



# LEAGUE HANDBOOK

2nd - 8th Grade Tackle

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# ASSOCIATION GUIDELINES



## SECTION 1

### 1.1 Association Eligibility Criteria

The Managing Directors evaluate associations using the following criteria when determining whether an association is eligible for the league:

- All associations must implement a series of Best Practices that foster a safe, positive, and productive experience for the association’s youth football players who are participating in this league. Questions regarding establishing and implementing Best Practices can be directed to GSFL staff.
- GSFL recognizes associations that promote and implement programs for teams at multiple grade levels.
- GSFL does not recognize single teams formulated by any individual (s) not affiliated with or recognized by a bona fide association.
- An association must be perpetual – organized with the intent to exist from year to year.

An association must be organized with a democratic structure, meaning that the administrative structure of the association must allow for open election of officers and forums for parents and participants to voice their ideas and concerns. GSFL recognizes that each individual association operates under different circumstances, and that no two associations will have identical structure and operation. Association representatives are encouraged to contact GSFL Representatives or the Managing Directors with any questions they might have relating to the structure and operation of their association.

### 1.2 Association Participation in GSFL

Each participating association will appoint a representative to serve on the GSFL Advisory Group. Associations enrolling teams in both Grades 2-6 and Grades 7-8 must designate two representatives – one for Grades 2-6 and one for Grades 7-8.

The Advisory Group will guide league operations under the direction of the Managing Directors. Members of the Advisory Group may be assigned to subcommittees responsible for evaluating and recommending changes to rules, policies, procedures, and best practices. These recommendations will be presented to the full Advisory Group for review and implementation.

A fundamental principle of the GSFL is that participating associations do not impose restrictions on participation in excess of GSFL eligibility requirements that follow in this handbook. Associations that enroll teams into GSFL are required to provide GSFL (upon request) with information to prove that the association is following Best Practices and Team Eligibility Guidelines.



# TEAM AND ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES



## SECTION 2

**A fundamental principle of GSFL is the maintenance and promotion of quality community-based youth football with balanced and fair competition.** In order to assure continued alignment with this principle, GSFL has established the following Team Composition and League Eligibility Guidelines:

### **2.1 Eligible Teams:**

- a. Community-based teams and school teams are eligible.
- b. Community-based teams are defined as teams that are comprised of players who are from the community in which their parent or legal guardian resides or in which they attend school.
- c. GSFL will recognize a team if it is derived from a bona fide association (an association organized as an ongoing perpetual entity consisting of multiple teams) or a school program within their boundaries as defined by the association's bylaws. Generally, association boundaries are based on a city's limits or a high school district attendance area and are deemed as a "Reasonable Drawing Area." GSFL recognizes that certain associations may permissibly draw from multiple communities where participant numbers are historically low. These situations will be evaluated by the Managing Directors on a case-by-case basis to assure the association is operating in conformance with GSFL philosophies.

### **2.2 Ineligible Teams:**

- a. GSFL will not allow Open/All-Star and Independent teams to participate in the league.
- b. An "Open/All-Star" team is defined as any team that is comprised of players from multiple communities where recognized youth associations exist.
- c. An "Independent" team is defined as any team that is comprised of players who all reside in the same community or attend the same school, but who have chosen to bypass the local association.

### **2.3 Player Eligibility Guidelines:**

In general, players should compete with the association tied to the community where the player lives or attends school. Players who reside in split households (divorced or separated parents) may participate for the association where either parent's residence is located. In the event there is no program located where the player resides, or a program does not have enough players to field a team at a particular grade level, a player may register and play for a bordering association, subject to GSFL prior review and approval.

### **Waiver Process:**

GSFL does not look favorably at players participating for associations not affiliated with the community where the player either resides or attends school. The Managing Directors have seen dozens of situations over the years where the "Waiver Process" has been initiated primarily to circumvent the rules and essentially construct an all-star team. However, GSFL does recognize that there are other situations that granting a Waiver allowing a player to participate with an outside association is in the best interests of all. These situations must be handled on a case-by-case basis.

The Waiver process is as follows:

- a. The Waiver must be initiated by the player's parents or legal guardians, and the Waiver request must be communicated in writing to both the association where the player should be participating and the association where the player desires to participate. The Waiver request must clearly articulate the reasons for requesting a Waiver.
- b. The Waiver must next be approved in writing by all associations involved with the Waiver.
- c. All Waiver requests that are approved by involved associations are subject to final review and approval by the GSFL Managing Directors. The decision of the Managing Directors is final and not subject to appeal.

