



October 14, 2026

NFHS Soccer Weekly Rule Interpretations

Clock Stoppage

Rules References: Rule 5 and 7

Time-wasting is a frequent occurrence generally originating from the leading team or sometimes from teams attempting to play for a draw to force overtime or kicks from the penalty mark. Officials' crews must distinguish between legal gamesmanship and illegal delays under NFHS rules.

Legal Tactics:

- Shielding and Possession: Playing into corner flags, passing across the backline, or running out the clock with live-ball possession.
- Goalkeeper Footwork: Controlling a live save with the feet and waiting for a press before picking it up (provided it is not an illegal back-pass).
- Clearance and Walking: Launching a live ball out of play or walking to retrieve the ball for one's own restart.

Illegal Delays:

- Goalkeeper Possession Count: Keepers have a strict time limit once they gain secure hand control. Remember: the count begins the moment control is established, not when the keeper decides to stand up.
- Standing Over the Ball or Failure to Respect Distance: Stepping directly in front of the ball to prevent a quick restart is an automatic misconduct trigger.
- Kicking/Throwing the Ball Away: Displacing the ball after the whistle to deny the opposing team a prompt restart.
- Manufactured Delays: Re-spotting the ball multiple times, feigning uniform/shoe issues, or walking away to swap kickers at the last second.

The referee has the authority to stop the clock for unusual delays or blatant time-wasting. Give the clock-stoppage signal immediately stopping the clock eliminates the incentive. Stop the clock whenever the leading team makes a substitution within the final five minutes of the second half (or overtime). Issue an immediate caution (Yellow Card) for delaying the restart of play or unsporting conduct. Do not let teams steal minutes late; addressing the first blatant attempt sets the tone and protects match control.

SITUATION 1: Team A is leading in the final four minutes of the second overtime. A2 checks in and enters the game as a substitute for A3. The referee stops the clock and beckons A2 onto the field. **RULING:**

Correct procedure. **COMMENT:** The referee shall stop the clock once the substitute is beckoned onto the field in the final five minutes of regulation or overtime play. (7-4-3)

SITUATION 2: The goalkeeper controls the ball with their hands for longer than 8 seconds. **RULING:** Illegal. **COMMENT:** If the goalkeeper controls the ball with their hands for longer than eight seconds before releasing the ball, the opposing team is awarded a corner kick. (12-3-3)

SITUATION 3: The game is winding down and Team A is ahead by one goal. The referee awards a free kick to Team B. Player A3 steps directly in front of the ball to prevent a quick restart for Team B. The referee stops the clock and warns A3 to prevent this time wasting tactic. **RULING:** Correct Procedure. **COMMENT:** Depending on how many times Team A has done a time wasting tactic depends on if the referee issues a caution.