

# **Virginia Soccer Association Laws of the Game**

Except where noted below, all Virginia Soccer Association Recreational League games will abide by [USSF Laws of the Game](#). SFL standards are provided for guidance only and if there is a conflict, rules promulgated directly by SFL shall be enforced.

These laws were approved by the VSA Board of Directors in March 2022. Unless modified by the Board, they shall be in force from the Spring 2022 season. Note that further modification shall not require board approval unless it is a significant departure from USSF or VYSA guidance.

## **Law 1 – The Field of Play**

Currently, most matches are played at James Long Park in Haymarket, VA – with the exception of SFL matches which are played at Catharpin Park (4805 Sudley Road; Catharpin, VA 20143). However, based on weather or other conditions, it is possible that other fields will be used. Officials should contact the referee assignor and coaches/parents/players should contact the Director of Recreation with any questions about the correct field.

Both teams and coaches will be on one side of the field with parents and other bystanders on the other side of the field. One team shall be on either side of midfield and their parents shall be on the opposite side of the field on the same side of the midfield line. Team officials such as the team manager or designated snack provider may also be on the side of the field with the team if they are fulfilling their official duties. A team may have no more than 2 assistant coaches for each game. In specific circumstances, a team may have an additional parent on the sideline to assist with a differently-abled player. In general, when two fields of the same size are adjacent, the players will be in between the fields and the parents will be on the outside.

For all games involving buildout lines, the referee should attempt to use pinnies or a cone on the outside of the field (from a team coach if necessary) to mark the build out line if it is not clearly marked on the field. For U8 and below, mid-field shall serve as the build-out line.

The referee shall ensure that all goals are securely anchored. The referee will not allow play to begin if a goal is not securely anchored or any other unsafe condition exists.

### **Law 2 – The Ball**

The home team is responsible for providing the game ball.

Age Group	Ball Size
U8 and below	3
U10/U12	4
U13 and above	5

### **Law 3 – The Number of Players**

Age	# of players	Goalies	Coaches allowed on Field
U5/U6	4	No	1
U8	4	No	No
U10	7	Yes	No
U12	9	Yes	No
U13 and Up	11	Yes	No

All age groups use unlimited substitutions with substitutions allowed at any stoppage in play; however, the referee may disallow a substitution if he feels it is being done for unsporting reasons. Note that these rules do not apply to SFL.

The recommended minimum number of players to begin a game is 4 for U8/6/5 and 5 for U10/U12. A coach may elect to play with less than the recommended minimum number of players but shall not be forced to do so. If a team has less than the maximum (as adjusted

due to any misconduct) number of players at any point during or prior to the match, the opposing coach may elect to 'loan' a player or players to the undermanned team. All team officials are to bear in mind that the goals of the recreational program are developmental, and all decisions should be based on what best supports these goals for the players of both teams.

For U8 and below, an offensive style of play is strongly encouraged and in normal circumstances, defensive players shall push up the field as appropriate when their team is in possession of the ball. At these age levels, goalkeepers are not used. No defensive player should 'camp out' in front of the goal if he or she is not defending an opposition player or 'set piece.'

One coach is allowed on the field during play for U5 and U6 age groups. Neither coach shall enter the penalty area while the ball is in play.

#### **Law 4 – The Player's Equipment**

VSA will abide by the rules of all sanctioning bodies governing acceptable player equipment. For clarification's sake, the following guidelines have been provided. Specific policies are available from the Director of Recreation.

Religious jewelry or other adornments may only be worn if required by their religion and determined to be safe by the match referee. If the player uses the item in an unsafe manner, the player may be asked to remove the item, leave the field until the issue is corrected or ejected from the match as appropriate. The same rules shall be followed for medical alert jewelry. Jewelry worn under this policy must be secured to the body with tape or another means. Unless deemed to be unsafe by the referee, headscarves and religiously required turbans are specifically allowed.

Under no circumstance shall a player be permitted to play while wearing earrings. Per medical guidance, there is no danger in the piercing 'closing' over the course of a game. Because of this, the risks inherent to allowing hard/metal objects in a sporting environment outweigh the benefits of allowing them to be worn.

A player may not remain on the field with an open wound or bodily fluids evident on their uniform. Any player who leaves the field for this reason may reenter the field once the wound has been closed and/or the uniform has been sanitized. Prior to reentering the field, the player must gain permission from the referee who shall verify that the issue has been resolved.

