may be reduced for reporting scores late. The rationale for using a “4, 2, 1, 0” system rather than a “3, 1, 0” system is that a team that actually plays its game and loses should get a benefit for actually playing a game rather than forfeiting the game which denies the other team an opportunity to play a game. Furthermore, teams that play more games than other teams, should be rewarded for playing these games and “taking a chance” that it may lose or tie the game. Teams with identical records and have no score reporting penalties will have the same number of game points. For example, when two teams play and win all eight games and have no game point penalties, both teams would have the same number game points (32). On the other hand, if Team A plays eight games while Team B plays seven games, then Team A would be ranked ahead of Team B because it had 32 game points while Team B only had 28 game points.
- **Bonus Points** – Bonus points are awarded based on the goal differential up to a maximum of three points per game. For example, a game score of 5 – 1 would result in three bonus points. As discussed elsewhere, bonus points are not awarded to teams that report their scores late. The rationale for limiting the number of bonus points to three, i.e., not using goal differential, is to discourage the practice of running up scores. For example, a team winning a game 3 – 0 gets the same number of bonus points as a team winning a game 8 – 0.
- **Goals Allowed** – This factor is used to reward teams for their defensive performance.

Actual Game Field Performance Standings

When a team’s “actual game field performance” is needed, then the web site may not reflect the proper placement of a team. For example, when determining whether a team should be placed in a given division or scheduled to play comparable teams for special games, how the team actually performed is needed. As shown in Attachment I, teams that had forfeits and administrative penalties for reporting scores late would be ranked lower than teams with comparable records that had none of these penalties

⁶ Examples of reasons some teams may play more games than other teams include teams dropping out after the schedules are prepared, (2) games being cancelled and unable to be rescheduled, and (3) some teams may play two games on a weekend and may have more games played at a given point in time than another team that was only scheduled to play one game that weekend.

on the web site. For example, Team A in Attachment I won four games (based on the actual game scores), tied two games, and lost one game (based on the actual game scores). Team A's "actual game field performance" game percentage point value is 75 percent. As shown in Attachment I, Team A had been assessed a forfeit for using an illegal player in a game it won, assessed a scheduling forfeit for not showing up for a game, and late score reporting penalties for two games. This reduced Team A's game point percentage to 46.9 percent on the web site while its "actual game field performance" remains at 75 percent. This game point percentage difference was caused by administrative penalties rather than the "actual game field performance." Accordingly, the SFL has a process to generate the standings, using the same ranking factors as used for the web site, that eliminates any administrative penalties assigned to a team that may affect its standings. The process of recommending the division placement of teams is a good example of how the "actual game field performance" calculation is used.

AGE GROUP DIVISIONS

The primary objective of placing teams into divisions is to have teams grouped together that have comparable abilities so that competitive games can be scheduled, i.e., very strong teams play against comparable teams rather than against very weak teams. Two key factors impact the ability to achieve this objective – understanding a team's competitive abilities and potential conflicts with game scheduling requirements. Each of these is discussed below.

Team Competitive Abilities

Over the years, the SFL has tried various methods to place teams in divisions so that teams with comparable abilities are scheduled against each other. For example, it has allowed the clubs to place teams in divisions, dictated the placement of teams in divisions based on the prior season's "actual game field performance", and recommend the division placement based on the previous season's "actual game field performance" and allowed the clubs to make any adjustments they considered necessary based on their knowledge of the team. The latter is the current process that has been adopted by the clubs. Specifically, the clubs have consistently maintained that they are in the best position to know the strength of their teams since they understand the players that are returning to a given team and that player changes can significantly affect the strength of a given team. While the goal is to have about 35 to 45 percent of the teams in division 1, as shown in Table 2 below, the current process has not resulted in desired division structure for many age groups. In addition, as shown in Table 3 below, an analysis of the score differentials shows the division structure has not necessarily resulted in more competitive games.

Table 2: Proposed and Actual Age Group Division Structure

Age Group	Fall 2022 Proposed	Fall 2022 Actual	Spring 2023 Proposed	Spring 2023 Actual	Fall 2023 Proposed	Fall 2023 Actual
Under 11 Boys	NA	NA	43.3%	30.0%	NA	NA
Under 12 Boys	43.6%	27.8%	41.7%	31.8%	45.0%	23.4%
Under 13 Boys	36.1%	100%	49.0%	45.8%	38.6%	100%
Under 14 Boys	40.8%	34.6%	40.4%	21.8%	47.5%	29.1%
Under 16 Boys	41.1%	31.0%	39.7%	34.4%	40.5%	15.4%
Under 19 Boys	45.1%	30.4%	34.8%	33.3%	45.1%	37.0%
Under 11 Girls	NA	NA	37.5%	100%	NA	NA
Under 12 Girls	38.5%	100%	42.3%	50.0%	56.0%	100%
Under 13 Girls	33.3%	100%	41.9%	51.7%	37.5%	100%
Under 14 Girls	43.3%	100%	36.1%	44.7%	55.2%	100%
Under 16 Girls	37.5%	34.9%	41.9%	39.5%	46.1%	100%
Under 19 Girls	36.0%	100%	37.0%	63.0%	50.0%	100%

