

## Taos Youth Soccer League

### Codes of Conduct, Team Philosophy, and Guidelines

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#### **Dear Parents,**

Welcome to the Taos Youth Soccer League. Our goal is to provide young players with a positive introduction to soccer in an environment that is educational, enjoyable, challenging, and safe. At the younger ages, our primary emphasis is on age-appropriate individual skill development, confidence with the ball, creativity, participation, and enjoyment of the game.

We believe young players learn best when they are given the freedom to experiment, make decisions, make mistakes, and discover solutions for themselves. Our coaches are there to teach and encourage, not to control every decision a child makes on the field. Developing confident, skillful players takes time, patience, repetition, and, most importantly, many opportunities to interact with the ball.

#### **Developing Confidence on the Ball**

At younger ages, dribbling is strongly encouraged. We want players to become comfortable with ball possession, changing direction, taking on opponents, protecting the ball, and trying creative solutions. A young player should not be afraid to dribble because they are worried that an adult will yell at them to pass.

For this reason, parents and spectators should not yell instructions such as ***"Pass the ball!"*** from the sideline. While passing is an important part of soccer, requiring young players to give up the ball before they have developed confidence with it can undermine the program's developmental goals.

Instead, encourage children to dribble, explore, create, and shoot.

We want young players to take chances. We want them to attempt to beat an opponent one-on-one. We want them to discover what happens when something works and what happens when it does not. Losing the ball while attempting a skill is part of learning. A child should never be afraid to try something because they are worried about making a mistake.

Our objective is to develop players who are comfortable and confident with the ball at their feet.

#### **Encourage Dribbling and Shooting**

Encourage young players to shoot whenever the opportunity presents itself. Scoring goals is exciting, builds confidence, and is one of the great joys of playing soccer. At these developmental ages, we want children attacking the goal, taking shots, and experiencing success.

***Encourage dribbling. Encourage shooting. Encourage creativity.***

We want games to be active and exciting. The more opportunities children have to dribble, shoot, score goals, and interact with the ball, the more opportunities they have to learn.

Although we do not officially keep score or track wins and losses, we absolutely want children scoring goals, and lots of them. The purpose of not keeping score is not to discourage competition or scoring. It is to remove the adult emphasis on the final result and place that emphasis instead on what the children are learning and doing on the field.

#### **Individual Development Before Team Tactics**

Our developmental philosophy is based on a simple progression: develop the individual player first, then teach that player how to function within a team.

At younger ages, players should spend considerable time developing individual technical abilities such as dribbling, ball control, turning, changing direction, receiving, shooting, coordination, balance, and confidence in

one-on-one situations.

As players mature, particularly as they approach approximately 12 to 14 years of age, we can progressively introduce passing combinations, movement off the ball, positional concepts, pattern play, and more sophisticated team tactics.

By that point, we want players to possess the individual technical ability and confidence necessary to make those concepts successful.

A player who is comfortable with the ball has choices. That player can dribble, pass, shoot, turn, protect the ball, or combine with teammates. Our objective is not simply to teach children to move the ball from one player to another. It is to develop players who possess the technical ability, confidence, and understanding to decide when to dribble, when to pass, and when to shoot.

### **Games Are Part of the Learning Process**

At the younger ages, games should be considered an extension of practice. Winning and losing are not tracked, official scores are not kept, and standings are not based on game results.

Coaches are on the field with the players in place of traditional referees. Their responsibility is not simply to enforce the rules. They encourage learning, explain situations, help children understand the game, reinforce appropriate skills, and create a positive environment where players can experiment and develop.

Coaches may stop play when necessary to explain a rule or help players understand what happened. At other times, letting play continue and allowing the children to solve the problem themselves may provide a better learning opportunity.

*The objective is always learning and development.*

### **The Parent's Role**

Parents and families are an essential part of this developmental environment. The most helpful thing a parent can provide from the sideline is positive encouragement.

Cheer for effort. Cheer for creativity. Cheer when a child attempts a new skill. Cheer for a great dribble, a good shot, a save, a strong defensive effort, or an act of sportsmanship. Celebrate improvement and courage, not simply outcomes.

Please allow the coaches to provide soccer instruction. Multiple adults shouting instructions can overwhelm young players, distract them from the game, and prevent them from learning to make their own decisions.

Please resist the natural temptation to shout "Pass!" every time your child receives the ball. Players will have plenty of time to learn sophisticated passing and team play as they mature. At the younger ages, we want them to develop a relationship with the ball and the confidence to use it.

Instead, encourage them to play, dribble, create, shoot, and have fun.

### **How We Measure Success**

At these ages, success is not measured by wins, losses, standings, or tournament results. Success is measured by development.

Is the player more comfortable with the ball than they were at the beginning of the season? Are they willing to dribble toward an opponent? Are they attempting new skills? Are they shooting with confidence? Are they beginning to make their own decisions? Are they learning from mistakes? Are they becoming more coordinated, creative, confident, and enthusiastic about playing soccer?

Those are meaningful measures of success.

Most importantly, we want children to love playing soccer and look forward to returning to the field. If we can develop players who are technically skillful, confident with the ball, willing to take risks, unafraid of mistakes, and excited to play, we will have given them the foundation they need for the next stage of their development.

As they grow older, we can teach increasingly sophisticated passing, combination play, positioning, movement, and team tactics. Those concepts become much more effective when they are built upon a strong foundation of individual technical ability and confidence.

**First, develop the player. Then develop the team.**

We look forward to working with your children and families and providing an environment in which young players can learn, experiment, compete, score goals, make mistakes, develop confidence, and, above all, enjoy playing soccer.

Sincerely,

**Taos Youth Soccer League**

## Taos Youth Soccer League

### Codes of Conduct, Developmental Team Philosophy, and Guidelines

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#### OUR DEVELOPMENTAL PHILOSOPHY

*First, develop the player. Then develop the team.*

- The primary purpose of the Taos Youth Soccer League is to provide children with an age-appropriate environment in which they can learn, develop skills, gain confidence, compete, and enjoy playing soccer.
- At the younger ages, individual technical development comes before team tactics. Our priority is developing players who are comfortable, creative, and confident with the ball at their feet.
- Young players need frequent opportunities to touch the ball, dribble, turn, change direction, take on opponents, shoot, score goals, make decisions, and solve problems for themselves.
- Mistakes are an essential part of learning. Players should never be afraid to attempt a skill because they fear making a mistake or disappointing an adult.
- As players mature, particularly as they approach approximately 12 to 14 years of age, coaches can progressively introduce passing combinations, movement off the ball, positional concepts, pattern play, and increasingly sophisticated team tactics.
- Our developmental progression is simple:

#### DEVELOP CONFIDENCE ON THE BALL

- At the younger ages, dribbling is strongly encouraged.
- Players should be encouraged to possess the ball, change direction, protect it, take on opponents one-on-one, and experiment with creative solutions.
- Losing possession while attempting to dribble or perform a skill is not necessarily a failure. It is part of learning.
- Coaches should provide players with opportunities to make their own decisions rather than constantly directing every action from the sideline.
- We want players to gradually develop the technical ability and confidence to recognize when to dribble, when to pass, and when to shoot.

#### ENCOURAGE DRIBBLING AND SHOOTING

- Young players should be encouraged to attack opponents, dribble toward goal, and shoot whenever opportunities arise.
- Scoring goals is exciting and is one of the great joys of soccer. We want children to experience that excitement.
- At the developmental ages, we want active games with plenty of dribbling, shooting, attacking, defending, and goals.
- We do not discourage scoring simply because scores are not officially kept. **The more opportunities children have to shoot and score, the more opportunities they have to learn.**
- Encourage dribbling. Encourage shooting. Encourage creativity.