# TEAM AND ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES



## SECTION 2

*GSFL reserves the unrestricted right to remove any player, team, or program that is not operating within the spirit and intent of these guidelines. If your goal is to stack a team to satisfy personal ambition or ego, that is your choice—but please take that team elsewhere. Programs/teams that recruit, cut, or turn away participants based solely on ability raise serious concerns and are in direct conflict with the inclusive philosophy we aim to uphold.*

### 2.4 Team Composition Guidelines

One of GSFL’s primary goals is for the league to maintain competitive balance and maximize player development. GSFL recognizes that each association has different participation numbers, transportation issues, and resources, and that by necessity team composition may differ somewhat from year to year and from one association to another. With respect to team composition, GSFL strongly encourages associations with multiple teams at the same grade level to use the following guidelines:

- a. Overall association emphasis and focus should be on maintaining competitive integrity and maximizing player development.
- b. Associations should make every effort to avoid the same roster composition for their teams year by year.
- c. At a minimum, associations with multiple teams per grade should conduct player evaluations and reform team composition between **3rd–4th** grades and between **6th–7th** grades.
- d. Regardless of the system/policy an association adopts, transparency is essential. Associations should publicly post formation policies on their association website or otherwise make them available for review.

### 2.5 Roster Size Guidelines

GSFL recognizes that different associations encounter different issues with respect to the size of individual team rosters. This is especially true for associations that generally have only one team per grade. These guidelines have been created with a focus on balancing **player safety, meaningful playing time, and player development**. **“Convenience” should not be a significant consideration when an association is determining roster size.**

- a. Maximum Recommended Roster Sizes:

<u>Grade Level</u>	<u>Game Format</u>	<u>Maximum Roster Size</u>
2 <sup>nd</sup> Grade	9-Man	18 players
3rd–6th Grade	11-Man	22 players
7th–8th Grade	11-Man	33 players

- b. Association directors should discuss situations where one or more of their teams will exceed maximum roster guidelines with the Managing Directors before making a final decision. A team that exceeds the maximum roster guidelines **IS NOT** excused from meeting mandatory minimum playing time standards.
- c. GSFL does not accept excuses such as “not enough coaches” or “parent preference” to justify excessive roster sizes. GSFL policy is to split large teams when necessary and will assist associations with doing so. Associations that anticipate a “team split” dilemma should contact the Managing Directors at the earliest possible time to discuss options and alternatives.

# TEAM AND ELIGIBILITY GUIDELINES



## SECTION 2

### 2.6 Team Management Guidelines

Each association must have designated association administrator(s) and other staff listed on their association portal on MYAS *RegisterPlay*. Designated association representatives will represent the association and their teams for all GSFL related matters.

- a. League fees for each team must be paid in full no later than the first Friday in August each year, prior to any games being scheduled. If an association is experiencing uncertainty regarding the number of teams it will field, administrators are strongly encouraged to proactively contact the GSFL Representatives and Managing Directors to discuss the situation and explore potential solutions.
- b. Each participating team must initially submit **player/coach rosters**, including school attendance, player weights (if applicable), and player jersey numbers through MYAS *RegisterPlay* no later than 48 hours prior to the team's first scheduled game.
- c. On Tuesday, September 9th all team rosters will freeze. After September 9, players can be added only after first notifying GSFL Representatives and obtaining approval. GSFL recognizes that there will be some legitimate late roster additions.
- d. Associations are responsible for collecting and retaining documentation that proves what grade each athlete is in and which school they attend. This information must be made available to GSFL Representatives and the Managing Directors upon request.
- e. Associations are responsible for accurately measuring and submitting the weight of each participating 2<sup>nd</sup>-6<sup>th</sup> grade player and providing the jersey number of all participating 2<sup>nd</sup>-8<sup>th</sup> grade players.
- f. If your association is having issues registering players through *RegisterPlay* you can either email [football@myas.org](mailto:football@myas.org) or call 763-746-1728 for assistance.