Notes

- When the actual division 1 column shows 100 percent, the clubs did not identify enough division 1 teams to support two divisions. Accordingly, all teams were placed in division 1.
- In the Fall seasons, all Under 11 teams are placed in division 1 since inadequate information is available to understand how to rank teams based on the previous season’s “actual game field performance.” Accordingly, a comparison between the expected and actual division breakdown is not applicable (NA).

History has shown that clubs make division assignment errors when registering teams every season. Unfortunately, these errors may not be detected until after the game schedules are developed. The Spring 2023 season illustrates this. The primary reason that the Under 19 Girls’ division 1 teams outnumbered the division 2 teams by almost a 2:1 margin was that several clubs placed all their teams in division 1 since they thought that the age group was only going to have one division like it did in the Fall 2022 season.

Furthermore, as shown in Table 3 below, the division structure has not necessarily resulted in more competitive games based on an analysis of the game scores. The following illustrates the mixed results during the Fall 2023 season.

- The Under 12 Boys and the Under 19 Boys had two divisions and each division had a high percentage of games where the goal differential was three goals or less. The Under 12 Girls and Under 19 Girls only had one division and the games where the goal differential was three goals or less was about 10 percentage points less for the Under 12 Girls and about 20 percentage points less for the Under 19 Girls. Accordingly, it appears that the division assignments for the Under 12 Boys and Under 19 Boys produced more competitive games.
- The Under 14 Boys and Under 16 Boys had two divisions while the Under 14 Girls and Under 16 Girls only had one division. The percentage of games where the goal differential was three goals or less was about the same. In the case of the Under 14 Boys and Under 16 Boys, it does not appear that the division assignments produced more competitive games.

The reasons for these differences are unknown.

Table 3: Game Score Differentials By Age Group and Division – Fall 2023

Age Group	Division	Total Games Played	Score Difference 0 to 3	Score Difference 4 to 6	Score Difference Greater Than 6
Under 11 Boys	1	172	112 (65.1%)	49 (28.5%)	11 (6.4%)
Under 11 Girls	1	103	64 (62.1%)	29 (28.2%)	10 (9.7%)
Under 12 Boys	1	41	38 (92.7%)	2 (4.9%)	1 (2.4%)
Under 12 Boys	2	140	100 (71.4%)	37 (26.4%)	3 (2.1%)
Under 12 Girls	1	93	57 (61.3%)	32 (34.4%)	4 (4.3%)
Under 13 Boys	1	250	155 (62.0%)	82 (32.8%)	13 (5.2%)
Under 13 Girls	1	100	60 (60.0%)	33 (33.0%)	7 (7.0%)
Under 14 Boys	1	63	34 (54.0%)	18 (28.6%)	11 (17.5%)
Under 14 Boys	2	152	88 (57.9%)	51 (33.6%)	13 (8.6%)
Under 14 Girls	1	113	70 (61.9%)	33 (29.2%)	10 (8.8%)
Under 16 Boys	1	40	23 (57.5%)	14 (35.0%)	3 (7.5%)
Under 16 Boys	2	214	124 (57.9%)	75 (35.0%)	15 (7.0%)
Under 16 Girls	1	127	80 (63.0%)	38 (29.9%)	9 (7.1%)
Under 19 Boys	1	67	52 (77.6%)	10 (14.9%)	5 (7.5%)
Under 19 Boys	2	113	84 (74.3%)	21 (18.6%)	8 (7.1%)
Under 19 Girls	1	102	57 (55.9%)	30 (29.4%)	15 (14.7%)
Total		1,890	1,198 (63.4%)	554 (29.3%)	138 (7.3%)

During the Spring 2023 season almost all age groups had two divisions. Attachment II shows the game score differentials by age group and division for the Spring 2023 season.

Potential Conflicts With Game Scheduling Objectives

The SFL has long employed a regular season scheduling system that is designed to balance several competing priorities that include (1) reducing travel time to games involving teams from different clubs,

(2) eliminating teams from playing each other more than once during the regular season, (3) ensuring that the maximum number of games possible are played on the club's preferred game day (normally Saturday), and (4) having teams of comparable abilities play each other. In theory, smaller divisions should improve achieving the objective of having teams of comparable abilities play each other. However, as noted in a 2021 regional scheduling study⁷, divisions increase the travel time for games between clubs. An analysis of the games scheduled for the Fall 2023 season was performed to determine if the age groups with two divisions had a significant difference in games requiring travel distances of over 20 miles. This analysis provided the following key insights on the impact of divisions on travel distances.