#### GAMES ARE PART OF THE LEARNING PROCESS

- At the younger ages, games are an extension of practice and should be treated as another opportunity for development.
- **Winning and losing are not tracked, official scores are not kept, and standings are not based on game results.**
- The purpose of not keeping score is not to eliminate competition. Children naturally enjoy competing. The purpose is to prevent adults from allowing the result of a youth game to become more important than player development.
- Coaches may be on the field with younger players in place of traditional referees. In this role, coaches are teachers as well as game facilitators.
- Coaches may explain rules, demonstrate proper restarts, encourage appropriate skills, help children understand situations, and occasionally stop play when doing so provides an important learning opportunity.

- Coaches should also recognize when **not** to intervene. Allowing children to make decisions, solve problems, and learn from the consequences of those decisions is an important part of player development.
- Games should provide children with opportunities to experiment, compete, make mistakes, succeed, score goals, and enjoy playing soccer.

#### **AGE-APPROPRIATE DEVELOPMENT**

- Coaching should reflect the physical, cognitive, emotional, and technical development of the players.
- Younger children should not be expected to understand or execute sophisticated tactical systems designed for older players or adults.
- At younger ages, instruction should emphasize fundamental individual skills, including dribbling, ball control, turning, changing direction, receiving, shooting, coordination, balance, spatial awareness, and confidence in one-on-one situations.
- As players mature and build technical confidence, coaches can progressively introduce passing, combination play, movement away from the ball, positioning, pattern play, and team tactics.
- Players develop at different rates. Coaches and parents should avoid comparing one child's development unnecessarily with another's.
- Development should be measured by the progress of the individual player over time.

#### **TEAM GUIDELINES**

##### **MUTUAL SUPPORT**

- We will consistently work to help one another improve. A team's strength depends upon the development, commitment, and character of its members. We will not tolerate unproductive criticism, insults, bullying, or belittling teammates.
- Encourage teammates when they attempt new skills, even when those attempts are unsuccessful.
- Recognize the accomplishments of others and support teammates when they make mistakes.
- Players should feel safe experimenting and learning without fear of ridicule.
- **We improve together.**

##### **BE COURTEOUS AND RESPECTFUL**

- Show respect for the game and for your teammates and coaches by arriving prepared and on time for practices, games, and other team activities.
- Conduct yourself in a manner that reflects positively on yourself, your family, your team, and the Taos Youth Soccer League.
- Treat teammates, opponents, coaches, parents, spectators, volunteers, and game officials with respect.
- Follow the rules of the game and demonstrate good sportsmanship.

##### **EMBRACE HUMILITY**

- Be proud of your accomplishments without diminishing others.
- Carry yourself with confidence and humility. Allow your effort, character, development, and play to speak for themselves.
- Celebrate the accomplishments of your teammates as well as your own.

##### **NO TRASH TALKING OR TAUNTING**

- Trash talking, taunting, intimidating, insulting, or deliberately embarrassing another player will not be tolerated.
- Competition should never come at the expense of sportsmanship.
- Compete hard while respecting the people you are competing against.

##### **RESPECT YOUR PHYSICAL WELL-BEING**

- Players should drink plenty of water, eat nutritious foods, get adequate rest, and arrive prepared for physical activity.
- Listen to your body. If you experience pain, illness, dizziness, unusual fatigue, or symptoms of an injury, tell a coach immediately.
- Players should never feel pressured to continue participating when doing so could jeopardize their health or safety.

## **RESPECT YOURSELF**

- Give your best reasonable effort whenever you step onto the field.
- Coaches do not expect perfection. They expect effort, a willingness to learn, and a positive attitude.
- Improvement requires patience, repetition, consistency, and practice.
- Do not be afraid of mistakes. A mistake made while genuinely attempting to learn or perform a skill provides an opportunity to improve.
- Challenge yourself to become a better player than you were yesterday.

## **ACCEPT CHALLENGES**

- Youth soccer should be enjoyable, but learning new skills will sometimes be difficult.
- Players will make mistakes, lose the ball, miss shots, lose one-on-one challenges, and experience frustration. These experiences are part of learning.
- Do not allow mistakes to prevent you from trying again.
- Learn from setbacks, remain positive, and continue working.
- One of the greatest rewards in sport is accomplishing something you once thought you could not do.

## **COMMITMENT TO YOUR TEAM**

- Regular attendance helps both individual and team development.
- Players should make every reasonable effort to attend scheduled practices, games, and team activities.
- We recognize that children have important responsibilities outside soccer, including family, school, health, and other commitments.
- When an absence is necessary, parents or guardians should communicate with the coaching staff as early as reasonably possible.

## **REPRESENT YOUR TEAM WELL**

- Players should demonstrate good sportsmanship, courtesy, and respect during practices, games, and other league activities.
- Remember that your behavior reflects upon yourself, your family, your team, and the Taos Youth Soccer League.

## **NO PROFANITY, FIGHTING, BULLYING, OR RETALIATION**

- Practices and games should provide a safe, positive, and supportive environment.
- Fighting, bullying, threatening behavior, harassment, retaliation, and profanity directed toward others will not be tolerated.
- If a problem occurs, tell a coach. Do not retaliate.
- Allow coaches and responsible adults to address inappropriate behavior.

## **PROHIBITED SUBSTANCES**

- The possession or use of alcohol, illegal drugs, vaping products, tobacco products, or other prohibited substances during Taos Youth Soccer League activities is prohibited.
- Any incident involving prohibited substances will be addressed by appropriate league officials in accordance with league policies.

## **PLAYER GUIDELINES**

Players are expected to:

- Attend practices, games, and team activities whenever reasonably possible.
- Arrive on time, appropriately dressed, equipped, and prepared to participate.
- Have a parent or guardian notify the coaching staff when an absence is necessary.
- Give their best reasonable effort while maintaining a willingness to learn.
- Bring appropriate equipment, including shin guards, soccer socks that completely cover the shin guards, water, appropriate footwear, and clothing suitable for weather conditions.
- Wear required protective equipment. Players may not participate in activities requiring shin guards without them.
- Treat teammates, opponents, coaches, and others respectfully.
- Encourage teammates who are learning or attempting new skills.

- Be willing to dribble, shoot, experiment, and make decisions.
- Understand that losing the ball or missing a shot while attempting something is part of learning.
- Avoid criticizing teammates for mistakes.
- Ask permission before leaving the practice or team area.
- Never leave the facility without the knowledge of the responsible coach and parent or guardian.
- Tell a coach immediately when injured, ill, experiencing pain, or unable to participate safely.
- Never hide an injury to continue playing.
- Follow appropriate return-to-play procedures following an injury.
- Stay home when experiencing a contagious illness or when participation could jeopardize your health or the health of others.
- Respect and care for league equipment.
- Help collect equipment following practices and team activities.
- Communicate respectfully when frustrated or disappointed.
- Be honest with teammates, coaches, and parents.
- Ask questions when you do not understand something.
- Most importantly, play, learn, experiment, compete, and enjoy the game.

## **PLAYING OPPORTUNITIES AND PLAYER DEVELOPMENT**

- At the developmental ages, playing opportunities should support the league's emphasis on participation, learning, and age-appropriate development.
- Coaches should provide players with meaningful opportunities to participate and apply the skills being taught in practice.
- Players should have opportunities to experience different game situations rather than being prematurely limited to highly specialized roles.
- Coaches should avoid sacrificing long-term player development simply to obtain a short-term game result.
- Playing-time decisions should align with Taos Youth Soccer League policies, player safety, age-group requirements, attendance, and the program's developmental objectives.

