



## Loudoun Soccer Game Day Tips – Line-ups and Substitutions (Classic)

The following information is designed to assist coaches in Loudoun Soccer's Rec program in organizing their team for game day. These are recommendations, and coaches may organize their teams as they see fit as long as they adhere to the club's policies regarding playing time, goalkeeper rotation, etc.

### **Game Day Line-Up:**

When arranging your line-up, it is recommended that you organize your players in a fashion so your level of play is balanced for much of the game. In other words, avoid starting the players who are more developed, and having those less developed sit out to start the game.

This will prevent a drop-off in the level of play when you begin substituting players later in the match. The alternative (start all of your stronger players) may result in a surge to start the game, but your team on its heels once those players are subbed.

Other recommendations:

1. Encourage or require players to arrive at a certain time before kickoff. In addition to providing them adequate warm-up time, it will allow the coach to better plan their line-up knowing who is present and who is absent.
2. Play more developed players in more important, central roles (see Competitive Balance exception below).
3. Balance positioning of lesser developed players by placing them near more developed players. For example: a lesser developed player may play as a wide midfielder (#7), with more developed players placed around them (#3 and #8) to balance out the ability levels.
4. Struggling to find someone to play Goalkeeper? You're not alone! Most young players do not wish to play this position out of fear – usually the fear of making a mistake. A goalkeeper error is evident to everyone (it usually results in a goal scored against them), and young players will want to avoid that pressure. Alleviate that pressure by simplifying the expectations for that role:
  - A. Scream "keeper" if you're going to come out and get the ball
  - B. Make all the saves you're supposed to make
  - C. Distribute the ball well.

If resetting these expectations doesn't help – incentivize playing the role. Offer those who step up to play the chance to choose their position on the field for the next period.

If you don't have volunteers – assign everyone a quarter or half (depending on your game format) on a rotating basis to share the responsibility (e.g. 8 games with a 16 player roster – each player plays one half as goalkeeper).



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### **Substitutions:**

Loudoun Soccer playing time policies require the following:

- All players who attend at least one of the two team practices that week receives 50 percent playing time in that weekend's game.
- The goalkeeper position should be rotated at each half (suggested but not required).

Larger sided games (9v9 and 11v11, and HS 7v7) require coaches to better manage their rotation, as these games are organized as halves, with substitutions possible at the following stoppages:

- Your team's throw-in
- Your opponent's throw-in if they are also subbing players
- Either team's goal kick
- Either team's kick off
- Replacing an injured player (the opposing team may sub one player at this time too)
- Replacing a cautioned (yellow carded) player (the opposing team may sub one player at this time too).

It's important for player development for youth athletes to compete for a sustained amount of time on the field, which is different in other sports where players compete for short shifts of time. This means coaches should avoid constantly subbing players in and out; in addition to affecting their development, constantly subbing disrupts the flow of the game.

For teams with large rosters (e.g. 18 or more players), coaches should identify one or two periods in the game to substitute players. For example:

7<sup>th</sup> and 8<sup>th</sup> grade: with 35 minute halves, organize player rotation across two or three marks:

- Two Substitution Times: rotate players around the 17-19' mark. Players who are not subbed out at that time can be subbed out later in the half (25-28').
- Three Substitution Times: rotate players around every 11-12 minutes (12', 24', half-time, 42', 55')

Subbing at the midway point of each half helps to ensure that minimum playing time is awarded to all players, and everyone receives a sustained amount of time on the field at one time.

Teams with smaller rosters may need to sub players more frequently depending on their fitness and energy levels.

You may wish to send your substitutes to midfield one to two minutes early, in anticipation of a stoppage occurring to rotate players. The ball may not exit the field of play immediately; waiting till that specific minute mark to rotate players may reduce their actual playing time if the ball doesn't exit the field for a substitution opportunity.



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### **Competitive Balance (Managing Lopsided Matchups):**

Loudoun Soccer rules for small-sided matches (4v4, 7v7, 9v9) permits a team to add an extra player on the field once that team is losing by four (4) goals. The additional player is to be removed from the field when/if the margin is reduced to three (3) goals; the specific player who entered the field as an extra player should be the player to be removed in this circumstance.

This “Competitive Balance” rule does not exist for full-sided (11v11) matches.

Coaches of teams in Grades 7-8 who are at a competitive advantage in a match (e.g. leading by four or more goals) should attempt to balance the level of play through one or more of the following methods:

- Direct players to use their “weaker foot” for passing, ball control, and shooting;
- Designate players who have not yet scored goals as the only ones who are allowed to shoot (results in other players have to pass them the ball);
- Place stronger players in primarily defensive positions and encourage them to pass to the weaker players playing primarily attacking positions;
- Award less-developed players more playing time in this particular match (e.g. your better players who may play more often in other matches have reduced playing time in this match);
- Set special conditions for their players before they are allowed to score (e.g. complete five consecutive passes before shooting, or everyone on the field must touch the ball before scoring, or only score off of crosses);
- Limit the number of players in your offensive half of the field;
- Remove a player from your team from the field and play down (e.g. play 8v9), as long as minimum playing time standards are maintained.

Given the nature of the program (it’s Rec soccer, and it’s meant to be fun), coaches of more advanced players and teams are expected to manage lopsided match-ups by adding conditions. No teams benefit from having the score run up (either winning or losing by a large margin). In addition to challenging these players further, it represents sportsmanship by avoiding a large score line.