### **Law 5 – The Referee**

All VSA referees must be certified and current in order to be paid for their services. If no referee is present for a recreational game and both coaches agree that an individual is otherwise qualified, a non-certified or non-current referee may fulfill the duties of the referee on a volunteer basis.

The referee shall ensure that all goals are securely anchored. The referee will not allow play to begin if a goal is not securely anchored or any other unsafe condition exists.

All officials are expected to wear a USSF approved uniform including the current year's patch for all matches with the following exceptions. Referees are expected to follow the same guidelines as players regarding the wearing of jewelry and other adornments (e.g., earrings are prohibited).

- For all matches, a referee may wear a solid black baseball style hat with no more than a white manufacturer's logo.
- Experienced referees are expected to have a full uniform available for every game; however, that is not a realistic expectation for a brand new referee. To that end, newer referees shall at a minimum wear an approved shirt, black shorts, black socks (pulled all the way up) and primarily black shoes.
- In the event that a game is played in colder temperatures, a referee may wear a light jacket in a color that matches any official referee jersey color. They may also wear long black athletic pants and black gloves if necessary.

With the following modifications the duties and responsibilities of the referee are as assigned in the FIFA Laws of the Game:

For U8 and below games, in lieu of issuing a card, the referee should ask for a player to be substituted so that the coach may take corrective action. Except in the rare circumstance of repeated play that is likely to injure another player or blatantly violent conduct, a player substituted for this reason shall be allowed to reenter the match.

Referees are not required to blow the whistle for each stoppage of play; however, they must clearly indicate the reason for stoppage and the restart to players and coaches. This can be done through a combination of whistling, verbal and visual cues. It should be noted that most players at younger levels will not be familiar with most hand signals so it is important to use additional means of communication.

At no time shall a referee alter these Laws for 'training' purposes. The referee may however offer limited advice on an instructional basis.

In addition to the standing requirement to conduct pre-game, halftime, and post-game conferences, the center referee shall provide developmental guidance to assistant referees as appropriate.

Referees shall complete reports in gameofficials within 24 hours of the conclusion of a match. For matches where score is not officially kept, a score of 1:1 may be recorded. Contact the Director of Referees or Referee Assignor for guidance on completing game reports. Game reports shall include relevant details on all conduct or disciplinary actions taken by the official before, during or after the match.

For U10 matches, on restarts or other plays involving the build-out line, the referee should attempt to place himself on the build-out line and verbally encourage the team that is now defending to retreat behind the line. See USSF guidance on the VSA Referees web page for additional guidance.

Since no score is kept, the decision of the referee is final and protests are not allowed. However, after the match, constructive feedback related to officiating is encouraged. Compliments or complaints regarding VSA recreational officiating should be directed to [referees@vsaonline.org](mailto:referees@vsaonline.org)

Referees are responsible to be aware of and enforce all VSA policies with special emphasis on those regarding safety such as (but not limited to) those regarding the playing of games in severe weather conditions.

If a referee is unable to fulfill his assigned duties or feels that doing so will put him at significant risk of injury, he shall notify the referee assignor immediately. If he is unable to contact the referee assignor, he shall contact a VSA board/staff member if available. If he is unable to contact any of the available personnel, he shall make an effort to ensure that his duties are fulfilled by another qualified referee and notify the Referee Assignor and Director of Referees as soon as possible. Any voice mail or email left more than 12 hours prior to game time shall be considered sufficient notification. Within 12 hours of game time, a phone call should be made to the assignor and leaving a voicemail is satisfactory. Within one hour of the game, if you are unable to contact the assignor directly, please call the Director of Referees whose number will be disseminated directly to referees.

### **Law 6 – The Assistant Referee**

As part of each match with a referee crew, prior to and after the match, the crew should take a minute and provide constructive feedback to each other. This feedback should be offered and received in a professional manner. Regardless of the referees position or level of experience, they should be open to providing and receiving feedback.

### **Law 7**

The following table lists the length of each half for each age group. With the exception of SFL tournament games, there is no overtime. See SFL Tournament rules for specifics on overtime. For age groups with halves, halftime will be 5 minutes. The interval between quarters shall be 3 minutes.

U5: 10 minute quarters	U12:	30 minute halves
U6: 10 minute quarters	U13 SFL:	35 minute halves

U8: 10 minute quarters	U14 SFL:	35 minute halves
U10: 25 minute halves	U16 & U19 SFL:	40 minute halves

If a game is delayed more than 15 minutes, the referee shall notify the referee assignor who shall coordinate any schedule adjustments with the VSA registrar. In the absence of further guidance, split remaining time into two equal halves and make every effort to end the match on time.