## **BEHAVIOR AND DISCIPLINE**

- Behavioral concerns should be addressed fairly, consistently, and in an age-appropriate manner.
- Whenever circumstances allow, discipline should be progressive and educational.
- A player may receive a reminder, be temporarily removed from an activity, have a parent or guardian contacted, or receive additional consequences consistent with league policy.
- Serious or repeated violations may be referred to appropriate Taos Youth Soccer League officials.
- The purpose of discipline is to protect players, maintain a positive environment, teach appropriate behavior, and provide children with an opportunity to learn from their actions.

## **PARENT AND GUARDIAN GUIDELINES**

- Parents and guardians are essential partners in creating a positive developmental environment.
- Our shared objective is to help children become skillful, confident, creative players who enjoy soccer and want to continue playing.

## **ENCOURAGE DEVELOPMENT, NOT RESULTS**

- At the younger ages, do not measure your child's success by the score of a game.
- Winning and losing are not officially tracked, and scores are not kept for standings.
- Instead, look for development. Is your child becoming more comfortable with the ball? Are they attempting new skills? Are they willing to dribble? Are they shooting? Are they making their own decisions? Are they becoming more confident?
- Celebrate effort, improvement, creativity, courage, and sportsmanship.
- Remember that a child can play extremely well in a game their team appears to lose, and can learn very little in a game their team appears to win.

## **ENCOURAGE DRIBBLING**

- At the younger ages, please do not yell "Pass!" or "Pass the ball!" from the sideline.
- We intentionally encourage young players to dribble and become comfortable possessing the ball.
- A player who attempts to beat an opponent and loses possession has not necessarily done something

- wrong. The player may be practicing exactly the skill we are trying to develop.
- Repeatedly instructing children to pass can discourage them from experimenting and can make them afraid to possess the ball.
- Passing will become increasingly important as players mature. At the younger ages, we first want children developing confidence and individual technical ability.

### **ENCOURAGE SHOOTING AND GOAL SCORING**

- Encourage players to shoot.
- Celebrate goals and attempts at goal.
- We want children attacking, shooting, and scoring.
- Not officially keeping score does not mean goals are unimportant. Goals are an important and exciting part of soccer.
- The distinction is simple: we encourage children to score goals, but we do not allow the final score to determine whether their experience was successful.

### **ALLOW PLAYERS TO MAKE DECISIONS**

- Please avoid giving continuous tactical instructions from the sideline.
- Children need opportunities to see the game, make decisions, experience the consequences of those decisions, and develop their own understanding.
- When adults continually tell children where to run, when to pass, when to shoot, and what to do with the ball, the adults are making the decisions rather than the players.
- Decision-making is a skill, and like every other soccer skill, it must be practiced.

### **ALLOW THE COACHES TO COACH**

- During practices and games, coaches are responsible for soccer instruction.
- Sideline instructions that conflict with coaching objectives can confuse young players.
- At the younger ages, a coach may intentionally encourage a child to dribble in a situation where an adult spectator believes the child should pass. This is part of the developmental process.
- The most valuable contributions parents can make from the sideline are positive encouragement, enthusiasm, and support.
- Let the children play. Let them make decisions. Let them make mistakes. Let them learn.

### **WHAT YOU CAN EXPECT FROM OUR COACHES**

Coaches will make reasonable efforts to:

- Provide age-appropriate instruction.
- Emphasize individual technical development at younger ages.
- Encourage dribbling, ball mastery, creativity, and shooting.
- Create frequent opportunities for players to interact with the ball.
- Encourage children to make their own decisions.
- Allow players to make mistakes without fear of embarrassment or criticism.
- Introduce passing and team concepts progressively as players develop.
- Create a safe, organized, positive, and enjoyable learning environment.
- Teach the rules and principles of soccer in an age-appropriate manner.
- Encourage sportsmanship, responsibility, confidence, and respect.
- Treat players fairly and respectfully.
- Communicate important information to families.
- Place player development and safety ahead of game results.

### **COACHES ON THE FIELD**

- At younger developmental levels, coaches may be on the playing field rather than using traditional referees.
- Coaches should use this opportunity to teach rather than simply officiate.
- They may explain rules, help with restarts, provide encouragement, and briefly stop play when an important learning opportunity arises.
- Coaches should avoid unnecessarily controlling the game. Children also need uninterrupted opportunities

to play, experiment, and solve problems independently.

### **TRANSPORTATION AND PICKUP**

- Parents and guardians are responsible for safe and reliable transportation to and from practices, games, and team activities.
- Players should arrive on time and prepared.
- Players should be picked up promptly following activities.
- Never leave a child at the field unless the responsible coach or designated adult is present.
- If someone other than a parent or guardian will pick up a child, follow applicable league procedures and clearly communicate the arrangement.

### **HEALTH AND SAFETY**

- Inform coaches of information necessary for your child's safe participation, particularly injuries or activity restrictions.
- Keep required emergency contact and medical information current.
- Follow appropriate return-to-play procedures following injuries.
- Coaches are not substitutes for qualified medical professionals.
- Player health and safety always take priority over practices, games, goals, or results.

### **WEATHER**

- Activities may continue during manageable weather conditions when coaches determine that conditions are safe.
- Practices or games may be delayed, shortened, relocated, or canceled because of lightning, extreme temperatures, unsafe fields, heavy precipitation, or other dangerous conditions.
- Never leave your child unattended during questionable weather unless you have confirmed that the responsible coach or designated adult is present.

### **SUPPORT ALL PLAYERS**

- Cheer positively and enthusiastically.
- Support the entire team, not only your own child.
- Recognize good sportsmanship and appropriate play by both teams.
- Never ridicule a player for making a mistake.
- Remember that the players are children learning a difficult sport.

### **RESPECT OPPONENTS AND GAME OFFICIALS**

- Treat opposing players, coaches, families, and game officials respectfully.
- Parents and spectators should never argue with, confront, threaten, insult, or attempt to intimidate another participant or official.
- At developmental ages where coaches are on the field instead of referees, parents should respect the coaches' role as teachers and game facilitators.
- When referees are used, remember that many youth referees are themselves young people learning and developing.

### **MINIMIZE SIDELINE DISTRACTIONS**

- Once players enter the playing area, allow them to focus on the game, their teammates, and their coaches.
- Avoid calling players away from play or continuously giving instructions.
- Positive encouragement such as "Great effort!" "Keep trying!" "Great idea!" or simply cheering is far more helpful than telling a player exactly what to do.

### **SCHOOL, FAMILY, AND OTHER RESPONSIBILITIES**

- We recognize that young players have responsibilities beyond soccer.
- School, family responsibilities, health concerns, religious observances, and other important commitments may occasionally require an absence.
- Communicate these situations to coaches as early as reasonably possible.

## COMMUNICATING WITH COACHES

- Attend scheduled parent meetings whenever possible.
- Bring individual concerns directly to the appropriate coach or league representative.
- Arrange an appropriate time for private discussions rather than attempting lengthy conversations immediately before practices or games.
- When possible, avoid initiating difficult conversations immediately following an emotional game.
- Communicate respectfully and constructively.

## PROTECT THE DEVELOPMENTAL ENVIRONMENT

- Adults should remember that children hear and are affected by sideline conversations.
- Negative comments about players, coaches, opponents, officials, or other families can undermine the environment we are working to create.
- Parents and guardians should model the sportsmanship, patience, respect, and self-control we expect from our players.
- Serious or repeated violations of league expectations may be referred to appropriate Taos Youth Soccer League officials.
- Whenever reasonably possible, consequences for adult behavior should be directed toward the responsible adult rather than unnecessarily penalizing the child.