- In the age groups with two divisions, the division with the fewer number of teams, i.e., the division 1 teams, had a far higher percentage of their games involving travel distances greater than 20 miles.
- The age groups with only one division generally had games involving travel distances much lower than the division 1 teams.

Table 4 below shows the results of an analysis of the games scheduled for the Fall 2023 season to determine if the age groups with two divisions had a significant difference in games requiring travel distances of over 20 miles.

⁷ Regional Concept for Regular Season Scheduling, June 29, 2021.
(www.sflsoccer.org/wp-content/uploads/2021/06/regional-concept-20210629-1.pdf)

Table 4: Games Requiring Travel of Over 20 Miles

Age Group	Division	Teams	Games Over 20 Miles	Total Games	Percent
Under 11 Boys	1	45	36	180	20.0%
Under 11 Girls	1	28	33	112	29.5%
Under 12 Boys	1	11	12	44	27.3%
Under 12 Boys	2	36	7	144	4.9%
Under 12 Girls	1	25	15	100	15.0%
Under 13 Boys	1	63	16	252	6.3%
Under 13 Girls	1	26	33	104	31.7%
Under 14 Boys	1	16	17	64	26.6%
Under 14 Boys	2	39	18	156	11.5%
Under 14 Girls	1	29	26	116	22.4%
Under 16 Boys	1	10	20	40	50.0%
Under 16 Boys	2	55	17	220	7.7%
Under 16 Girls	1	33	41	132	31.1%
Under 19 Boys	1	17	37	68	54.4%
Under 19 Boys	2	29	30	116	25.9%
Under 19 Girls	1	28	25	112	22.3%
Total		490	383	1,960	19.5%

The results of this analysis showing that more than one division increases travel distances is consistent with the results of the Spring 2021 regional scheduling study. Accordingly, assuming a viable division strategy based on competitive abilities can be developed and implemented, the clubs will need to determine (1) how many divisions should be established and (2) whether the increases in travel distances are acceptable with a given division structure.

GAME RESCHEDULING

The requirements for game rescheduling depends on whether the teams are from the same club or different clubs. Any game rescheduling needs that involve games where both teams are from the same club are handled by that club, i.e., the SFL does not have any specific requirements or restrictions and it is up to the club to ensure that (1) any games cancelled, regardless of reason, are rescheduled, (2) the club can support the rescheduled game, i.e., field and officials are expected to be available, and (3) the teams are properly notified. The need to reschedule games that involve teams from different clubs once the game schedules have been published can be broken into two broad categories – (1) game changes for the convenience of the team or club and (2) game changes required for reasons beyond the control of the club. Over its history, basic approach for changes needed for the game schedule changes needed for the convenience of a club or team have been basically the same – the change must be acceptable to the home team’s club and the visiting team unless the change involves only a field change, i.e., the game time does not change and/or minor time changes. In these cases the only requirement is that the club must ensure that the teams are properly notified of the change.

Over its history, the SFL has used various approaches for handling games that need to be rescheduled because of changes required for reasons beyond the control of the club, e.g., weather cancellations, field permitting authority changes, etc. The approaches include the following.

- **Letting the teams and home team club “work it out”** – This is consistent with the approach currently used when the game involves teams from the same club. It is up to the home team’s club to arrange all aspects of the game rescheduling.
- **Requiring clubs to provide field slots than can support the SFL automatically rescheduling games** – Under this approach, the club provides Sunday game slots that the SFL can use to reschedule games involving teams from different clubs that were cancelled for reasons beyond the control of the club. The SFL then reschedules the cancelled games into those available slots.
- **Allowing the clubs to control the game rescheduling process** – This is the approach currently used for rescheduling games that involve teams from different clubs. The home team’s club can (1) if desired, work with the visiting team to arrive at a game date and time that is acceptable to the home team’s club and visiting team (commonly referred to as voluntary game rescheduling) and (2) assign a game date and time, within certain parameters, that applies to all parties, e.g., the home team’s club must have the available field slot with reasonable expectations that officials can be provided, both teams are expected to be present for the game, etc. (commonly referred to as automatic game rescheduling). If the home team club cannot reschedule the game within the specified time frame using either of these approaches, normally the Wednesday after the game cancellation, then the home team is assessed a scheduling forfeit and the SFL makes no further attempt to reschedule the game. If the club finds out later that it cannot support the game then the home team is assessed a scheduling forfeit or rescheduled using a process where the visiting team agrees to the change. In addition, if either team cannot play on the specified date, then that team is assessed a scheduling forfeit and no further attempt is made by the SFL to reschedule the game.

