

• LET THE GAMES BEGIN.....

Here in AYSO Region 232 we play "small-sided" soccer until the 14U age group. This allows young players with new and inexperienced coaches and parents to learn and grow together in their understanding of the game. The field, the ball, the object of the game and the Laws are modified in concert with FIFA regulations to help provide the best age-appropriate experience for the players. What follows is a guide for coaches, referees, and parents alike.

In **6U** the emphasis is on basic skills like kicking and ball control, while reinforcing the idea of a direction of play and an objective. Kick-ins, rather than throw-ins, are utilized. In 6U play we may have pop-up goals or just use cones, but there are no goalkeepers. **In this age-group we hope to provide an introduction to the game, for parents and players alike, in a low stress atmosphere. We should let the kids discover the game for themselves, let the game be its own teacher, and build the foundation together for the fantastic family experience that playing soccer will be for all of you!**

In **8U** play we have no goalkeepers, a goal box but no penalty area, no penalties, and no offside. There is no heading of the ball. These kids should be learning to play more as a team, while keeping their hands down resulting in less pushing and holding. Positional play is more achievable so we hope that coaches are rotating players through all the positions, maybe not in the course of a single game but definitely during the course of a week. Playing without goalkeepers allows young players to learn how to defend as a team, with support and depth. There are no throw-ins here. Kick-ins are utilized, with an emphasis on ball control. It is our hope to start providing referees at 8U. Your help in encouraging parents and older siblings to become certified referees will help us succeed.

In **10U** we are still "small-sided", but all the Laws of the Game apply. We introduce the "build out line". This line dictates offside and allows goalkeepers to initiate the attack from the back. There is no punting or dropkicks allowed. This is an effort to prevent heading the ball and to play the ball on the ground under control. There are goalkeepers, a penalty area, penalty kicks, indirect free kicks, and offside is introduced. At this age players are definitely developing favorite positions but coaches are encouraged to keep varying their line-up, especially the goalkeeper as this is such a mentally tough position to play and we expect many goals. Throw-ins are introduced and should begin to be coached even though the emphasis should be on control with the feet. **We USED to coach heading of the ball at this age. Unfortunately, no more. FIFA Laws have changed. Heading is not allowed until 14U. Concussions, and the fear of them, has caused this change. If the ball touches the head, play is stopped, and an indirect kick is awarded to the opposing team.**

In **12U** we play 9 v 9 on slightly smaller fields, still all the Laws apply. Players are definitely finding "homes" in positions on the field. The amount of space available to play in, along with the improved ability of the players at this age, makes 12U an exciting introduction to tactical soccer for many, both young and old. At this age players are expected to perform a proper throw-in. Offside is dictated by the half line

and position of the ball. **Heading of the ball is prohibited in this age group as well. FIFA and USYS dictated that NO player may head the ball while there is even one 10 year old on the field.**

By **14U** we are playing full-sided soccer on regulation fields. Players are increasingly specialized in their positions, but the emphasis is always squarely on team play, good sportsmanship, and having fun for everyone. This age-group may well continue to be Co-ed if the numbers of players dictates. **Heading the ball can, and should, be coached at this age. No more than 30 minutes per week with No more than 15-20 headers per week. There are No limitations during matches.**

We are also trying out a **16U** program. This program will develop as kids register to play. If enough kids register and we have enough volunteers to support it then we will create a program to fit..... ie, 3v3. This is a very exciting and fast paced competitive game at this age. Rosters are 5 per team. Rules are vastly different from 11v11 soccer. Free substitutions, etc... Please consider registering to participate in this program. There will be a meeting for all 16U players and volunteers at the start of season to introduce this program.

Finally, I am most proud to introduce a VIP program for the most special among us. This program includes children as young as 4 and adults as old as 110. Wheelchairs, crutches, whatever. **ALL ARE WELCOME.** Please consider this program, this will be a free flowing program and an opportunity for anyone to play. Volunteers will be required, as always. Obviously rules and roster sizes will be determined by registered participants. I look forward to seeing you all out there. **Buddies welcome as well.** This will be small sided game play. **Registered volunteers only.**

AYSO has a unique substitution system. We require that all players play at least half of every game regardless of attendance, attentiveness, ability or interest. We facilitate this by providing substitution opportunities at halftime, at the approximate midpoint of both halves of play, and in case of an injury. It is our hope that all coaches will play all kids three quarters of the game if possible, before playing anyone for four quarters.

As a Region we should all improve our understanding and execution of quarter breaks. The quarter is for substitution rather than a recess in the game. The clock continues to run and we should aim to resume play after about two minutes. It should be possible for all players to have a drink at this time, but they must hustle to the touchline where the water-bottles should be ready. Only those being substituted can leave the field of play. This will help maintain the flow of the game and keep us all on schedule.

Let us all be clear that players can take a drink of water at any time.

Simply have your player come to the touchline at midfield and hand them some water. Etiquette demands that they take no part in active play while they are drinking, even if the ball comes right to them. Send some water out into your goal so players can have some, and share when the chance arises. It's hot out there!!

I hope that this helps to clarify some of what we are doing here playing AYSO soccer. Please take the opportunity to go to www.ayso.org, and our local site at www.ayso232.org and learn more about both. Your greater knowledge and

understanding will increase your enjoyment and better the experience you are sharing with the kids.

Thank you for all your efforts.
Have as much fun as you can stand!

Nathan Hardy
Regional Commissioner
AYSO 232