## HOW WE MEASURE SUCCESS

At the younger ages, success is not determined by wins, losses, standings, or tournament results.

We ask coaches and parents to consider different questions:

- Is the player more comfortable with the ball?
- Is the player willing to dribble toward an opponent?
- Is the player attempting new skills?
- Is the player shooting with confidence?
- Is the player beginning to make independent decisions?
- Is the player learning from mistakes rather than becoming afraid of them?
- Is the player becoming more coordinated and technically capable?
- Is the player developing confidence?
- Is the player demonstrating sportsmanship and respect?
- Is the player excited to return to practice and play again?

*These are meaningful measures of developmental success.*

## REMEMBER WHY WE ARE HERE

- Youth soccer belongs first and foremost to the children who play it.
- At the younger ages, our responsibility is not to create winning teams as quickly as possible. Our responsibility is to develop players.
- We want children touching the ball, dribbling, shooting, scoring goals, defending, experimenting, competing, making mistakes, solving problems, and learning.
- We want children to leave the field more confident and more excited about soccer than when they arrived.
- As players mature, we can progressively teach passing combinations, movement, positioning, pattern play, and increasingly sophisticated team tactics. Those concepts become far more effective when they are built upon a strong foundation of individual technical ability and confidence.
- Coaches, parents, guardians, volunteers, and league officials share responsibility for protecting this developmental environment.

*Encourage dribbling. Encourage shooting. Encourage creativity. Encourage effort.  
Allow mistakes. Celebrate improvement.*

**FIRST, DEVELOP THE PLAYER. THEN DEVELOP THE TEAM.**

## Taos High School Soccer Program Codes of Conduct

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### **Purpose**

The Taos Youth Soccer League (TYSL) is committed to providing a positive, inclusive, safe, and age-appropriate environment where participants can learn, play, experiment, and develop a genuine enjoyment of soccer.

TYSL is a developmental youth soccer program, not a competitive league. We do not keep official scores, standings, or win-loss records, and games are played without referees. Our emphasis is on participation, individual development, creativity, sportsmanship, confidence, and enjoyment of the game.

Participants come to soccer with different experiences, abilities, interests, and reasons for playing. Every participant deserves to feel welcome, valued, and included.

The conduct of participants, coaches, parents, guardians, and spectators should always support this mission.

### **PARTICIPANTS' CONDUCT**

Every participant involved with the Taos Youth Soccer League is expected to treat teammates, opponents, coaches, parents, guardians, and spectators with respect.

Soccer should provide participants with opportunities to develop not only physical and technical abilities but also confidence, independence, responsibility, cooperation, and sportsmanship.

Participants are expected to:

- Treat teammates and opponents with respect.
- Listen when coaches are providing instruction.
- Participate to the best of their ability.
- Encourage teammates.
- Avoid teasing, bullying, name-calling, intimidation, or inappropriate physical behavior.
- Avoid foul, insulting, discriminatory, or abusive language.
- Never intentionally attempt to injure another participant.
- Avoid retaliation when accidentally or intentionally fouled.
- Respect another participant's physical and personal boundaries.
- Demonstrate good sportsmanship.
- Help create an environment where everyone feels welcome.
- Accept that mistakes are a normal and necessary part of learning.
- Allow teammates to learn and make mistakes without criticism or ridicule.
- Play fairly and honestly.
- Have fun and allow others to have fun.

Participants should understand that everyone develops differently. A participant who is more experienced or physically developed should never ridicule, intimidate, or intentionally dominate a less experienced participant.

Likewise, less experienced participants should be encouraged and supported as they develop their abilities. Every participant belongs.

### **PARTICIPANT CONDUCT DURING PRACTICES AND GAMES**

During practices and games, participants should be encouraged to play freely, creatively, and respectfully.

Participants are encouraged to:

- Dribble the ball.
- Shoot.
- Take on opponents.
- Try new moves.
- Use both feet.
- Experiment with different ways of controlling the ball.
- Make independent decisions.
- Solve problems.
- Be creative.
- Make mistakes and try again.

A participant should never be criticized simply for attempting something creative that does not succeed.

Young participants should not be expected to play soccer like adults. Chasing the ball, experimenting, losing possession, missing shots, and making unexpected decisions are normal parts of learning the game.

As participants mature, particularly in the 12 to 14 age groups, coaches will increasingly introduce passing, receiving, positional awareness, movement, spacing, combination play, and pattern play.

These concepts should build upon, rather than replace, the creativity and individual ball skills developed during the younger years.

### **EQUAL PLAYING TIME**

**All participants will receive equal playing time.**

Playing time will not be based upon:

- Skill level
- Athletic ability
- Previous soccer experience
- Practice attendance
- Goals scored
- Defensive ability
- A participant's perceived importance to the team
- A participant's current level of development

The primary exceptions are injury, illness, or another situation affecting the health or safety of the participant. Equal playing time does not require constant substitutions. Coaches should minimize unnecessary substitutions and provide participants with meaningful periods of uninterrupted play.

Participants need time on the field to become involved in the game, interact with the ball, learn to pace themselves, solve problems, and gradually understand the flow of soccer.

*There are no bench players in TYSL. Every participant is a player, and every player plays.*

### **PARENT AND GUARDIAN PARTICIPATION**

Parents and guardians are encouraged to participate positively in TYSL activities.

Volunteers are an important part of a community youth soccer program, and assistance is greatly appreciated.

Volunteer participation, however, will never affect a participant's playing time or standing within the league.

A successful developmental program requires cooperation among participants, families, coaches, volunteers, and league leadership. Everyone involved should understand and support the developmental philosophy of TYSL.

### **SUPPORT YOUR PARTICIPANT AND THE COACHES**

Participants benefit from positive support at home, during practices, and during games.

Parents and guardians are encouraged to celebrate:

- Effort
- Creativity
- Improvement
- Courage
- Sportsmanship
- Trying something new
- Perseverance
- Enjoyment of the game

Parents and guardians should avoid comparing participants based on ability, goals scored, athleticism, or other measures of performance.

The role of the coach is to create an environment in which participants can explore soccer, develop skills, solve problems, and gradually become independent players.

Parents and guardians should support this process by allowing coaches to coach and participants to play.

### **LET THE PARTICIPANTS PLAY**

One of the most important principles of TYSL is that participants must be allowed to make their own decisions on the field.

Parents and spectators should avoid constantly shouting instructions such as:

- "Pass!"
- "Shoot!"
- "Kick it!"
- "Get rid of it!"
- "Stay there!"
- "Go!"

Although well-intended, constant instructions can interfere with a participant's ability to observe the game, think independently, make decisions, and learn from the results.

Positive encouragement is welcome.

Cheer for the participants. Allow the participants to play.

The soccer field should be a place where participants learn to make decisions for themselves rather than constantly looking toward adults for instructions.

### **COMMUNICATION WITH COACHES**

TYSL welcomes respectful questions, suggestions, and constructive feedback.

Parents and guardians with questions or concerns should communicate directly with the appropriate coach or league representative.

Whenever possible, concerns should be discussed away from practices and games so coaches can devote their attention to participants.

Parents and guardians should not confront coaches during practices or games.

When a concern involves participant safety or requires immediate attention, it should be brought to the attention of a coach or league representative immediately.

All communication should remain respectful and focused on creating the best possible developmental environment for participants.

## **TRAINING SESSIONS**

Parents and guardians are welcome to observe training sessions unless otherwise directed for safety or organizational reasons.

Training sessions are learning environments.

Participants need opportunities to listen, experiment, concentrate, make mistakes, solve problems, and interact with coaches and teammates.