The SFL has found it increasingly difficult to implement the automatic game rescheduling process since the clubs have been unable to provide the game fields and time slots necessary to reschedule known cancelled games. For example, during the Fall 2023 season a number of games were cancelled one weekend due to weather related reasons. Some clubs took a proactive approach and simply moved their home games to the last week of the season that was reserved by the club for league wide games cancellations. This greatly reduced the efforts needed to reschedule a large number of games. However, over half the clubs were unable to provide the necessary field and time slots to automatically reschedule 58 games that involved teams from different clubs affected by the weather cancellations on the Wednesday following these game cancellations. The reasons that the clubs could not identify fields and game slots for these games are unknown. Although many of these games were ultimately rescheduled and played, the efforts required by the clubs and the SFL to coordinate this effort using a “case by case” approach was cumbersome and time consuming for all parties.

MANAGING COMPLAINTS AND DISCIPLINE INFRACTIONS

The SFL is primarily a scheduling organization and the resolution of complaints, disciplinary actions, and protests are primarily the responsibility of the affected clubs. The role of the SFL is to help facilitate the resolution of complaints, disciplinary problems, and protests. Section XII. of the rules discusses the approach used for most of the discipline issues that have arisen. For all practicable purposes, the SFL focuses its disciplinary processes on the instances where an individual is asked to leave the field, i.e., red cards issued by game officials or cases where a game official asks a non player, such as a coach or spectator, to leave the field. Although the rules require clubs to notify the SFL when a red card is issued or an individual is asked to leave the field, this very rarely happens. In addition, although the rules require the coach of a team that receives a red card or has an individual asked to leave the field to report this on the day of the game, compliance with this requirement is spotty and not very reliable. The source of most reports of red cards or individuals asked to leave the field are the game reports submitted by the teams. These reports result in a request to the home team's club for a referee report. Complaints that are received are forwarded to the applicable club for review. The SFL does not track or monitor the actions taken by a club on these complaints in most cases.

As noted elsewhere a high percentage of games do not have game reports submitted by 6 PM on the Monday following the game by at least one team. Accordingly, it is unclear how many infractions that warrant the SFL's review and game suspension notification process are missed. Furthermore, even when the clubs hosting a game are asked for game reports from its officials, the SFL did not receive those reports in about 10 percent of the cases during the Fall 2023 season. This was a significant reduction from the Spring 2023 season in which game reports were not received for about 25 percent of games requested and about 24 percent of the Spring 2022 games.

TEAM ROSTERS

Player decisions relating to the team rosters can impact other mission areas in ways that may not be readily apparent. For example, when a team has a low number of assigned players, it may result in the not having enough players to play a game. This can affect the team standings and the opposing team not being able to play a game through no fault of its own. Team roster decisions that can impact other mission areas include the following.

- Using player roster information to validate team registration before scheduling decisions are made.
- Allowing teams to use players from another recreational team from the same club.
- Maximum players allowed on a given team roster.
- Actual age groups allowed to participate on a given team.

Each of these are discussed below.

Validating Team Registrations Before Scheduling Activities Begin

The SFL's experience has shown that the clubs have difficulties in understanding the number of recreational players that will be available to support the teams that need to be scheduled. For example, during the Fall 2023 season, between the initial team registration deadline of August 1 and the final deadline of August 10, the clubs added 57 teams and dropped 29 teams.⁸ The numbers for the Spring 2023 season were better with 37 teams being added after the March 1 initial registration deadline and nine teams dropped by the March 10 final deadline. However, the Fall 2022 season was similar to the Fall 2023 seasons with 84 teams being added and 24 teams being dropped between the initial team registration and the final registration deadlines. Clubs have constantly asked the SFL to extend the registration deadlines so that they have the opportunity to sign up more players and better understand the players that can be assigned to their teams. The advantages cited include possible increases in the number of teams participating in the league and ensuring that the registered teams have enough players. The SFL has been unable to arrive at a solution that would allow later team registrations because of the following constraints.

- The final team registration deadline allows about two weeks to generate the initial game schedules⁹ and send them out to the clubs to review. The review by the clubs is designed to (1) ensure that the time slots used by the SFL are consistent with the time slots that the club told the SFL were available before the schedules were developed and (2) allow the clubs to make any adjustments that may be needed for internal club purposes before the schedules are published, e.g., resolving conflicts with game schedules the club may generate for SFL coaches that also coach non SFL teams, field permit issues, etc. This process greatly eases the game rescheduling burden discussed elsewhere since the change does not required coordination with the teams. During the Fall 2023 season, the SFL generated 1,960 games and well over 450 game schedule changes were made by the clubs prior to the schedules being published.
- Once the game schedules are finalized by the clubs, they are published to the web site and the clubs begin taking the actions needed to support the games, e.g., assigning game officials to the games. This normally occurs about one weekend before the first games are actually scheduled to be played.

