

Referee Guidance - Equal Play

(Revised Sept 2023)

The Problem:

A certain player(s) on a team is playing a lot more or less than other players.
This **DOES NOT INCLUDE keepers**

Our Rules:

Equal playing time, playing fair, respect and sportsmanship are the fundamental cornerstones of this league, but occasionally participants, coaches and spectators forget to apply these principles. We understand that many coaches are new and that all are volunteers, however we have a strict code of conduct in regardless to fair play and expect coaches to try their best to follow this conduct.

Code of Conduct: *Coaches must give all of their players an equal amount of playing time during all game periods including overtime, and the opportunity to participate in the shootout. It's no fun being on the sideline.*

Regina Inter-zone Soccer Rules: Law 3: *All players **MUST** be afforded equal playing time. Law 12: Coaches and Team Officials may be cautioned and shown the Yellow card, if in the opinion of the referee, he fails to give all players the opportunity to play equal time.*

Instructions to Coaches - Equal Play: *Coaches must strive to provide equal playing time so that players are allowed to learn and play the game in a supportive manner. The health and safety of players is paramount. Do not encourage players to continue playing if they are obviously injured or unwell. Ensure everyone participates and is challenged to develop skills, teamwork and confidence.*

Reasons We WILL Allow Exception:

- 1) The player is playing as a keeper. Keepers can be in net for any duration of a game.
- 2) The player is playing less or more time due to an injury. A player injury may require someone to take the injured player's spot and this may force a coach to play a player longer than others. The injured player would most likely play a lot less than other players and may even be out for the rest of the game.
- 3) A player is playing less or more time due to a discipline issue. The coach may play players less or more time to compensate for a player being benched. A player might be benched for numerous reasons:
 - a. Unwillingness to play
 - b. An attempt by the coach to de-escalate situations where the best option is to sit the player (such as the player becoming too aggressive or showing unsporting behavior)
 - c. Concern for the players safety, i.e. a player has some injury that the coach does not want to risk getting worse (for example a sprained ankle)

Reasons We WILL NOT Allow Exception:

- 1) Players want to “play ____ position and only ____ position”.
- 2) The Coach attempts to justify the violation of the rule by saying there is not a full line on the bench, i.e. players would have to rotate double and even triple shifts.
- 3) The coach says they did not know about the equal play rule. Coaches are expected to know this as it is in the code of conduct as well as clearly indicated in the rules. Coaches will be informed of the rule at the coach clinics and information about the rule will be posted on the web site and at the facilities.

What You Can DO About It:

1. Watch carefully for players playing long periods of un-substituted play. It is usually the better players that a coach would play for longer periods of time in order to gain an unfair advantage in the rule violation. Most often it is a stronger male player. If possible try to time the players on their shifts. Look for players who always seem to be on the field and players who appear to be scoring most of the goals.
2. Be sensitive to comments or complaints from the opposing coach or players. Often these complaints are legitimate and a good indicator of problems. Listen to comments from other refs who may have had a problem with a team in previous games. Our experience has been that coaches will repeat the negative behaviour in subsequent games unless they have been called on it.
3. If you have Other Match Officials or league officials at your game then ask them to assist you in timing players on their shifts and to alert you of violations of equal play.
4. If you are concerned that a violation of the equal play rule is occurring then at a stoppage in play approach the offending coach and have a private conversation regarding the reasons why he is playing one player more or less than another and the need to adhere to the Code of Conduct and the rules.
5. The referee has the authority to deny a player substitution so you could indicate to the coach that a player who has not been substituted must leave the field or the offending player must stay off the field for a shift or two to make up equal play time.
6. If, after receiving a warning a coach persists to violate this rule, the coach may be issued a Yellow Card by the referee and reported to the league for further action.
7. Repeated violations may be punished by a Red card or the game may be suspended. All incidents of this nature will be reported to the league.
8. In circumstances where teams are not subscribing to the Code of Conduct, referees and league officials are authorized to terminate the game and declare a forfeit.
9. In If TWO red cards are given (coaches or players), the game is terminated and the offending team.
10. The referee will report, in writing, to the appropriate authority, any misconduct by players or coaches. The League Referee Coordinator/Discipline Committee will review all incidences of coach or player misconduct.