Parents and spectators should avoid interrupting practices or providing separate instructions from the sideline.

During training, participants should receive their soccer instruction from the coaching staff.

## **CONDUCT OF PARENTS, GUARDIANS, AND SPECTATORS**

The standards of respect and sportsmanship expected of participants and coaches also apply to parents, guardians, and spectators.

Spectators are expected to:

- Provide positive encouragement.
- Treat all participants respectfully.
- Treat coaches and other families respectfully.
- Avoid foul, abusive, threatening, discriminatory, or inappropriate language.
- Never ridicule a participant for making a mistake.
- Avoid criticizing participants from either team.
- Avoid coaching from the sideline.
- Respect the developmental purpose of the league.
- Avoid arguments with other spectators.
- Avoid confrontations with coaches.
- Remain outside the playing area unless asked to enter by a coach.
- Respect the decisions made cooperatively by coaches during games.
- Model appropriate behavior and sportsmanship.

Because TYSL games are played without referees, coaches work cooperatively to help participants understand the rules and resolve situations that occur during play.

Parents and spectators should allow coaches to manage these situations.

The absence of referees does not give spectators responsibility for officiating games from the sideline.

## **GAMES WITHOUT REFEREES**

TYSL games are intentionally played without referees.

This approach allows games to remain focused on participation, learning, sportsmanship, and development.

Coaches are expected to cooperate with one another to address situations that arise during play and to help participants understand the basic rules of soccer.

Participants should gradually learn to recognize fouls, respect opponents, acknowledge when a ball has gone out of play, and understand that honesty and fairness are part of the game.

Disagreements should be handled calmly.

Parents and spectators should not enter the field, argue over calls, or attempt to officiate from the sideline.

The adults involved should model cooperation and respect.

### **NO SCORES, STANDINGS, OR WIN-LOSS RECORDS**

TYSL does not maintain official scores, league standings, or win-loss records.

This is intentional and fundamental to our developmental philosophy.

Games provide opportunities for participants to apply skills and experience soccer in a game environment. They are not intended to determine which team or group of participants is better than another.

Coaches, parents, guardians, and spectators should not create unofficial standings, emphasize scores, or treat games as if the outcome is the primary measure of success.

A successful TYSL game is one in which participants play, learn, experiment, interact with the ball, demonstrate sportsmanship, and want to play again.

### **PRINCIPLES OF CONDUCT FOR COACHES**

#### **SAFETY**

A coach's first responsibility is the health, safety, and well-being of every participant.

Coaches will:

- Maintain appropriate supervision of participants.
- Inspect the playing area for obvious hazards.
- Encourage the use of appropriate soccer equipment.
- Ensure shin guards are worn when required.
- Use age-appropriate activities.
- Teach safe methods of play.
- Respond appropriately to injuries and illnesses.
- Have reasonable access to emergency contact information.
- Know how to contact emergency services.
- Communicate injuries or significant safety concerns to parents or guardians.
- Never knowingly encourage an injured or ill participant to continue playing.
- Consider environmental conditions, including heat, cold, lightning, and field conditions.
- Continue developing their knowledge of safe and age-appropriate coaching practices.

Participant safety takes priority over practices, games, or any other soccer activity.

### **PLAYER DEVELOPMENT**

Coaches will place participant development ahead of competition or game results.

Coaches will:

- Develop each participant's enjoyment and appreciation of soccer.
- Provide equal playing time.

- Recognize that participants develop at different rates.
- Provide age-appropriate instruction.
- Encourage frequent interaction with the ball.
- Encourage dribbling.
- Encourage shooting.
- Encourage creativity.
- Encourage participants to take on opponents.
- Encourage experimentation and problem-solving.
- Allow participants to make mistakes.
- Provide positive and constructive feedback.
- Minimize unnecessary substitutions.
- Avoid excessive sideline instruction.
- Encourage independent decision-making.
- Create enjoyable and engaging training sessions.
- Gradually introduce more advanced concepts as participants mature.
- Place greater emphasis on passing, positional awareness, combination play, and pattern play in the 12 to 14 age groups.
- Help participants develop the skills and confidence necessary to move into more advanced levels of soccer if they choose to do so.

*The ball should be the participant's primary teacher, and the coach should help create the environment in which that learning can occur.*

## **ETHICS AND PROFESSIONALISM FOR COACHES**

Coaches have an important responsibility as adult role model.

Coaches will:

- Treat every participant with dignity and respect.
- Provide equal opportunities for participation.
- Avoid favoritism.
- Never use playing time as a reward or punishment.
- Never reduce playing time because of practice attendance.
- Avoid humiliating or embarrassing participants.
- Never use threatening, abusive, discriminatory, or degrading language.
- Encourage sportsmanship, honesty, fairness, and responsibility.
- Respect opposing participants, coaches, parents, and guardians.
- Work cooperatively with other coaches.
- Resolve disagreements calmly and professionally.
- Model the behavior expected from participants and families.
- Maintain appropriate adult-participant boundaries.
- Place participant welfare ahead of personal interests.
- Remember that youth soccer belongs to the participants.

## **COACHING THE YOUNGER PARTICIPANT**

Coaches working with younger age groups should recognize that soccer development begins with the individual participant and the ball.

Young participants need opportunities to:

Touch the ball. Dribble the ball. Control the ball. Protect the ball. Shoot the ball. Experiment with the ball. Make mistakes with the ball. Become confident with the ball.

Coaches should resist the temptation to organize young participants into rigid tactical systems too early.

Passing, positional awareness, tactical organization, and pattern play will become increasingly important as participants mature, particularly in the 12 to 14 age groups.

The younger years should establish the technical, physical, creative, and emotional foundation upon which those later concepts can be built.

### **RESPONDING TO INAPPROPRIATE CONDUCT**

TYSL recognizes that participants are learning social and emotional skills as well as soccer skills. When inappropriate behavior occurs, the first response should generally be educational and restorative, not punitive.

Depending upon the circumstances, coaches may:

- Stop the activity.
- Separate participants when necessary.
- Allow participants time to regain control.
- Discuss what occurred.
- Help participants understand how their actions affected others.
- Review the expected behavior.
- Facilitate an appropriate apology or restorative conversation.
- Communicate with parents or guardians.
- Develop a plan for returning the participant successfully to the activity.

Serious or repeated behavior involving bullying, harassment, threats, physical aggression, discriminatory conduct, or behavior that threatens the safety of others may require additional action by TYSL leadership.

Parents, guardians, and spectators who engage in threatening, abusive, disruptive, or persistently inappropriate behavior may be asked to leave the playing area.

The objective of corrective action should be to protect participants, restore a positive environment, teach appropriate behavior, and preserve the opportunity to participate whenever reasonably possible.

### **OUR SHARED COMMITMENT**

Everyone participating in the Taos Youth Soccer League shares responsibility for maintaining the environment we want for our participants.

We commit to:

- Put participant safety first.
- Provide equal playing opportunities.
- Support age-appropriate development.
- Encourage dribbling, shooting, and creativity.
- Allow participants to make mistakes.
- Encourage independent decision-making.
- Introduce tactical concepts when developmentally appropriate.
- Treat everyone with dignity and respect.
- Reject bullying, harassment, intimidation, and discrimination.
- Support coaches without interfering with instruction.
- Keep adult behavior appropriate for a youth environment.
- Remember that games belong to the participants.
- Keep competition in its proper perspective.
- Protect the enjoyment of the game.

TYSL does not measure success through scores, standings, championships, or win-loss records.

We measure success by whether participants are developing skills, confidence, creativity, independence, sportsmanship, friendships, and a genuine desire to continue playing soccer.

