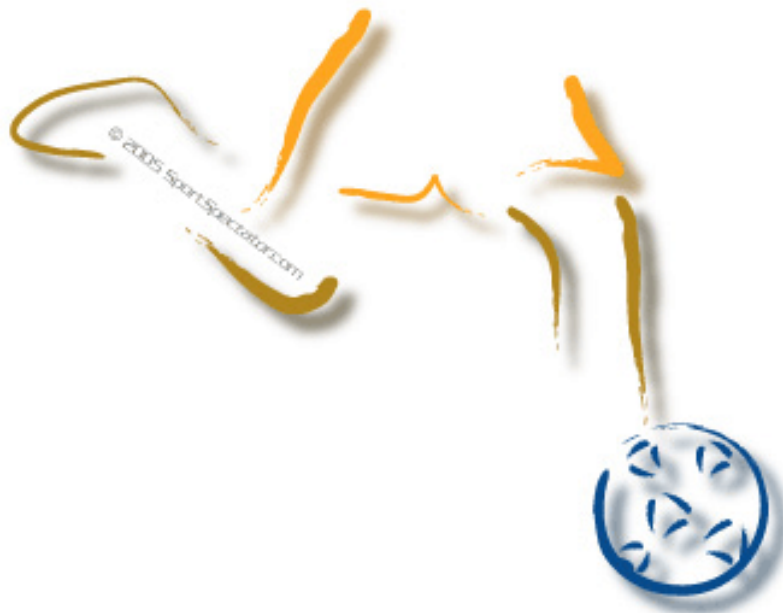


Soccer 101

A Guide to Soccer Rules, Positions and Play



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(see back for list of sources)

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The Essentials

Game Length

A standard middle school game is 60 minutes, split into equal halves. The clock does not stop, so the referee adds bonus time at the end of each half to account for breaks in the action. Players, coaches, and fans alike never know how much time is left, as the referee is the only keeper of time. The team with the most points at the end of the game wins. In most cases, when the score is tied at the end of regulation play, the game is considered a draw. If a match cannot end in a tie, the first team to score in overtime wins. If neither team scores during overtime, teams can use a [penalty-kick tiebreaker](#) to determine the winner.

Start of the game

To start each half, and following a goal, all players must be positioned on their own side of the field before play can begin with a [kick-off](#). The action starts once the ball is kicked in the direction of the opponents' goal.

Offense and Defense

Offense:

The team in possession of the ball seeks a good shot at the goal. Teamwork is critical as players [dribble](#) and pass the ball around the opposition. Teammates run into open space, where they can receive a pass or distract defenders. The highest success rate comes from shots attempted within, or just beyond the penalty area; this is why attackers often choose to [cross](#) the ball to a teammate to create a scoring opportunity.

Defense:

Regaining possession of the ball by intercepting passes or stealing the ball from dribbling players is the essence of defense. Therefore, the defense aligns itself across width of the field to cover more of the field, cut down passing angles, and deter long passes. Defenders want to keep opponents in front of them and the ball out of the middle of the field, especially when the ball is close to goal. Consequently, when the ball nears the goal, defenders

will often **clear** the ball either downfield or toward the sidelines to prevent scoring opportunities.

Scoring

A goal, worth one point, is scored when the entire ball passes over the goal line and through the goal.

Equipment

There is minimal equipment in soccer. Players wear a uniform, including shorts, a jersey or tee shirt, shoes with cleats for better traction, and shin guards to protect the front of the shin during play. Goalkeepers wear gloves and a different colored jersey with protective padding built in. The soccer ball is usually made of synthetics or leather and is slightly smaller at the youth level.

Common Referee Signals

One referee makes all decisions related to rules, and two linesmen aid the referee by making calls, mostly for balls that go out of bounds. The referee calls fouls against players to ensure fair and safe play. If a player commits a foul, the opposing team is awarded a **free kick**, which results in an unguarded kick from the spot of the foul. A free kick is either a **direct kick** or an **indirect kick**, depending on the type of foul. Sometimes, a referee uses his discretion and allows play to continue through a foul if the offense retains possession of the ball and is on the attack when the foul was committed. In this case, he will call, "Advantage, play on," and swing his arms upward in front of his chest. In cases of dangerous play or unsportsmanlike conduct, a yellow or red card is given to a player, depending on the severity of the foul. A red card signals ejection from the game.

Field of Play

Soccer is played on a large grass rectangular field with goals on either end. The ball is out of bounds when the entire soccer ball has crossed the goal line or touch line, whether on the ground or in the air. Depending on where it left the field and who touched it last, the ball is put back into play by a [throw-in](#), [corner kick](#), or [goal kick](#). While soccer field dimensions may vary slightly by level of play, all fields have some common characteristics:

Midfield line: Line that divides the field into equal halves.