⁸ These numbers do not include the teams that one club dropped in late August 2023 right before the game schedules were ready to be released on the web site.

⁹ The game schedules developed by the SFL have mandatory and desired constraints. Mandatory constraints include (1) playing different teams during the regular season, (2) scheduling teams for an equal number of home and away games, e.g., the team is considered as the home team for four regular season games in an eight game season, and (3) teams are paired to share time slots in almost all cases. During the Spring 2023 and Fall 2023 seasons, all teams were paired to share time slots. The desired constraints include (1) reducing the travel distances for away games, (2) playing most games on Saturdays, and (3) reducing the conflicts for coaches with two or more SFL teams.

Because of issues associated with teams dropping out after the schedules were developed, the SFL adopted a process that required clubs to provide an initial listing of players that were available in each age group. This process helps validate that the clubs have enough players to support the registered teams. The actual assignment of players to a given team is not important for this submission. For example, assume a club has three Under 16 Boys teams registered and at the time of the player submission¹⁰ it has 42 players registered for the Under 16 Boys age group. This analysis would show that an average of 14 players per team were available and that the three teams appear viable. While the numbers may not be realistic for a given team, it may be reasonable for the club to assume that the additional players needed can be added by the time the games are actually played based on the club's prior experience. On the other hand, if this analysis showed that only 24 players were currently registered for the three teams used in this example, then the viability of supporting three Under 16 Boys teams is questionable since the club would probably need more than double the current player registrations by the time the games will be played for all three teams to be viable. Accordingly, the SFL would probably reduce the number of Under 16 Boys teams scheduled to two teams.

This process change was adopted to reduce the disruptions that occurred from teams dropping out after the schedules were generated or teams that could not play some of their scheduled games due to player availability issues. Specifically, when a team drops out after the schedules are generated or a team cannot play a game due to player availability, its opponents lose a game through no fault of their own and "gaps" may be created in a field schedule. These "gaps" can cause referee assigning issues. While in concept the games associated with teams that have dropped out could be rescheduled, in practice this is (1) difficult and time consuming and (2) may not address the "gaps" in the field schedule. For example, rescheduling the games require (1) identifying teams that had not played each other that could be paired together¹¹, (2) contacting the club expected to host the game to identify, in many cases, a Sunday time slot that can be used to support the game so that teams would not have to play two games on the same day, i.e., the existing time slot for the cancelled game cannot be used, and (3) contact both teams to determine if the proposed date is acceptable since a significant game schedule change is being made and may involve significant travel for the visiting team. Because of the manual efforts needed, rescheduling these games has been considered impracticable. For example, as noted elsewhere, (1) teams may not want to travel long distances to play games, (2) many teams do not want to play Sunday games, and (3) clubs already have difficulties in identifying Sunday time slots that can be used to support games that need to be rescheduled due to external factors such as weather cancellations.

¹⁰ The initial player information is due at the same time as the final team registration information, i.e., March 10 for the spring season and August 10 for the fall season.

¹¹ In many cases it is logical to assume that many of the affected teams are already scheduled to play against each other. For example, assume that Team A and Team B lose a game because Team D dropped out. Team A is probably already scheduled to play Team B so a game between these two games to replace the game they lost against Team D cannot be scheduled. In order to schedule a replacement game for Team A and Team B, a review would be made to identify the available teams that they were not scheduled to play. This may require the opposing teams to have an extra game, e.g., two teams may end up playing nine games while all the other teams in that age group and division would play eight games.

Allowing Teams to Share Players

In the past, the SFL allowed teams to share players between a club's SFL teams. This practice was adopted to address the issue of clubs having too many players for one team but not enough players for two viable teams, too many players for two teams but not enough players for three viable teams, etc. Eventually this practice was eliminated because of issues that included (1) confusion on game day on which players were allowed to play, (2) which teams were allowed to share players and which teams were not, and (3) the perception that an unfair competitive advantage was provided to teams that could share players when they played teams that could not share players. An example of the latter case is Team A's club only has one team in an age group while Team B's club has two teams in the age group. Although Team A's roster may have 18 players assigned, on the game day with Team B, only 12 players are available. Team B has similar player availability issues. However, because it can borrow players from the other team in the age group from its club, it can field 16 players which allows it to have more substitutions. In addition, Team A can pick the stronger players from its other team to improve its chances on winning the game.