# COACH SELECTION SCREENING AND TRAINING



## SECTION 3

Associations must have an open application/selection process for coaching candidates. A minimum of two members of the coaching staff for each team must be recognized as **Trusted Coaches** or an equivalent program that provides verified concussion certification (which is required by Minnesota law), child abuse prevention training (which is required for Safe Sport compliance), and background checks (which are recommended annually). These minimum requirements ensure that all coaches meet the highest standards for player safety, well-being, and development.

- a. All coaches and administrative personnel must pass a nationwide criminal background check.
- b. Minnesota Statutes sec. 121A.38 requires that all coaches and administrators complete an accredited concussion course, which must be renewed every three years.
- c. All coaches must comply with federal Safe Sport mandates.
- d. The full coaching staff of each team is encouraged to complete football-specific training via USA Football, the GSFL in-person coaches' clinic presented by the Minnesota Football Coaches' Association annually in late July, or a coaches' clinic hosted by the association's local high school football program and sponsored by the association.
- e. A minimum of two members of each team's coaching staff must be represented at GSFL's required preseason coaches' meeting conducted in early August. Attendance by each individual team's coaches is required as a condition prior to the team's games being scheduled.



# LEAGUE STRUCTURE



## SECTION 4

### 4.1 Grade Divisions Offered

The league will offer separate divisions for each grade level. Players may play up a grade but are not permitted to play down. Any player moving up must receive approval from their home association and should have their parents or guardians execute a document acknowledging the player is playing up a grade level. In addition to the grade requirements, there are maximum ages that a player cannot exceed as of August 15 of the applicable season. The age limits are as listed in the summary below. Any other exceptions (including, but not limited to, requests that a player play down a level or repeat a level) will be considered by the Managing Directors on a case-by-case basis, and will only be approved in extraordinary circumstances.

#### Grade 2

*Players must be 8 years old or younger as of August 15.*

- 9-man format
- Four 10-minute stop-time quarters (modified timing)
- Eight (8) total games (7 league games + 1 bowl game)
- Two (2) referees per game, with a focus on developing new game officials

#### Grades 3-4

*Players must be 9 years old or younger as of August 15 for 3<sup>rd</sup> grade, and 10 years old or younger as of August 15 for 4<sup>th</sup> grade.*

- 11-man format
- Four 10-minute stop-time quarters (modified timing)
- Eight (8) total games (7 league games + 1 bowl game)
- Two (2) referees per game, with a focus on developing new game officials

#### Grades 5-6

*Players must be 11 years old or younger as of August 15 for 5<sup>th</sup> grade, and 12 years old or younger as of August 15 for 6<sup>th</sup> grade*

- 11-man format
- Four 10-minute stop-time quarters (modified timing)
- Nine (9) total games (7 league games + 2 playoff games)
- Three (3) referees per game, utilizing more experienced officials

#### Grades 7-8

*Players must be 13 years old or younger as of August 15 for 7<sup>th</sup> grade, and 14 years old or younger as of August 15 for 8<sup>th</sup> grade.*

- 11-man format
- Four 10-minute stop-time quarters (modified timing)
- Nine (9) total games (7 league games + 2 playoff games)
- Three (3) referees per game, utilizing the most experienced officials, including those with current MSHSL certification or a minimum of three years of experience at this level or higher



## SECTION 4

### 4.2 Season Play Dates

The GSFL regular season for grades 5-8 will begin the last Friday in August. The season will conclude on the last Sunday before the MEA convention in mid-October.

- a. As scheduling allows, all teams will play a mix of weekend and weeknight games:
  - Grades 2-4: 8 total games (six weekend games and two weeknight games).
  - Grades 5-8: 9 total games (six weekend games and three weeknight games).
- c. Teams can also opt to play additional non-league games, which can be arranged through the Managing Directors.