Touch Line: The line that defines the outer edge of the longer sides of the field. When the ball goes out of bounds over the touch line, a throw in occurs. Also called the sideline.

Goal lines: Lines that mark out of bounds at either end of the field. When the ball goes out of bounds over the goal line, either a goal kick or corner kick occurs, depending on which team last touched the ball. Also called end lines.

Penalty area: Arguably the most important portion of the field, because a foul inside the penalty area results in a [penalty kick](#). Also called the penalty box.

Goal area: Goal kicks are taken from the corners of this box.

Goal: Points are scored when the ball passes through the 8-foot tall goal.

Center circle: Opposing players must stand outside the circle until the ball is kicked to initiate the game in a kickoff.

Center spot: A mark at the center of the halfway line where the ball is placed during kickoffs.

Corner kick quarter-circles: Area where ball is placed on corner kicks. A flag at least five feet high stands at all four corners.



Positions

Players are divided into two basic classifications: goalkeepers and field players. Field players consist of forwards, midfielders and fullbacks. Coaches can mix and match the number of players at each position, as long as there are 11 players on the field. Sample formations include 4-4-2, 3-5-2, 4-2-4, etc. and are listed fullback-midfielder-forward, respectively (see diagram on other side).

Position Descriptions

G Goalkeeper: Keeps the ball out of the goal and organizes team defense. Uses hands and arms within the penalty area. Possesses sure hands to catch, deflect, or punch shots away from the goal. Also called goalie or keeper.

F Forwards: Attack the opposition to create scoring opportunities. Take the majority of shots. Also called attackers.

(abb. "F") The Right Forward ("**RF**") is the one on the right facing the other teams goal; **LF** is on the left, & **CF** is center. Most formations will have 2 or 3 forwards. Teach your forwards to be aggressive and opportunistic. They must fight to win the ball.

M Midfielders: Enable the transition from the fullbacks to the forward. Constantly in motion, both defending and attacking. Also called halfbacks.

(abb. **"MF"**; aka Halfbacks) Play between Forwards & Fullbacks. Must support the Forwards & also support the Fullbacks. Used to be called "linkmen" because they link the Fullbacks & Forwards. Must run more than any position & must have good stamina or be subbed a lot. On my U-16 recreational team we have 2 "Offensive MF's" ("OMF's") & 2 "Defensive MF's" ("DMF's"). (We play a 3-2-2-3, see "Formations"). My "MF's" move up on the attack & can move into scoring position & score if the opportunity is created. However, they must get back & cover their position & remember they are a mid-fielder. I encourage them to take long chip shots at the top of the goal, but not long grounders that the goalkeeper will easily pick up. On defense, I bring the DMF's back just outside the Penalty Box. We play a zone defense & the Defensive MF's will shift from side to side & move into the Penalty Box if necessary, depending on where the ball is, but the **LMF (Left MF) & RMF (Right MF)** will not go past the "center"; that way we always have someone covering the center even if the ball is far to one side. (The right and left sides are as you face the other team's goal).

D Fullbacks: Provide last line of defense before the goalie. Stop the opposition before a shot is taken. Some coaches assign a single defender, called a sweeper, who plays closest to his own goal behind the fullbacks.

(abbreviation "FB"). (aka Backs and Defenders) The Left & Right are as you face the other teams goal. In diagrams the Left Fullbacks will be designated "**LFB**", center as "**CFB**" & right as "**RFB**". In Britain, they sometimes use the term full-back to refer to the right and left back, as opposed to the center back(s).

In Clementon's formation, we will have 4 Fullbacks with two having special designations: **Sweeper** and **Stopper**. In addition to the LFB and RFB, the Sweeper plays in the Center and is usually the closest defensive player to our goalie. The **Sweeper's** primary job is to "clean up" loose kicks or sweep away attacking players if they get by the front defensive line containing the LFB, Stopper and the RFB. The "**Stopper**" is a position that is also in the center of the field and plays in back of the CMF and in front of the Sweeper. The Stopper's main purpose is to disrupt the flow of the opposing offense and to at least force the offense to go towards the corners and not go directly towards the center of the goal.

(See "[Formations](#)" and "[Positions](#)").

