

Essex County Youth Soccer Association
Advice to Coaches on Managing Games with a Lopsided Score
Spring 2016

The Essex County Youth Soccer Association (ECYSA) is committed to providing competitive games for all teams participating in the league. ECYSA forms divisions and groups based on strength reports submitted by each Member Organization's Travel Director. ECYSA encourages coaches to work with their Travel Director to ensure that their team's strength chart accurately describes the players' individual and collective capabilities.

While most of the approximately 2,000 games played each season are fairly well balanced, there are invariably situations where one team is clearly superior and the game's score becomes lopsided. Factors that lead to lopsided scores include but are not limited to absence of key players, inaccurate strength charts (both under rated and over rated teams), injuries, and roster changes.

When a score is lopsided ECYSA Division Directors may request game reports. The purpose of these reports to find out the circumstances and facts pertaining to the match from both coaches and in some circumstances the referee. There is no precise definition for a lopsided score. The coach of a team that wins consistently by a five or six goal margin may be required to submit a report. If the differential is seven or more goals, the winning coach should expect an email from the Division Director.

The referee's job does not include telling either coach what to do when the score is lopsided. If the referee believes that goal celebration is excessive or that one or more players are taunting a team that is losing by a wide margin, they may sanction those coaches or players with warnings and/or cards.

Advice to the Winning Coach

There is no benefit to running up the score. The maximum differential credit for any game is three goals. The point in the match when your team reaches that three goal differential plays an important part in deciding when to take actions to control the score. If the score is 2-0 late in the match and your team scores, it's doubtful you should make changes. But if your team is winning 3-0 within the first 15 minutes and your opponent's players are clearly less capable than yours, you need to take action. Waiting until the score differential reaches five or six goals, especially if that happens early in the game, only makes managing the game more difficult.

Some coaches will tell us they respond to a lopsided score by putting their best players on defense and/or having their leading scorer play goalie. Think about it. If the other team's skill level can't stop your best players from scoring, what chance do they have to mount any kind of offense against those same players? A far better approach is to replace your best players—*all of them*—with your least capable players. This will give your less capable players an opportunity to get lots of playing time and improve their skills. Another tactic is to adopt a shape with a more defensive posture. Reduce the number of forwards and/or limit the number of players that can move into the opposing team's side of the field. Insist that a minimum number of passes be completed before a shot can be taken and increase that number if the score differential continues to grow. Require that players pass and shoot with their weak foot.

Conduct yourself with good sportsmanship and avoid any comments or actions that may be interpreted by the other team as demeaning or unsportsmanlike. Consider how your actions and behavior are impacting the other team. How would you feel if you were in their position? Avoid any communication with the opposing coach—even if the other coach attempts to engage you in a discussion—that could exacerbate what is already a difficult situation for the other team.

Advice to the Losing Coach

Maintain your composure. If you get upset, you're players will likely follow your lead. You don't want a bad situation to get worse and potentially have you or a member of your team sanctioned for losing self-control. Avoid confrontation with the other coach—even if the other coach is loud, pompous, and unaware of the impact they're having on you and your team.

After the game, submit a coach's report with your assessment of whether the opposing coach made efforts to control scoring. ECYSA takes these reports very seriously and promptly investigates games with lopsided scores.