### 4.3 Game Administration and Schedule Construction

- a. **Definition of "Host Team"** - A "host team" is defined as a team at whose fields a game is scheduled on a particular date. The host team is responsible for having the field marked properly, the chains out, and the lights on for all scheduled games on that particular date. The host association directors/administrators are responsible for assuring that these items are provided for all games scheduled at their field. For example, for three games, scheduled at 4:30, 6:00 and 7:30 on a Sunday at Andover Prairie Knoll Park, Andover is responsible for having the field ready at 4:15, properly marked, chains out, and lights on if needed. This responsibility continues for all of the games scheduled on that date. Our goal is to minimize "neutral site" games, which is a game between two teams where neither is the host. Occasionally, however, a neutral site game makes logistical sense from a team travel standpoint.
- b. **Definition of "Home Team"** - The "home team" is the host team (or the team listed as "Team 2" on the schedule for a neutral site game), and is responsible for providing the chain gang. (Remember that the "host team" provides the chains.) WE DO NOT SWITCH CHAIN GANGS AT HALFTIME.
- c. **Schedule Construction** - Teams with high quality lighted fields and teams from communities with multiple teams in the same division usually get more "host games", although GSFL makes it a priority to schedule each team with **as close to half its games at home as possible and to minimize excessive travel**. Association administrators should inform their coaches and parents of this fact in advance of the final schedules being published. In addition, coaches and parents should know that we usually schedule games in two, three or four game blocks in order to get officials. In certain situations, some teams may only have two or three "host" games in a season. It is advisable for association administrators to inform their parents in advance of the necessity of scheduling games in "blocks" and some teams may play fewer games at their "host" field.

# GAME RESCHEDULING POLICIES



## SECTION 5

Rescheduling games for reasons other than inclement weather or the last-minute withdrawal of a team from the league after the schedule has been published is strongly discouraged and should occur only in rare, unavoidable cases. A team missing its star player or a last-minute hockey or basketball tryout conflict are not acceptable reasons to request a non-weather-related reschedule. It is important that all associations submit all known schedule conflicts for its teams in advance via the Game Day Survey form at the earliest possible date and keep the Managing Directors updated with any changes up to the date schedules are posted in order to minimize possible rescheduling issues during the season.

### 5.1 Reschedule Procedure For Non-Weather-Related Schedule Changes

All reschedule requests (regardless of who initiates the request) must be simultaneously submitted in writing to the following:

- a. The coach and association administrator for the affected opponents (including other teams scheduled at the same site and the same date); the Supervisor of Officials; and the Assigner. Verbal notifications (including to the Assigner) do not count as official requests.
- b. The Managing Director responsible for overall scheduling (Kevin Johnston for grades 2-6; John Swanson for grades 7-8).
- c. Games will become officially rescheduled only after the Managing Director and Supervisor of Officials have approved the reschedule **AND** the rescheduled game(s) have been posted online.

### 5.2 Inclement Weather Cancellations and Rescheduling

Inclement weather is the primary cause of cancellations. GSFL will make every effort to reschedule games cancelled because of inclement weather, but because of the short seven-week time period that regular season games are scheduled, there is no absolute guarantee that games that are cancelled because of inclement weather can be rescheduled, especially for games cancelled after October 1.

#### Advance Cancellations

There are situations where the weather is bad enough over an extended period of time that advance cancellations are required and advisable. In these situations, it is imperative that the individuals involved with the decision-making process (association administrator, coaches, Managing Directors, League Representatives, and the Supervisor of Officials) maintain constant communication by telephone. It is not good practice to rely on electronic correspondence (email and text) in these situations, other than to follow up and start the rescheduling process.

Guidelines for advance cancellations are as follows:

- Weekday advance cancellations must be made by 4:30pm.
- Weekend advance cancellations must be made by 10:00am.
- Any blanket league-wide advance cancellation must be approved by the Supervisor of Officials.
- A site-specific (one site only) cancellation is made by the host association's administrator or designated director. We occasionally receive directives from the host park and recreation department or school district that the game must be cancelled.

# GAME RESCHEDULING POLICIES



## SECTION 5

### Communication Protocol

- Emailing [football@myas.org](mailto:football@myas.org) is the required method of communication for all cancellation situations. The host association/team is responsible for contacting all affected teams/associations, the Supervisor of Officials, the Managing Directors, and League Representatives.
- Website updates will be made only after confirmation of the cancellation.

### At-Field/On-Site Cancellations

- If the advance cancellation deadline has passed (after 4:30pm on weekdays and 10:00am on weekends), only the host association's administrator or designated director can cancel at the field if conditions are unsafe. Note that occasionally the host's park and recreation department or school district will instruct the host administrator to cancel the games.
- Follow the established Communication Protocol (outlined above) to ensure timely and accurate reporting of cancellations.

### In-Game Weather Issues

- Once a game has started, only officials can suspend a game due to inclement weather.
- Any games that are suspended after having reached halftime are considered complete games.
- Incomplete games will be resumed and completed only if they impact bowl game placement.
- If one game is canceled at a field, all subsequent games that day at the same site are also canceled.