Fouls or Penalties

There are 2 kinds of fouls, Direct Kick Fouls & Indirect Kick Fouls. (Rules are called "Laws Of The Game" and are changed each year. Go to www.fifa.com for current rules. See "[Cards](#)" for more fouls & penalties):

Direct Kick Fouls

For which the other team receives a "direct free kick" (meaning a goal can be scored by kicking the ball straight into the goal) or a "penalty kick" ("PK") if the foul occurs within the Penalty Box (Note: It doesn't matter whether the ball was in the Penalty Box or not; what matters is where the foul was committed). There are 10 direct kick fouls. The rules say that the referee should call a foul for numbers 1 thru 6 if he believes they are committed in a manner he considers "careless, reckless or using excessive force":

1. **kicking or attempting to kick an opponent.** Accidentally kicking an opponent while tackling the ball is not a foul unless it was careless, reckless, or there was excessive force. If a player slide tackles from the front, it will be considered at least "dangerous play" (which is an indirect kick foul), or kicking, or tripping, or "unsporting behavior", even if the ball is contacted, since it would at the least be reckless or dangerous. (See "Cards, Red Card, Serious Foul Play")
2. **tripping or attempting to trip an opponent** (if careless, reckless or using excessive force),
3. **charging into an opponent** (the goalkeeper can also be called for this if his action is careless, reckless or uses excessive force),
4. **striking or attempting to strike an opponent** (if careless, reckless or using excessive force),
5. **pushing an opponent**, including the goalkeeper (if careless, reckless or using excessive force),
6. **jumping at an opponent in a careless or reckless manner** or using excessive force (this includes jumping for a header if an opponent is carelessly or recklessly bumped, and jumping at the goalkeeper),
7. **blatant holding or pulling** (including holding clothing, using any part of the body to hold an opponent & "Sandwiching"),

8. **making contact with an opponent before touching the ball** when tackling an opponent to gain possession of the ball (Note: it is always a foul if the tackler contacts the ballhandler before touching the ball. However, it can still be a direct kick foul if the ball is touched first but the tackler was "careless, reckless, or used excessive force" and was judged to have kicked, tripped, charged or jumped at the ballhandler. Or, if the Referee believes the tackler played in a "dangerous manner", an indirect kick can be awarded),
9. **spitting** at an opponent, even if it doesn't hit the opponent (this is grounds for a Red Card),
10. deliberately handling the ball (a "**hand ball**" should not be called if a player is instinctively trying to protect himself from injury or if the ball hits the hand while it is in a natural position near the players side and has not been moved toward the ball. See "[Hand Ball](#)" for more details; this does not apply to the goalkeeper inside his own penalty area.),



Indirect Kick Fouls

For which the other team receives an "**indirect free kick**" (meaning a goal only counts if another player touches the ball before it enters the goal). The indirect free kick is taken from where the offense occurred. There are 2 types of indirect kick fouls:

Four fouls that apply to all players:

1. "**Dangerous Play**" (or playing in a dangerous manner) is any action by a player that in the judgment of the Referee is dangerous to himself or to another player and that isn't a "direct kick foul" such as tripping. Examples would be a high kick when an opponent is nearby, or if a player tries to head a low ball that an opponent is trying to kick, then the player who is putting himself in danger would be guilty of dangerous play. Another example would be any action that might endanger the goalkeeper within the Penalty Box. If the goalkeeper and an opponent both go for a loose ball, the Referee will tend to favor the goalkeeper if there is a collision. It isn't necessary for someone to be hurt for dangerous play to be called. For example, slide tackling with spikes high would be dangerous play, even if the opponent isn't contacted. However, a dangerous act (such as a high kick) isn't "dangerous play" unless an opponent is nearby.
2. "**Impeding the Progress of an Opponent**". Generally, a player cannot use his body to impede another players movements, even if it is not deliberate. This can be called if a player is not within "playing

distance" of the ball (i.e., 3 feet) and block's an opponent's movement or screens an opponent from the ball. However, if a player is within playing distance & able to play the ball (meaning not laying on the ground), the player can legally screen an opponent from the ball. (You usually see this when a ball is going out of bounds & the player whose team will get the throw-in screens the opponent so the opponent can't save the ball). Impeding the progress of an opponent used to be called "obstruction". The rule also applies to "innocently" impeding the goalkeeper by standing in front of him when he has the ball.

3. **Preventing the goalkeeper from releasing the ball from his hands.** A player who attempts to prevent the Goalkeeper from putting the ball into play by standing directly in front of the Goalkeeper can be called for breaking this rule or for "unsporting behavior", in which case both a Yellow Card & an indirect kick would be awarded. (See "Cards")
4. **Any time a yellow or red card is shown & a direct kick isn't awarded** (e.g., for "unsporting behavior", "dissent", persistently breaking the rules, and offensive or threatening language; see "Cards" for a list of the many types of unsporting behavior).