*Every participant plays. Every participant learns. Every participant belongs.*

## **Taos High School Soccer Program Anti-Bullying and Conduct Policy**

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### **Purpose**

The Taos Youth Soccer League is dedicated to providing a positive, respectful, safe, and inclusive environment for all players, coaches, families, volunteers, and spectators. Our goal is to create an environment where young players can learn, develop skills and confidence, build friendships, and enjoy the game of soccer.

Bullying, harassment, intimidation, retaliation, and other forms of inappropriate conduct have no place in the Taos Youth Soccer League. These expectations apply during practices, games, team activities, league events, electronic communications, social media, and other interactions involving league participants and families.

This policy establishes expectations for players, parents and guardians, coaches, volunteers, and spectators, as well as procedures for addressing inappropriate behavior.

### **Section 1: Definition of Bullying and Misconduct**

Bullying is repeated or deliberate behavior intended to intimidate, humiliate, exclude, threaten, or cause physical or emotional harm to another person. Depending upon the seriousness of the conduct, a single severe incident may also require immediate intervention.

Bullying or misconduct may include, but is not limited to:

- Verbal abuse, insults, threats, or inappropriate comments.
- Teasing, mocking, or name-calling.
- Deliberately excluding or isolating another player.
- Cyberbullying or inappropriate use of social media, messaging, or other electronic communication.
- Physical intimidation, aggression, or fighting.
- Sexual harassment or inappropriate comments or conduct.
- Discriminatory or degrading comments.
- Deliberately embarrassing or humiliating another player.
- Encouraging others to bully, exclude, intimidate, or harass another person.
- Retaliating against someone who reports inappropriate behavior.

Normal disagreements, competitive situations, accidental contact, and occasional conflicts between children are not automatically considered bullying. Whenever appropriate, coaches should use these situations as opportunities to teach communication, sportsmanship, empathy, conflict resolution, and appropriate behavior.

### **Section 2: Expectations for Players**

All players are expected to:

- Treat teammates, opponents, coaches, volunteers, parents, guardians, and spectators with respect.
- Encourage and support teammates, particularly when they are learning new skills or make mistakes.
- Avoid teasing, name-calling, bullying, intimidation, exclusion, and retaliatory behavior.

- Never ridicule another player for losing the ball, missing a shot, making a mistake, or attempting a new skill.
- Understand that mistakes are an important part of learning and player development.
- Demonstrate good sportsmanship during practices and games.
- Use social media and electronic communication responsibly and respectfully.
- Tell a coach, parent, guardian, or another trusted adult if they experience or witness bullying, harassment, or inappropriate behavior.
- Be honest when discussing conflicts or incidents with coaches or league representatives.
- Participate appropriately in restorative conversations or other efforts intended to resolve conflicts and rebuild trust.

Players are encouraged to support one another. A strong developmental environment is one in which children feel comfortable experimenting, making mistakes, learning new skills, and expressing themselves without fear of ridicule or embarrassment.

### Section 3: Expectations for Parents and Guardians

All parents and guardians are expected to:

- Support all players and coaches in a positive and age-appropriate manner.
- Model the sportsmanship, patience, respect, and self-control expected of our players.
- Encourage effort, learning, skill development, creativity, and enjoyment rather than focusing primarily on game results.
- Refrain from yelling negative or excessive tactical instructions from the sideline.
- Allow coaches to provide soccer instruction and facilitate the game.
- Never insult, threaten, intimidate, ridicule, or confront players, coaches, volunteers, or other families.
- Address concerns privately and respectfully with the appropriate coach or league representative.
- Avoid confrontational discussions during or immediately following games.
- Refrain from publicly criticizing individual children, coaches, volunteers, or other families.
- Avoid spreading rumors or creating unnecessary conflict or division among teams or families.
- Use social media and electronic communications responsibly.
- Encourage children to report bullying, harassment, or other inappropriate behavior.

At the younger developmental ages, parents should remember that children are learning. Mistakes, missed shots, lost possession, unsuccessful dribbling attempts, and incorrect decisions are normal parts of player development and should never result in ridicule, criticism, or negative sideline behavior.

### Section 4: Expectations for Coaches

Coaches have a particular responsibility for maintaining a safe, positive, and developmentally appropriate environment.

Coaches are expected to:

- Treat every player with dignity and respect.
- Provide age-appropriate instruction and expectations.
- Encourage players to experiment, make decisions, and learn from mistakes.
- Encourage individual skill development, confidence with the ball, creativity, dribbling, and shooting.
- Never ridicule or humiliate a child for making a mistake.

- Address bullying, harassment, intimidation, retaliation, or inappropriate conduct when it occurs.
- Listen respectfully when a player, parent, or guardian reports a concern.
- Avoid favoritism or retaliatory treatment following a complaint.
- Model appropriate sportsmanship toward opposing players, coaches, families, and spectators.
- Communicate concerns involving player behavior to parents or guardians when appropriate.
- Refer serious or repeated incidents to the appropriate Taos Youth Soccer League representatives.

Discipline should be educational whenever reasonably possible. The objective is to correct inappropriate behavior while helping young players understand how their actions affect others.

### **Section 5: Reporting and Responding to Concerns**

Any player, parent, guardian, coach, volunteer, or league participant may report bullying, harassment, or serious misconduct to the appropriate coach or designated Taos Youth Soccer League representative.

Reports should be handled as privately, respectfully, and promptly as reasonably possible.

When an incident is reported:

- The immediate priority will be the safety and well-being of the children involved.
- Appropriate adults should listen to the individuals involved before reaching conclusions.
- Parents or guardians may be contacted when appropriate.
- The response should consider the player's age, the seriousness of the behavior, whether the behavior was intentional, whether similar incidents have occurred previously, and the effect on other participants.
- Serious or repeated incidents may be referred directly to Taos Youth Soccer League leadership.
- Conduct that may violate applicable law or create an immediate safety concern may be referred to the appropriate authorities.
- Retaliation against anyone who makes a good-faith report or participates in addressing a concern will not be tolerated.

### **Section 6: Restorative Approach**

Whenever appropriate, the Taos Youth Soccer League will seek to use conflict as an opportunity for learning, accountability, and growth.

For less serious incidents, coaches or league representatives may use restorative practices that encourage players to:

- Explain what happened.
- Listen to the perspectives of others involved.
- Understand how their words or actions affected another person.
- Accept responsibility when appropriate.
- Apologize or take reasonable steps to repair harm.
- Agree upon expectations for future behavior.
- Rebuild trust with teammates and coaches.

Restorative practices do not eliminate consequences when consequences are necessary. They are intended to help children understand their behavior, accept responsibility, repair harm when possible, and make better decisions in the future.

### Section 7: Consequences for Players

Disciplinary responses should be age-appropriate, proportionate to the behavior, and consistent with Taos Youth Soccer League policies.

Whenever circumstances allow, progressive intervention may include:

| <b>Infraction</b>                      | <b>Possible Response</b>                                                                                                                                                                                    |
|----------------------------------------|-------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>First or Minor Offense</b>          | Verbal reminder or warning, parent notification when appropriate, and a restorative discussion with the coach.                                                                                              |
| <b>Repeated Offense</b>                | Parent or guardian meeting, behavioral expectations or agreement, restorative intervention, and possible temporary removal from an activity.                                                                |
| <b>Continued or Serious Misconduct</b> | Referral to Taos Youth Soccer League leadership and possible suspension from practices, games, or other league activities consistent with league policy.                                                    |
| <b>Severe Offense</b>                  | Immediate removal from the activity when necessary to protect participants, followed by review by appropriate Taos Youth Soccer League representatives and additional action consistent with league policy. |

The purpose of discipline is to maintain safety, protect the developmental environment, establish accountability, and help young players learn appropriate behavior.