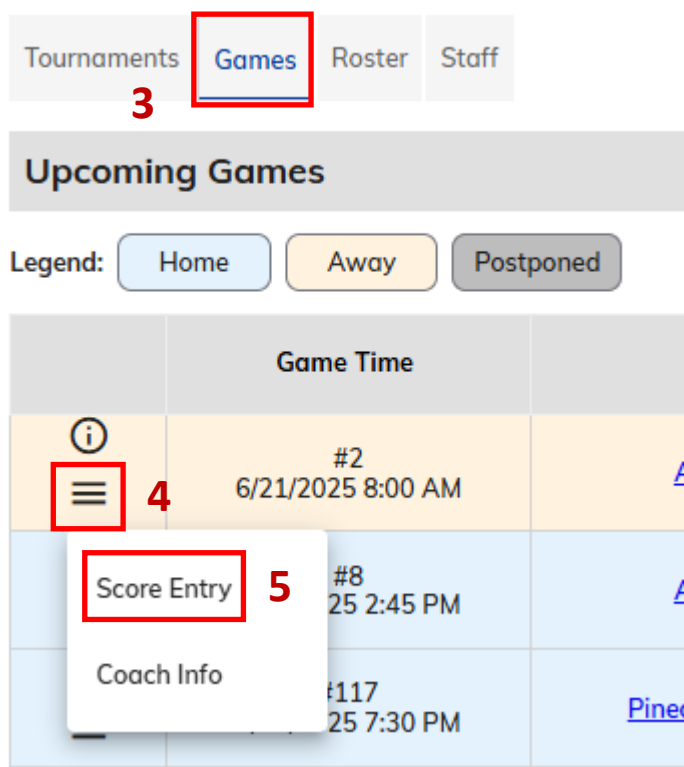
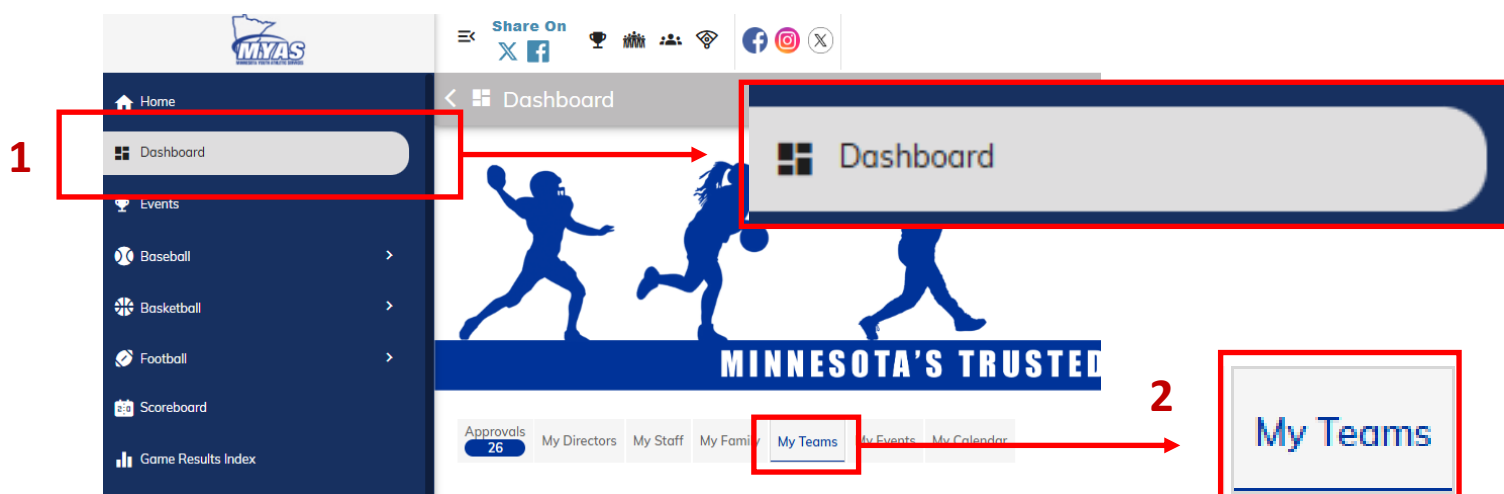
# WEBSITE MANAGEMENT & GENERAL COMMUNICATION



## SECTION 6

GSFL will maintain current standings, schedules, and all pertinent league information online. League information will be accessible on the GSFL portion of the website at [www.gopherstatefootball.org](http://www.gopherstatefootball.org) as well as on your individual team's profile/site on *RegisterPlay* at [www.myasrp.com](http://www.myasrp.com). Both coaches involved in a game must submit/input their completed game scores online via *RegisterPlay*. All that is required is to input scores within 24 hours after each game is completed. This system helps ensure an accurate score for each completed game. **Both** coaches must report their scores within 24 hours of the completion of each game.

