



Managing Lopsided Games (09/2026)

With over 2,000 games each season, despite the best efforts of ECYSA Grade Group Directors and Town Directors, situations are inevitable where one team at a particular match will be dominant, potentially leading to excessive scoring by that dominant team and a poor experience for all players. There are multiple reasons and circumstances that may lead to these occurrences, but ultimately responsibility for managing this situation falls on the coaches of the respective teams.

ECYSA has implemented rules to encourage appropriate game management of lopsided games, defined as a goal differential of over 6, including required game reports by coaches of both teams disclosing actions taken and any mitigating circumstances, point deductions for Grade 6 and older divisions, and potential sanctions to coaches who fail to take action as well as those who take advantage of the rule by directing their team to score own goals to cost the opponent points in the standings.

Note that it is NOT the referee's responsibility to manage or direct teams in these situations- the referee's job is to report the final score accurately along with any observations as to what actions or circumstances were observed if they determine it appropriate to report. Be advised that any effort by a coach or team member to influence the referee to falsify a game report to avoid sanctions will result in even greater sanction.

In Summary: Respect and Sportsmanship are Key!

The philosophy of ECYSA is to provide an atmosphere of good sportsmanship and to encourage everyone to compete, learn, and enjoy the game of soccer.

- In youth sports, Respect and Sportsmanship alone should be enough of a reason to try to take steps to prevent excessive scoring if the outcome of the game is not in question.
- Plus, it is no FUN for either side, and FUN is why kids want to play sports!
- Coaches - YOU are the adult and are responsible for managing your players and the scoring
- ECYSA requires COACHES to manage games to limit goal differentials to 6 or less
- Teams do not receive any benefit from goal differentials of more than 3.
- Teams lose standings points with goal differentials of more than 6.
- Coaches will be subject to sanction when the margin of victory is > 6.
- Let's keep the FUN in ECYSA games!

Lopsided Game Management

Use these strategies to help manage your players in games where there is a clear competitive imbalance.

Key Steps BEFORE the Game

Establish Your Team Expectations with Players and Parents

- Pre-plan with your coaching staff how you will manage a lopsided game situation
- Create a code word or signal so that your players know when to change tactics if necessary
- Practice the plan so your players know what is expected of them
- Communicate with your families at the beginning of the season/game that you may be switching up the game plan so they can support from the sideline
- Review your group standings to anticipate if your upcoming opponents may be struggling so that you can proactively plan during practice

Start EARLY in Games

Implement your control strategy as soon as it is clear your team is much stronger than your opponent

- 3+ goals is the time to start altering your game plan, NOT when the score is already 6-0
- Use your signal or code word with the team instead of screaming out instructions
- Talk to players on the sidelines who can share the message when subbed in
- If a player ignores your instructions, sub that player off the field and review the plan - Remember you are the adult!
- Communicate with the opposing coach as needed
- As the ADULT on the field, you are responsible for actively taking steps to control your players to PREVENT excessive scoring

Modify Tactics - Formations

Reset the Team

- Reassign player positions
- Give your less skilled players more time at forward
- Change your formation to have fewer forward players
- Use your more defensive-minded players on attack
- Place your more creative finishers in back
- Put your best goal scorer at Keeper
- Play with one fewer player on the field or even two fewer players if necessary
- Do not have a player walk off the field during play
- Send in fewer players at next substitution opportunity and inform the sideline/center referee of your plan
- FIFA/ECYSA rules do not allow for the other team to add players

Modify Tactics - Shooting

The goal is for players to STOP Scoring, not STOP Shooting

- Eliminate ALL shots from dominant foot
- Allow only shots with weaker foot or direct volleys from thigh or chest
- Focus on headers where allowed (ONLY in Grade 7/8 and HS)
- Shoot from longer distance (at least outside the penalty area)
- Intentionally shoot WIDE
- Pick a player(s) who normally has difficulty scoring and direct that this/these player(s) are only allowed to be the next to score
- Target player can be rotated

Modify Tactics – Possession

Require More Passing

- Switch to all non-dominant foot passing to work on developing skills with weaker foot
- Require 4 or more consecutive passes to be made before any shot that is taken
 - Remember not to make the counting obvious
- If the opponent touches the ball, team needs to reset the pass count and start again
- All players have to touch the ball (including the keeper) before anyone can shoot
- Goalkeepers should roll out balls to an outside defender instead of punting

Keep It in Perspective

Coaches on the losing side of lopsided games:

- Do your best to remain upbeat, kids feed off of your energy
- Continue to encourage your players to experiment with passing / attacking the ball
- Compliment your players for playing well even though the team is losing the game
 - Kids will usually not remember the exact score line, but they will remember a compliment on something special that they did well
- Learn from the game to focus in your next practice on developing specific skills to help avoid future issues
- Report poor sportsmanship when you report the game

RESPECT AND SPORTSMANSHIP ARE THE KEY!

Remember this is YOUTH Soccer, and you are the ADULT

- Coaches have the ability to build the development of young soccer players and even more importantly, young people
- Running up the score is not acceptable
- As the coach, you must remain in control of your players
- Be prepared to discuss the scoring avoidance strategies you used with your Travel Director and Grade Group Director when they ask how the lopsided score happened
 - Travel Directors are notified of all games with GD+6
- If it happens, immediately start planning how to change it up sooner next time