Sharing players between teams also raised other issues. The ability of a team to share players had to be approved on a case by case basis which increased the administrative burden although this was not considered a major factor when eliminating the practice. Simply giving blanket approval to all teams to share players could have addressed the administrative burden issues. More important considerations included the following.

- A club may register more teams that can actually be supported under the assumption that if the additional players expected did not register, then they would simply combine teams to make viable teams. However, if the expected additional players did not register and sharing players were required for many games, the game schedules for the two teams may not allow the sharing of players which can cause problems. For example, Team A may be scheduled at home while Team B is scheduled to play away and the game times do not allow players to play in both games. This can cause one or both teams have problems fielding a viable team on the game day and one or both teams may forfeit which causes the opposing team to lose a game through no fault of its own.
- The difficulties in ensuring the practice did not result in an unfair advantage for the larger clubs. Specifically, large clubs are more likely to field at least two teams in a given age group. This would allow them to almost always have enough players for a viable team with adequate substitutes on game day while a club with only one team in an age group would not have any options to produce a team with a sufficient number of players.
- It was unclear how the standings generated from the "actual game field performance" could be adjusted to reflect the benefits of being able to share players. For example, assume that the players from a division 1 team are used on a division 2 team and those players make the difference so that the division 2 team wins more games. When the team division placement recommendations are made for the following season, these victories may result in the division 2 team being recommended to move up to division 1. However, the club would take a look at the

actual players assigned to the division 2 team and request that the team be left in division 2. Assuming this request was granted and that the sharing of players continued, the division 2 team may continue to have an unfair advantage over its division 2 opponents.

These issues are examples of where the desire to have more teams and viable teams can conflict with the desire to have teams play games and competitive teams play in the same division.

Maximum Players Allowed on a Team Roster

The SFL currently has the following limits on the number of players that can be assigned to the teams in a given age group – Under 11/12 teams (20 players), Under 13/14 teams (22) players, Under 16/19 teams (25 players). These limits were established after a long discussion with clubs on how to balance the requirement that all players in good standing on the team must play for about 50 percent of the game and the number of players actually needed to make viable teams due to external factors such as players not showing up for games due to competing demands. An analysis of the team sizes for the Fall 2023 season was performed and identified the following key data characteristics.

- The number of players assigned to teams in a given age group varied widely with an average team size well below the maximum allowed.
- Very few teams had the maximum number of players allowed on their roster (only 19 of the 490 teams).
- Some have suggested the maximum roster size be limited to 18 players to improve competitiveness and support more teams. However, most of the teams in the Under 13 and above age groups had a significant percentage of the teams with 19 players or more. This was especially true in the Under 16 and Under 19 age groups. It is unclear whether the cause of a large number of teams having 19 or more players resulted from (1) the clubs believing that roster sizes in excess of 18 players are needed for many of the age groups or (2) the roster sizes were increased because of late player registrations and the clubs desiring to let as many players play as possible. Based on the discussions when the roster size limits were originally established, it appears that the clubs believe that roster sizes in excess of 18 players are needed in the many of the older age groups.

Table 5 shows the results of the analysis by age group and division.

Table 5: Team Roster Sizes – Fall 2023

Age Group	Division	Total Teams	Minimum Team Size	Average Team Size	Teams With 19+ Players	Maximum Roster Size
Under 11 Boys	1	45	11	15.6	5 (11.1%)	20 (4 Teams)
Under 11 Girls	1	28	13	15	0 (0.0%)	20 (0 Teams)
Under 12 Boys	1	11	14	16	2 (18.2%)	20 (2 Teams)
Under 12 Boys	2	36	13	15.8	1 (2.8%)	20 (1 Teams)
Under 12 Girls	1	25	11	14.2	0 (0.0%)	20 (0 Teams)
Under 13 Boys	1	63	15	17.7	17 (27.0%)	22 (1 Teams)
Under 13 Girls	1	26	13	17.2	7 (26.9%)	22 (0 Teams)
Under 14 Boys	1	16	15	17.8	6 (37.5%)	22 (0 Teams)
Under 14 Boys	2	39	13	18	15 (38.5%)	22 (2 Teams)
Under 14 Girls	1	29	14	17.8	10 (34.5%)	22 (1 Teams)
Under 16 Boys	1	10	16	19.5	5 (50.0%)	25 (0 Teams)
Under 16 Boys	2	55	15	19.5	32 (58.2%)	25 (3 Teams)
Under 16 Girls	1	33	15	19.1	25 (75.8%)	25 (0 Teams)
Under 19 Boys	1	17	16	20.9	15 (88.2%)	25 (1 Teams)
Under 19 Boys	2	29	17	20.8	23 (79.3%)	25 (1 Teams)
Under 19 Girls	1	28	16	19.7	17 (60.7%)	25 (3 Teams)

The relationship between team competitiveness and roster size is unknown.