- To enter scores in *RegisterPlay* – go to:  
Dashboard > My Teams > Click Your Team > Games Tab > 3-Lined Button To The Left Of Each Game > Score Entry.



### 6.1 “Redundancy” in Communication

We must make sure that we do not overly rely on the website and email correspondence to the exclusion of voice communication. It is always a good idea to confirm a change that appears on the website or appears via email with a telephone call, or to confirm an agreement reached over the telephone with an email. The technical term for this is “Redundancy!”

### 6.2 Lines of Communication

Parent and coach complaints and scheduling issues should first be addressed to the association administrator, and then forwarded to the Managing Directors at [football@myas.org](mailto:football@myas.org) (Dawson Blanck, Kevin Johnston, and John Swanson) if not resolved internally. It is not the role of League Representatives to field complaints or initiate schedule changes. The League Representatives' duties are limited to posting schedules, scores, and standings, and providing support to overall league operations.

# GSFL CONDUCT EXPECTATIONS



## SECTION 7

### 7.1 Field/Game Management

- Association administrators and coaches are responsible for the behavior of their parents and fans, as well as ensuring their teams clean up the sideline area immediately following each game. Remind your teams and their fans to pick up their garbage.
- Association administrators are responsible for assuring that their fields are properly marked and that a reasonable and safe distance between the playing area and spectators is maintained. With fields without a restraining fence, a clearly marked 10-yard restraining line should be maintained.
- Where fields have restraining fences or stadium seating, spectators are required to remain in the stands or behind the fence at all times.
- Teams must be on opposite sidelines, with fans positioned on the same sideline as their team. If a field setup makes this impossible, the association administrator is required to notify the Managing Directors in advance.
- The use of drones is strictly prohibited, and videotaping games other than your own team's game is not allowed. All scouting must be conducted in person and in accordance with traditional standards of sportsmanship and fairness.
- Association administrators are responsible for monitoring and managing the conduct of their association's coaches, players, parents, and other fans.
- If an issue arises with an official during a game, it must not be addressed on the field. Instead, the association administrator of the affected team should contact the Supervisor of Officials after the game to report and discuss the concern/issue. Several officials have been removed in recent years for various reasons including lack of effort, chronic lateness to games, and unprofessional behavior.

### 7.2 MYAS Code of Conduct

The [MYAS Code of Conduct](#) applies to all participants involved in GSFL games, including players, coaches, parents, fans, and game officials, and sets the standard of behavior for the season.

All individuals are expected to:

- Demonstrate good sportsmanship, respect, and positive support at all times.
- Refrain from profanity, abusive language, or negative behavior toward others.
- Prioritize the emotional and physical well-being of youth athletes.
- Respect the game, the officials, and all participants, regardless of background or ability.
- Use appropriate channels to express concerns in a constructive and respectful manner.

Game officials, coaches, and site administrators are empowered to enforce the Code of Conduct, and violations by an individual may result in temporary or permanent removal from both GSFL and other MYAS sports and events.

### 7.3 Disciplinary Action

GSFL reserves the right to permanently ban any player, coach, parent, or fan for acts of unsportsmanlike or abusive behavior, including single egregious incidents. Unfortunately, such behavior has increased in recent years and will not be tolerated under any circumstances.

Disciplinary actions for players, coaches, and parents/fans include, but are not limited to:

- Any ejection results in a minimum automatic suspension for the next full game. It is the responsibility of both the coach and the association administrator connected to the ejected person to report an ejection to the Supervisor of Officials within 24 hours following the ejection.
- A second ejection in the same season will result in suspension for the remainder of the season.
- These penalties provide a basic disciplinary framework, and each incident will be reviewed on a case-by-case basis and evaluated on its own particular facts or circumstances.