GOALKEEPER RULES:

Four indirect kick fouls that only apply to the goalkeeper & only if committed inside the Penalty Box (the goalkeeper is treated like a regular field player when he is outside the Penalty Box):

1. Taking more than six seconds while controlling the ball with his hands before releasing it (releasing it can include throwing it, kicking it or dropping it to the ground and then kicking or dribbling it. Once released, it is "live").
2. Touching the ball with hands after it is deliberately kicked to the Goalkeeper by a teammate. (Note: It is okay to pick up an accidentally kicked ball or a pass from a teammate that isn't "kicked" but is made using the head, chest, knee, etc.).
3. Touching the ball with hands on a throw-in from a teammate (i.e., the goalkeeper can't pick up a throw-in from a teammate).
4. Intentionally handling the ball again after he has released it and it has not touched any other player (e.g., dropping the ball, dribbling it and then picking it back up). Read b.2 and b.3 above. The Goalkeeper can only handle it again after an opponent touches or if it is accidentally kicked back or if it is headed or chested back by a teammate. He can't pick it up if a teammate has intentionally kicked or thrown it to him.

Advantage Clause.

This rule states that the Referee, in his discretion, may decide to not stop play due to a foul if it would be to the advantage to the fouled team to not stop play (i.e., The concept is that the team that was fouled should not be punished by having an attack stopped which might result in a goal and, conversely, that the team which committed the foul should not gain an advantage as a result of the foul). (See "Advantage Clause").

(See "[Cards](#)", "[Rules](#)", "[Hand Ball](#)", "[Offside Rule](#)", "[Shoulder Charge](#)", "[Penalty Kick](#)", "[Free Kick](#)" & "[Lines](#)").

Glossary

Bending the ball: A kick with spin that hooks while in the air. Players often "bend" the ball during corner kicks or to pass around defenders.

Bicycle kick: When a player flips backward and kicks the ball over his head.

Chip pass: A pass kicked high with backspin.

Clear: When defenders kick the ball away from the goal, usually far downfield or out of bounds.

Corner kick: When the ball crosses the goal line after last touching a defender, a member of the offense restarts play from the closest corner.

Cross: A pass sent from near the sidelines to the front of the goal to create a scoring opportunity. Also called centering.

Direct kick: A unguarded kick awarded following severe fouls, such as kicking, tripping, jumping at, charging, striking, pushing, holding or spitting at an opponent. When tackling an opponent, the player must first make contact with the ball or a direct kick results. Additionally called for hand ball. A goal can be scored directly from the kick; it does not need to touch an additional player after the kick.

Dribble: Keeping control of the ball while running by tapping, dragging, or rolling it in front of the body.

Drop kick: When a goalkeeper who is holding the ball drops it and kicks it after it bounces.

Free kick: A kick from the spot of the foul, awarded to the team that was fouled, in which the opposing players must stand at least 10 yards away until the ball is kicked. A free kick is either a **direct kick** or an **indirect kick**, depending on the type of foul.

Goal kick: When the offense sends the ball over the goal line, the defense kicks the ball from within the goal area. Opposing players may not enter the penalty area until the ball has been kicked.

Hand ball: The illegal action of touching the ball with an arm or hand.

Header: Using the head to pass, shoot, block, or otherwise control the ball.

Indirect kick: An unguarded kick following minor fouls, such as offsides, dangerous play (e.g. high kick), impeding the progress of an opponent, or preventing the goalie from releasing the ball. The ball must touch at least one player after the kick before a goal can be scored.

Juggling: Performing a series of touches while keeping the ball from hitting the ground.

Kickoff: The ball is put into play from the center circle at the start of each half and after a goal.

Marking: Guarding an opponent.

Man on: Players yell "man on" to inform a teammate that a defender is nearby.

Nutmeg: A pass that goes between an opponent's legs.

Offsides: Foul frequently enforced during a game to prevent unfair fast-break goals. Called when a player is closer to the opposition's goal line than both the ball and two defenders (the goalie and one additional defender).

Penalty kick: When a foul is called inside the penalty box, the offense is awarded a **direct kick** from the penalty spot. Only the goalkeeper can stop this shot attempt.

Penalty-kick tiebreaker: In case of a tie, five players from each team alternate penalty shots. The team that scores the most goals is the winner. If the teams remain tied after five shots, they alternate penalty shots until one team misses and the other scores. Also called a shoot-off.

Punt: A long distance kick by the goalie, who drops and kicks the ball before it hits the ground.

Save: When a player, usually the goalie, blocks a shot from going into the goal.

Scrimmage: A practice game. Also called a friendly.

Strike: Legal contact (kick, header, etc.) with the ball; hands and arms are not permitted.

Tackle: To steal the ball from a player. Stealing the ball by sliding in front of a player is called a slide tackle.

Throw-in: A two-handed, overhead pass, taken from the sideline when the opposing team knocks the ball out of bounds.

Touch: Contact that a player has with the ball while it is in his possession (e.g. "one-touch," "two-touch," etc.).

Trapping: Stopping the ball to gain control before advancing.

Volley: Kicking the ball while it is in midair.

Sources:

Sports Spectator

<http://www.sportspectator.com/fancentral/soccer/guide01.html>