### Section 8: Consequences for Parents, Guardians, and Spectators

Adults are expected to model appropriate behavior for young players.

Depending upon the seriousness or frequency of inappropriate conduct, responses may include:

| <b>Infraction</b>                      | <b>Possible Response</b>                                                                                                                                   |
|----------------------------------------|------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------------|
| <b>First or Minor Offense</b>          | Verbal or written reminder or warning from a coach or league representative.                                                                               |
| <b>Repeated Offense</b>                | Required discussion or meeting with appropriate league representatives and establishment of clear behavioral expectations.                                 |
| <b>Continued or Serious Misconduct</b> | Restricted access to practices, games, or other league activities in accordance with league policy.                                                        |
| <b>Severe Offense</b>                  | Immediate removal from an activity when necessary for safety, followed by review and possible restriction from future Taos Youth Soccer League activities. |

Whenever reasonably possible, consequences for adult misconduct should be directed toward the responsible adult rather than unnecessarily penalizing the child.

## Section 9: Coaches as Teachers and Game Facilitators

At the younger developmental levels, the Taos Youth Soccer League does not use referees. Coaches are on the field with the players and serve as teachers and game facilitators.

The purpose of having coaches on the field is to create an environment where children can learn the game while playing. Coaches help players understand basic rules, restarts, boundaries, sportsmanship, and appropriate game behavior while encouraging children to make their own decisions.

Coaches may briefly stop play when necessary to:

- Explain a rule or game situation.
- Demonstrate or clarify an appropriate restart.
- Address unsafe or inappropriate behavior.
- Help players understand what occurred.
- Use a situation as an age-appropriate learning opportunity.

Whenever possible, however, coaches should allow play to continue so children have opportunities to experiment, make decisions, solve problems, and learn through experience.

The coaches' role is not simply to enforce rules or determine winners and losers. Their primary responsibility is to maintain a safe and fair playing environment while encouraging learning, participation, individual skill development, creativity, confidence, and enjoyment.

Players, parents, guardians, and spectators are expected to respect the coaches while they are facilitating games. Parents and spectators should not interfere with coaches, challenge their decisions from the sideline, or attempt to take over instructional responsibilities.

Questions or concerns should be addressed privately and respectfully with the appropriate coach or league representative at an appropriate time.

## Section 10: Sideline Conduct

The sideline should contribute positively to the developmental environment.

Parents, guardians, and spectators are encouraged to cheer enthusiastically and positively. However, they should avoid continuously directing players or telling them what decisions to make.

At younger ages, the Taos Youth Soccer League intentionally encourages children to develop confidence with the ball. Parents and spectators should therefore avoid repeatedly yelling instructions such as "Pass!" or "Pass the ball!"

A young player who attempts to dribble past an opponent and loses possession has not necessarily made a mistake. The player may be practicing exactly the individual skill the program is attempting to develop.

Likewise, players should be encouraged to shoot, attack the goal, take chances, and be creative.

Positive encouragement such as "Great effort!" "Keep trying!" "Great idea!" or simply cheering allows children to play while leaving soccer instruction and game facilitation to the coaches.

## **Section 11: Social Media and Electronic Communication**

The standards of conduct expected on the soccer field also apply to electronic communication.

Players and adults should not use social media, text messaging, group chats, email, or other forms of electronic communication to:

- Bully, threaten, intimidate, or harass another person.
- Spread rumors or knowingly false information.
- Publicly ridicule players, coaches, volunteers, or families.
- Share inappropriate photographs, videos, or messages involving league participants.
- Encourage conflict among players, teams, coaches, or families.

Participants should remember that electronic communications can quickly spread beyond their intended audience and can significantly affect young players and families.

## **Section 12: Protecting the Developmental Environment**

Youth soccer belongs first and foremost to the children who play it.

Players must be allowed to learn, experiment, compete, make mistakes, and develop without fear of humiliation, intimidation, or criticism.

Adults should remember that children hear sideline comments and observe adult behavior. How coaches, parents, guardians, and spectators treat one another provides an example that young players are likely to follow.

We therefore ask every member of the Taos Youth Soccer League community to help create an environment characterized by:

- Respect.
- Encouragement.
- Sportsmanship.
- Patience.
- Accountability.
- Inclusion.
- Safety.
- Learning.
- Creativity.
- Confidence.
- Enjoyment of the game.

At the younger ages, winning and losing are not tracked, and official scores are not kept. This does not mean that competition or scoring goals is discouraged. We want children to compete, dribble, shoot, score goals, and experience the excitement of the game. The purpose of not keeping score is to keep the emphasis on development rather than the result.

## **Section 13: Acknowledgment and Agreement**

Players and parents or guardians should review this policy together in an age-appropriate manner.

By participating in the Taos Youth Soccer League, players and families are expected to understand and support these standards of behavior and the league's commitment to providing a positive, respectful, safe, and developmentally appropriate soccer environment.

Together, we strive to create a culture of mutual respect, accountability, sportsmanship, learning, confidence, and teamwork, both on and off the field.

**First, develop the player. Then develop the team.**

## Taos Youth Soccer League Playing Time and Player Development Policy

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### **Mission and Philosophy**

The Taos Youth Soccer League is committed to providing a positive, inclusive, age-appropriate soccer experience for every participant. The league aims to help participants develop soccer skills, physical confidence, creativity, independence, sportsmanship, and, most importantly, a genuine enjoyment of playing soccer.

The Taos Youth Soccer League is a developmental program, not a competitive league. We do not keep standings, win-loss records, or official scores. Games are not officiated by referees. The purpose of games is to provide participants with opportunities to play soccer in an age-appropriate environment and to apply what they are learning.

Participants play soccer for many reasons. Some want to learn a new sport. Some enjoy staying active. Some want to play with friends. Others may eventually choose to pursue soccer at a more advanced or competitive level. All of these reasons are valid.

Our responsibility is to provide every participant with an opportunity to play, explore, learn, and enjoy the game.

### **Equal Playing Time: All participants will receive equal playing time.**

Playing time in the Taos Youth Soccer League is not something a participant must earn through skill, experience, athletic ability, practice attendance, or performance.

Every registered participant is a member of the team and deserves an equal opportunity to participate.

Coaches are responsible for managing playing time as evenly as reasonably possible throughout each game and across the season.

Playing time will not be increased or reduced based upon:

- Skill level or previous soccer experience
- Athletic ability
- Goals scored
- Defensive ability
- Practice attendance
- A participant's perceived importance to the team
- A coach's preference for particular participants
- A participant's current level of development

There are no "bench players" in the Taos Youth Soccer League.

***Every participant is a player, and every player plays.***

### **Practice Attendance and Playing Time**

Regular attendance at practice is encouraged. Practice gives participants opportunities to become comfortable with the ball, develop skills, interact with teammates, and learn through movement and play.

However, practice attendance will not determine playing time.

Participants and their families have different schedules, responsibilities, transportation situations, and reasons for participating. A participant should not lose the opportunity to play because they were unable to attend practice.

Coaches may encourage attendance and explain the value of practice, but playing time must remain equal regardless of practice attendance.

### **Exceptions for Injury or Illness**

The primary exceptions to equal playing time are injury, illness, or another situation in which continuing to play could affect the health or safety of the participant.

A participant who is injured, becomes ill, or indicates that they are unable to continue should be removed from play as necessary.

Participant health and safety always take priority over playing time.

Once a participant can safely return, the coach should make a reasonable effort to return that participant to normal participation.

