Soccer has 17 laws or “rules” by which the game is played. Most of these laws are

easy to understand. The laws are designed to make soccer fun, safe, and fair for all

participants.

The object of soccer is for a player to get the ball into the other team’s goal by using

any part of the body except the player’s hands and arms. The goalie is the only

player allowed to touch the ball with the hands and arms and then only while he is

located in his own penalty area.

A referee is in charge of the soccer game. A referee’s main objective should be the

safety of the players. It is the referee’s responsibility to ensure that the game

remains fun for everyone. This includes players, spectators and the officials.

You will undoubtedly question some of the officiating calls as you watch a soccer

game. This is only natural. **To be fair to the referee** *you should read and understand the 17 laws* so that you have a good understanding of the rules of soccer. Try to

keep in mind that everyone who is watching a game has a different perspective.

*Spectators will be most likely, rooting for one team or the other.* **This will influence how they view the game**. The spectators will more than likely have a family member

playing in youth soccer. Also keep in mind that everyone will be viewing the game

from a different angle. Try to give the referee the benefit of a doubt. The referees

are much closer to the play than spectators. They should be trained in the laws and

impartial to the game’s outcome.

The 17 laws described below are the basic laws of soccer accepted throughout the

world. These laws are usually altered slightly so the game is more fun and beneficial

for young players. Each league should have a specific set of rules it will follow. These

rules should be distributed to the coach. Look over the rules of your league to make

sure you fully understand them.

LAW 1 - The Field of Play

This is the basic layout of a soccer field. The size of the field will vary from league to

league, usually depending on the age of the players.

LAW 2 - The Ball

A regulation size soccer ball is a No. 5 ball. Youth leagues may use different size

balls, such as a No. 3 ball or a No. 4 ball, depending on the age of the children.

LAW 3 - Number of Players

There must be no more than 11 players on the field of play for either team. A

minimum number of players is usually 7. Some youth leagues encourage games with

less than 11 players to help in the development of young players. One player from

each team must be designated as a goalkeeper. The goalkeeper must wear a

different color shirt from his teammates so that everyone can easily distinguish the

goalie. The goalie can only use his hands inside the penalty area.

LAW 4 - Player’s Equipment

Players must wear the same colored jersey or shirts. All youth programs require shin

guards to be worn by all players. **If your players will be wearing cleats***, make sure they are soccer cleats*. A soccer cleat does not have a cleat at the front edge of the

shoe like a baseball cleat. This is for safety.

LAW 5 - Referees

The referee enforces the 17 laws. There is one difference between soccer and most

other sports played in America**. *In soccer, the referee may let play continue and not call a foul*** if *he or she thinks that stopping play would give an advantage to the team committing the foul*. This is called the “advantage clause”. The referee should say

“play on” when this occurs.

LAW 6 - Linesmen and Lineswomen

Two linesmen may assist the referee in controlling the game. The linesmen’s duty is

to signal to the referee when the ball is out; to indicate a corner kick, a goal kick or

to designate which team is entitled to the throw-in. The linesmen may also signal

offsides, fouls or misconduct if a goal has been scored or when substitution is

desired.

The referee on the field makes the official and final decisions. The linesmen are there

to assist the referee; the referee may or may not act upon their advice.

Coaches should not expect to have linesmen at their youth soccer games.

Sometimes you are lucky to have a single referee. I have coached games where the

opposing coach and I had to take turns being the referee, because an official never

showed up.

LAW 7 - Duration of the Game

The duration of the game will depend on the age of the children. Older children will

more than likely have two halves. Younger children often times play four quarters.

Your league will determine whether quarters or halves are played and how long each

will be.

LAW 8 - Start of Play: Kick Off and Drop Ball

A kick off is taken to start a game, to restart play after a goal has been scored or to

start the second half or a new quarter. **At kickoff** *all players must be on their team’s half of the field*. The ball is placed on the center spot in the middle of the center

circle. The ball must be kicked forward at least one full rotation into the opponents’

“half of the field.” The team that kicks off to begin the game is determined by a coin

toss between the captains and the referee. **After a goal** *the team that was just scored upon starts the fkick off*. For new quarters and halves, the team, which did not

kick off the previous quarter or half will kick off. A goal cannot be scored by kicking

the ball directly into the goal on a kick off.

*A drop ball is played* **when the referee stops play for a reason other than a rule infraction**. An injury is a good example. The referee restarts play by dropping the ball

between two players, one from each team. A dropped ball may not be played until it

touches the ground. The first player playing the ball is allowed to play the ball again

without it having to be touched by another player. This means the player may

dribble, pass or shoot the ball after touching it.

LAW 9 - Ball In and Out of Play

The ball is out of play whenever it is completely outside the outside edge of the

touchline or the goal line either on the ground or in the air. Also it is out of play

when the referee stops play for any reason.

The ball is in play if any part of the ball is inside or touching the touchline or goal

line. The ball is considered in play after bouncing off of a goal post, cross bar, corner

flag, linesmen or referee if the ball remains on the playing field.

LAW 10 - Method of Scoring

**A goal can only be scored** *if the entire ball goes completely over the outside edge of the goal line, under the cross bar and between the goal posts while it is in play*. Any

player may score goals, including the goalie. Except when taking a free kick, throw-

in, goal kick, penalty kick or kick off, a ball played by a player directly into his own

goal is a score for the opposing team.

LAW 11 - Offside

An offensive player must have two opponents including the goalkeeper between

himself and the goal line at the moment the ball is passed to him. Offside is

determined when the ball is passed to the player, not when the player receives the

ball.

Offside position and offside are not the same. It is not against the rules to be in an

offside position. It is against the rules to be offside. Here is a definition of these two

concepts.

Offside Position - A player is in the offside position if he is:

• ahead of the ball and

• in the opponents half of the field and

• there are fewer than two opponents even with or ahead of him.

Offside -A player who is in the offside position becomes offside when

• he participates in the play or

• he interferes with an opponent or

• otherwise tries to take advantage of being in the offside position.

Exceptions - A player in an offside position is not to be called offside if he receives

the ball directly from:

• a throw-in or

• a corner kick or

• a goal kick.