Actual Age Groups Allowed To Participate on a Team

One technique that clubs use to help ensure that teams have enough players is to allow players to play in an age group higher than the player’s actual age. This is commonly referred to as “playing up”. The SFL rules allow this when (1) the player’s club allows it and (2) the player is not playing up more than two years. For example, Under 9 players may play on Under 11 but not on Under 12 teams while Under 13 players may play on Under 14 teams but not on Under 16 teams. Each season requests are received to waive this limitation and let players play up more than two years. As specified in the rules, these requests are denied since no waivers are allowed. The reason for the denial is the health and safety concerns associated with players playing up three or more years regardless of the skill level.

Table 6 shows the number of players assigned to the teams in a given age group and the players assigned to those teams that are playing up one or two years.

Table 6: Actual Age Groups Playing on Teams – Fall 2023

Age Group	Total Players	Players Playing Up One Year	Players Playing Up Two Years
Under 11 Boys	702	39 (5.6%)	2 (.3%)
Under 11 Girls	419	22 (5.3%)	1 (.2%)
Under 12 Boys	745	57 (7.7%)	5 (.7%)
Under 12 Girls	355	24 (6.8%)	1 (.3%)
Under 13 Boys	1,117	126 (11.3%)	22 (2.0%)
Under 13 Girls	446	46 (10.3%)	1 (.2%)
Under 14 Boys	988	110 (11.1%)	16 (1.6%)
Under 14 Girls	516	74 (14.3%)	3 (.6%)
Under 16 Boys	1,266	0 (.0%)	70 (5.5%)
Under 16 Girls	631	0 (.0%)	43 (6.8%)
Under 19 Boys	959	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)
Under 19 Girls	551	0 (.0%)	0 (.0%)
Total	8,695	498 (5.7%)	164 (1.9%)

Whether allowing players to play up affects a team's competitiveness is unknown. As shown in Table 6, the actual number of players playing up is about 7.6 percent with most of those only playing up one year.

**Examples of the Impacts Associated with
Various Penalties When Computing Web Site
And Actual Game Field Performance Standings**

As discussed elsewhere the penalties assessed for failing to comply with the various SFL rules can result in differences between the standings shown on the web site and those based on the team's "actual game field performance." Examples of the penalties that can cause these differences include the following.

- **Failing to report scores/game cancellations** – Teams are assessed a scheduling forfeit. The game is considered played on the web site and neither team receives any game points although the game is included in the web site's game point percentage computation. It should be noted that although clubs are also required to report game cancellations, club compliance with this requirement is spotty.
- **Reporting game scores late** – Teams are assessed a one game point penalty, e.g., the winning team only receives three game points for the game when the team's game point percentage is computed rather than the normal four points when the score is reported on time.
- **Forfeits assessed for failing to reschedule games** – When a game between teams from different clubs is cancelled and not rescheduled, then a team is normally assessed a scheduling forfeit. For example, assume that a game between teams from different clubs is cancelled because of the weather. The home team's club is required to either obtain the visiting team's approval to reschedule the game or provide a time slot that can be used to automatically reschedule the game. When these games cannot be rescheduled, then a team is assessed a scheduling forfeit, e.g., the home team is assessed the scheduling forfeit when the home team's club cannot provide a time slot to support the automatic game rescheduling process, the visiting team is assessed a scheduling forfeit when it cannot play a game that has been automatically rescheduled, etc. When these forfeits are assessed, the affected team loses all game points.
- **Forfeits assessed for violations of SFL rules** – The rules require teams to forfeit games for violations of certain rules although the game was played. When forfeits are assessed the team loses all game points. Examples of rule violations that result in forfeits include using illegal players, failing to report red cards, and team actions that result in early game termination. For example, assume Team A wins a game but fails to properly report a red card. Team A is assessed a forfeit which means that it loses all game points and the opposing team (Team B) is considered the winner and receives four game points. This is in contrast to what would be shown if the red card had been properly reported. If the red card had been properly reported, then Team A would have received four game points while Team B would have received one game point.

The impacts of the penalties can result in significant differences between the standings shown on the web site and those used when a team needs to be ranked based on its "actual game field performance." For example, when determining how to group teams with comparable abilities together, the results based on the "actual game field performance" should be used so that a team is not placed with weaker or

stronger teams simply because of the administrative penalties. For example, as shown below Team A’s game point percentage on the web site would be 46.9 percent because of the administrative penalties assessed against it while its game point percentage based on its “actual game field performance” would be 75 percent. Assume that this was a division 2 team. Using the web site’s standings, then the Team A would be recommended to be left in division 2 when, based on the criteria normally used to recommend division placement, it should be playing division 1 teams based on its “actual game field performance”. On the other hand, if it were a division 1 team, then web site’s standings would indicate that it should be moved to division 2 when, based on the criteria normally used for recommending division placement, the team should remain in division 1 based on its “actual game field performance”. Table 7 uses illustrative game results and penalties that may be assessed to show the impacts on the web site standings and “actual game field performance” under various scenarios.