### **Minimize Substitutions**

Coaches should minimize unnecessary substitutions.

Equal playing time does not mean constantly rotating participants on and off the field. Participants benefit from having enough uninterrupted time to become involved in the game, interact with the ball, solve problems, and begin understanding the natural rhythm of soccer.

Frequent substitutions can interrupt that process.

Young participants often begin by chasing the ball together in a group, running everywhere, and exhausting themselves. This is a normal stage of development. Coaches should not expect young participants to immediately understand spacing, positioning, or how to conserve energy.

Over time, participants should learn to manage their effort and stay engaged for longer periods.

Whenever practical and safe, allow participants to play through the experience rather than constantly substituting them.

### **The Ball Is the Teacher**

For our younger participants, development begins with the relationship between the player and the ball.

Participants need as many opportunities as possible to touch, manipulate, control, and experiment with the soccer ball. Dribbling is highly encouraged.

Encourage participants to take on opponents individually, change direction, experiment with moves, protect the ball, run with the ball, and discover different ways to control it.

A young participant who attempts to dribble past an opponent and loses the ball has not necessarily done something wrong. The participant has attempted a soccer problem and learned from the result.

Coaches should not discourage dribbling simply because passing the ball may seem easier or more efficient.

### **Encourage Shooting**

Participants should be encouraged to shoot.

Participants need opportunities to discover how different surfaces of the foot affect the ball, how much force is required, how body position influences accuracy, and how to recognize opportunities to attempt a shot.

Not every shot needs to be successful to be worthwhile.

Participants should be encouraged to experiment.

See the opportunity. Take the shot. Learn from the result.

### **Encourage Creativity**

Creativity is one of the most important qualities we can encourage in a young soccer player.

Participants should feel free to experiment with the ball without being afraid that they will be immediately corrected for making a mistake.

Participants should be encouraged to:

- Dribble.
- Shoot.
- Change direction.
- Try different moves.
- Use both feet.
- Experiment with different surfaces of the foot.
- Take on opponents.
- Protect the ball.
- Solve problems independently.
- Try something they have never attempted before.
- Make mistakes and try again.

Coaches should avoid creating players who are constantly looking toward the sideline for instructions.

We want participants to gradually become capable of seeing a situation, making their own decision, and acting upon it.

*Creativity requires freedom to experiment.*

### **Passing and Team Play**

Passing is an important part of soccer and should develop naturally as participants mature.

However, younger participants should not be pressured to constantly pass the ball simply because adults recognize that passing may be the most efficient tactical solution.

Before participants can effectively share the ball, they need confidence possessing it.

A participant who becomes comfortable dribbling, controlling, turning, shielding, and manipulating the ball develops a foundation that will later support more sophisticated team play.

Passing should therefore be introduced appropriately without suppressing individual creativity or a participant's willingness to possess the ball.

### **Ages 12 to 14: Expanding the Game**

As participants enter approximately the 12 to 14 age range, instruction can increasingly expand from individual ball mastery toward a broader understanding of the game.

At this stage, coaches can place greater emphasis on:

- Passing and receiving
- Positional awareness
- Creating and using space
- Supporting the player with the ball
- Movement away from the ball
- Combination play
- Basic attacking and defending principles
- Communication
- Team shape
- Pattern play
- Recognizing when to dribble and when to pass

The individual skills developed during the younger years now become tools that participants can use within a larger team structure.

The goal is not to replace creativity with structure. Instead, participants learn how to use their individual abilities creatively within the context of the team.

### **No Scores, Standings, or Win-Loss Records**

The Taos Youth Soccer League does not maintain official scores, standings, or win-loss records.

There are no league championships based upon game results.

This is intentional.

Removing standings and official results lets coaches, parents, guardians, and participants focus on what matters most at this stage: playing and learning soccer.

Without the pressure of a result, a participant can try a new dribbling move, take a shot, experiment with the ball, or make a mistake without feeling they cost their team a game.

Coaches should reinforce this philosophy and avoid creating unofficial standings or emphasizing game results.

### **Games Without Referees**

Games within the Taos Youth Soccer League are played without referees.

This creates another important learning opportunity.

Coaches should help participants learn the basic rules of soccer while encouraging fairness, honesty, respect, and sportsmanship. When questions or disagreements arise, coaches should work cooperatively to resolve them calmly and allow play to continue.

Adults should model the behavior we want participants to develop.

The absence of referees should reinforce the idea that these games belong to the participants and exist for their development.

### **Mistakes Are Part of Learning**

#### **Mistakes are expected.**

Do not remove a participant from a game because they lose possession, miss a shot, attempt an unsuccessful dribble, make an incorrect decision, or fail to execute a skill correctly.

Participants learn soccer by playing soccer.

They need opportunities to make decisions, experience the consequences, make adjustments, and try again.

Coaches should use mistakes as teaching opportunities rather than reasons to restrict a participant's freedom.

### **The Role of the Coach**

The youth soccer coach is first and foremost a teacher and facilitator of the game.

The coach's responsibility is not to control every decision participants make. The coach creates an environment where participants can learn to make those decisions themselves.

Coaches should:

- Provide equal playing time.
- Minimize unnecessary substitutions.
- Encourage frequent interaction with the ball.
- Encourage dribbling and individual ball mastery.
- Encourage shooting.
- Encourage creativity and experimentation.
- Allow participants to make mistakes.
- Avoid excessive sideline instruction.
- Ask questions that encourage participants to think.
- Introduce passing and tactical concepts when developmentally appropriate.
- Gradually introduce positional awareness and pattern play in the 12 to 14 age groups.
- Encourage sportsmanship and respect.

- Create an environment in which every participant feels welcome and valued.
- Help participants develop a lasting enjoyment of soccer.

### **The Role of Parents and Guardians**

Parents and guardians are important partners in creating the environment we want for our participants.

Families are encouraged to celebrate effort, creativity, courage, improvement, and enjoyment rather than goals, results, or comparisons between participants.

When watching games, parents and guardians should let participants play.

Constant instructions such as “pass,” “shoot,” “kick it,” or “get rid of it” can prevent a young participant from learning to observe the game and make independent decisions.

Positive encouragement is always welcome.

Allow the participants to solve soccer problems themselves.

### **What Success Looks Like**

**Success in the Taos Youth Soccer League is not measured by a scoreboard or standings.**

Success is a participant who:

- Wants to come back and play again.
- Is increasingly comfortable with the ball.
- Attempts a new dribbling move.
- Has the confidence to take on an opponent.
- Takes a shot when an opportunity appears.
- Uses both feet.
- Tries something creative.
- Makes a mistake and continues playing.
- Begins solving problems independently.
- Treats teammates and opponents respectfully.
- Develops confidence.
- Gradually begins to understand the game.
- Enjoys playing soccer.

As participants mature, success will increasingly include their ability to recognize space, combine with teammates, pass and receive effectively, understand positions, and participate in increasingly sophisticated patterns of play.

### **Our Commitment**

- The Taos Youth Soccer League believes that the best way for participants to learn soccer is to play soccer.
- Every participant deserves meaningful time on the field.
- Every participant deserves time with the ball.
- Every participant deserves opportunities to dribble.
- Every participant deserves opportunities to shoot.
- Every participant deserves the freedom to experiment.
- Every participant deserves permission to make mistakes.
- Every participant deserves the opportunity to develop at their own pace.
- For these reasons, equal playing time is a fundamental expectation of the Taos Youth Soccer League.
- We are not keeping score.
- We are not keeping standings.
- We are not keeping win-loss records.
- We are developing soccer players.

**Every participant plays. Every participant learns. Every participant belongs.**