### **Law 8**

At age group divisions U12 and younger, whenever the ball strikes a player in the head, play is stopped. The proper restart depends upon whether the player deliberately played the ball with his or her head. If deliberate, the proper restart is an indirect free kick to the opposing team. If this occurs within the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the point nearest to where the infringement occurred. If the play by the head is deemed inadvertent, then the proper restart is a dropped ball to the team that last legally played the ball. If it occurs in the penalty area, the ball will be dropped to the goalkeeper regardless of the team that last played the ball. Note that the opponent must be 5 yards away but can move closer once the ball touches the ground.

Note that the USSF mandate for heading allows U12 players to head the ball; however, VSA has elected to extend the rule to the U12 age group since a significant group of 10 year-olds may play in that age group.

### **Laws 9-10**

Except where stated otherwise, FIFA Laws of the Game shall be used as written.

Referees shall use their best judgment when deciding whether or not a restart has been infringed upon; and the age and level of play shall be considered.

For a kick-in, the ball shall be judged to be in play when the ball has been legally kicked and the whole ball has crossed over the touchline.

Due to recent USSF player development initiatives, VSA has implemented a build out line for the U10 age group. When a goalie gains control of the ball, the opposing team must retreat to the buildout line which will be an imaginary line marked with cones placed halfway between midfield and the outer edge of the penalty area parallel to the goal line. The opposing team must remain behind the build-out line until the ball has been properly put back into play. If the kicking team elects to restart before the team has retreated behind the buildout line, the opponents may play it immediately.

The use of buildout lines is mandatory for the U10 age group and may not be waived.

### **Law 11 - Offside**

Offside shall only apply to age levels U10 and above. For the U10 age group, no player shall be considered to be in an offside position unless they are past the build-out line in their attacking half of the field.

### **Law 12 – Fouls and Misconduct**

For U8 and below, there will be no penalty kicks. For any infringement that would normally result in a penalty kick, the team that did not commit the infraction shall be awarded a direct free kick that shall be taken from any point on the edge of the penalty area closest to the mid-field line.

Slide tackling is prohibited for U8 and below age levels, and the restart is a direct free kick.

In the U10 age group, if a goalie punts or drop kicks a ball, the opponent may be awarded an indirect free kick. The referee should use discretion and only award the kick for repeated offenses after a warning. Particularly early in the season, the referee should explain the rule to the goalkeeper and give them a drop ball so they can immediately demonstrate their understanding. An indirect kick should be awarded for subsequent offenses; however, the referee may use his best judgement and allow additional 'do-overs.'

### **Law 13 – Free Kicks**

For all games played on a small sided field, the minimum distance from a free kick (or other non-throw in restart), shall be shortened to four yards.

For U8 and below, all free kicks are direct.

### **Law 14 – The Penalty Kick**

As previously mentioned, there are no penalty kicks for U8 and below games.

For all other games, the referee shall check the penalty spot prior to the match. In general, any penalty kick shall be taken from the spot as marked. There are two exceptions:

- If there is no penalty spot marked or the mark is severely misplaced, the referee shall notify both coaches prior to the start of play and if a penalty is awarded, it shall be taken from a distance midway between the edge of the goal box and the penalty area directly in front of the middle of the goal.
- If the penalty spots are marked at unequal distances from the goal, the referee shall notify both coaches and ensure that any penalty kicks are taken from approximately the same distance from goal.

### **Law 15 – The Throw-In**

U8 and below shall use a kick/dribble-in in lieu of a throw-in.

- The ball shall be placed on or behind the touchline within one yard of where it crossed the touchline.
- The player taking the restart may either kick or dribble the ball into play.
- No goal may be scored until the ball has been touched by any player after it has been legally put into play. If, after being legally put into play, the ball crosses the goal line and no goal is scored, a goal kick or corner kick shall be awarded based on who last touched the ball.
- If any player other than the kicker touches the ball prior to it being in play, the restart shall be retaken unless the referee judges the infraction to be trifling.

### **Law 16 – The Goal Kick**

For all age groups with a build-out line, the team defending a goal kick must not cross the build-out line until after the ball has been kicked and moves.

For U8 and below, on a goal kick, while the non-kicking team may cross mid-field/build-out line when the ball is kicked, they may not play the ball until it leaves the penalty area. This is done to prevent a team from being penalized for allowing weaker players to take a goal kick.

### **Law 17 – The Corner Kick**

No changes unless otherwise listed elsewhere in this document.