Table 7: Impacts of Various Game Situations and Penalties on a Team’s Web Site and “Actual Game Field Performance”

Event/Comment	Team A	Team B	Team C	Team D
Games played – actual / web site	7 games / 8 games	8 games / 8 games	7 games / 8 games	8 games / 8 games
Scheduling forfeits assessed (team did not show up for game)	1 game – No game points received	None	None	None
Scheduling forfeits received	No games	None	One game – 4 game points received	None
Actual game forfeits assessed, e.g., illegal players	Won game but assessed a forfeit for using an illegal player – No game points received	None	None	None
Actual game forfeits received	No games	Lost game but opposing team assessed a forfeit for using an illegal player – 4 game points received	None	None

Event/Comment	Team A	Team B	Team C	Team D
Late score reporting penalties assessed	Two games – Two game points lost	None	None	None
Game record based on actual game scores for games played / Game record shown on web site	4-1-2 / 3-3-2	4-2-2 / 5-1-2	4-1-2 / 5-1-2	4-2-2 / 4-2-2
Game Point Percentage based on actual game results (no penalties) / web site (with penalties)	75% (21 game points) / 46.9% (15 game points)	68.8% (22 game points) / 78.1% (25 game points)	75% (21 game points) / 78.1% (25 game points)	68.8% (22 game points) / 68.8% (22 game points)

**Game Score Differentials By Age
Group and Division – Spring 2023**

During the Spring 2023 season, almost all the age groups had two divisions. Interestingly, the score differential for the Under 11 Girls, which only had one division during the Spring 2023 season, had about 77 percent of its games with a score differential of three goals or less. In the Fall 2023 season, these teams would be expected to play as Under 12 Girls. The Under 12 Girls in the Fall 2023 season had about 61 percent of their games with a score differential of three goals or less. The reason for this difference is unknown.

Table 8: Game Score Differentials By Age Group and Division – Spring 2023

Age Group	Division	Total Games Played	Score Difference 0 to 3	Score Difference 4 to 6	Score Difference Greater Than 6
Under 11 Boys	1	48	32 (66.7%)	14 (29.2%)	2 (4.2%)
Under 11 Boys	2	110	73 (66.4%)	27 (24.5%)	10 (9.1%)
Under 11 Girls	1	100	77 (77.0%)	16 (16.0%)	7 (7.0%)
Under 12 Boys	1	56	38 (67.9%)	13 (23.2%)	5 (8.9%)
Under 12 Boys	2	117	85 (72.6%)	27 (23.1%)	5 (4.3%)
Under 12 Girls	1	47	32 (68.1%)	15 (31.9%)	0 (0.0%)
Under 12 Girls	2	44	31 (70.5%)	10 (22.7%)	3 (6.8%)
Under 13 Boys	1	108	73 (67.6%)	24 (22.2%)	11 (10.2%)
Under 13 Boys	2	123	95 (77.2%)	23 (18.7%)	5 (4.1%)
Under 13 Girls	1	58	46 (79.3%)	9 (15.5%)	3 (5.2%)
Under 13 Girls	2	55	37 (67.3%)	16 (29.1%)	2 (3.6%)
Under 14 Boys	1	48	32 (66.7%)	11 (22.9%)	5 (10.4%)
Under 14 Boys	2	177	118 (66.7%)	50 (28.2%)	9 (5.1%)
Under 14 Girls	1	65	36 (55.4%)	18 (27.7%)	11 (16.9%)
Under 14 Girls	2	84	45 (53.6%)	35 (41.7%)	4 (4.8%)
Under 16 Boys	1	87	58 (66.7%)	25 (28.7%)	4 (4.6%)
Under 16 Boys	2	161	112 (69.6%)	44 (27.3%)	5 (3.1%)
Under 16 Girls	1	59	40 (67.8%)	18 (30.5%)	1 (1.7%)
Under 16 Girls	2	88	61 (69.3%)	14 (15.9%)	13 (14.8%)
Under 19 Boys	1	62	38 (61.3%)	18 (29.0%)	6 (9.7%)
Under 19 Boys	2	131	93 (71.0%)	34 (26.0%)	4 (3.1%)
Under 19 Girls	1	64	28 (43.8%)	27 (42.2%)	9 (14.1%)
Under 19 Girls	2	33	17 (51.5%)	13 (39.4%)	3 (9.1%)
Total		1,925	1,297 (67.4%)	501 (26.0%)	127 (6.6%)