

NorCal Premier Soccer

Referee Handbook

2025-26 Season

Updated March 9, 2026



A US Club Soccer Sanctioned League



Disclaimer: NorCal does not govern, oversee, train or license referees.
These functions are provided by California North Referee Administration.

I. Introduction

1. This Document

This document provides directives, best practices and suggestions/options for referees officiating NorCal matches of all levels (League, State Cup, League Cup, Super Rec, NPL and ECNL-RL) that are not generally covered by the current [IFAB Laws of the Game](#) (LotG) and the applicable [Rules of Competition \(Match Rules\)](#), but should be used in conjunction with those documents. If there is a conflict, the Laws of the Game / Rules of Competition take precedence over those presented here. Also see the [NorCal Handbook](#) and individual competition handbooks referenced therein.

The language used in this document is very specific:

- MUST denotes a directive; referee directives are mandatory
- SHOULD denotes a best practice; referees are expected to follow best practices
- MAY denotes a recommendation or an option

Directives, best practices and suggestions/options may be modified at NorCal hosted events. Referees will be informed of these modifications by the assignor, the referee site coordinator or the NorCal State Referee Coordinator. In particular, NorCal staff must be consulted before abandoning (or determining that it is not possible to start) a match.

Correct terminology is important for referees. However, sometimes there is confusion, e.g. game cards / match cards / rosters (for the purposes of officiating NorCal matches.) Here they are referred to as game cards; other terms may be heard at the field and elsewhere.

If there are any questions or issues on match day, including at the field, contact the assignor. The assignor is always the first point of contact for any issues or questions.

2. NorCal Refereeing

The three core tenets of NorCal Refereeing are:

- Safety
- Respect
- Professionalism

Safety is always the number one priority - safety of the players, other team participants, and the referee crew. Always put safety first. If some aspect of the match or environment may be unsafe, stop, think, and then act to mitigate the safety issue. Later, review and report to the assignor, and submit a [Referee Match Report](#).

Referees are in a position of authority over team participants (players/coaches/managers), but with that authority comes a duty and obligation to respect everyone at every match at all times, even if they don't extend the same respect to others.

Referees shall conduct themselves with professionalism at all times (before, during and after the match.) Professionalism establishes credibility, and credibility is the most critical resource a referee possesses. Professionalism also means being and appearing impartial, unbiased and fair in everything, including in all interactions and decisions.

Do not touch the players. Hand shakes and fist bumps are permissible. But otherwise there should be no physical contact between referees and any participants, even in the event of a physical altercation.

All referee reporting is to be done on the game card and [Referee Match Reports](#) which can be found here: [Referee Match Report](#). If there are issues with reporting, please contact the assignor.

Referees must not criticize any person (including but not limited to players, team staff, club staff, spectators, referees, assignors, NorCal staff) or any organization (including but not limited to clubs, referee associations or NorCal itself) related to NorCal and the matches/events they sanction, either in person or a digital platform (e.g. social media.) Referees should not publicly discuss a match they officiated until at least 48 hours after the conclusion of the match.

3. “Play the Game”

NorCal is truly a soccer organization and as such its position is that matches should be played whenever possible. Referees should always make every reasonable effort to facilitate the playing of the match. Unless there is a clear safety concern, regulatory requirement, or a strict Rules of Competition or Laws of the Game provision that prevents play, and cannot be addressed, the match must proceed.

The primary circumstances under which a match cannot be played are limited to the following:

- a. Only one team is present
- b. One or both teams have fewer than the minimum number of players required by the Rules of Competition
- c. One or both teams do not have a properly credentialed adult team staff member (coach or manager with valid US Club Soccer pass) present
- d. There are significant field or facility safety issues that pose a risk to participants

If one or more of these conditions cannot be resolved, the match **must not** be played. There are no permissible workarounds in these situations. If in doubt, contact the assignor. The facts leading to a decision to not play a match must be submitted in a [Referee Match Report](#).

In the case of c above, any US Club Soccer credentialed staff from the same club may coach any of their club's teams at any time. Credentialed team managers are often present at matches to assist with administrative items. If, at any time, a coach is not available (not present, been sent off, etc.) but the team/club has a credentialed manager present, that manager may act as a coach for the team. In this document, the term coach also refers to a manager/coach/director acting as a coach for the team.

4. Thank you!

NorCal thanks all referees for helping them bring the enjoyment of soccer to over one hundred thousand players every season in Northern California - and that cannot be done without referees!

II. Prior to the Match

1. Assignments

Referees are expected to honor their assignments. Before accepting assignments, ensure that travel time and traffic is taken into account. Referees should not find a replacement without receiving approval from the assignor. Referees must not request or accept match assignments with family members as team participants or when there may be other potential perceived conflicts of interest. If in doubt, contact the assignor. If a potential perceived conflict of interest arises after accepting the match, contact the assignor.

2. Referee Attire

Referees should travel to and from the field in a USSF or other referee organization shirt, other than a referee uniform shirt, or in a black/grey shirt. The referee crew should wear a single uniform shirt color to contrast with players' uniform shirts. Preferably, but less important, is to also avoid a color conflict with the goal keepers. The referee may wear a bib to distinguish the referee from the players if there is no other shirt / player uniform option.

- a. Shirts should be clean, must be tucked in, with a flattened down collar, and zipped up all the way (where applicable)
- b. Black referee shorts should be worn, and must not be rolled
- c. Socks should be black two-stripe referee socks, and pulled up to immediately below the knee
- d. Shoes should be predominantly black and clean
- e. No printing/embroidery except for manufacturer and/or US Soccer identification
- f. No jewelry except watches
- g. Affiliation to any league/club/team or other organization must not be shown. The only exception to this is subtle referee association/organization branding
- h. Sunglasses should not be worn unless medically necessary

Optional clothing that may be worn:

- i. Undershirts, if visible, should be black
- j. Solid black tights may be worn under shorts and socks
- k. Gloves may be worn, preferably black
- l. If a head covering is worn, it should be black

See: [USSF Uniform Standards](#)

III. At The Field

1. Arrival

The referee crew should arrive at the field 30+ minutes prior to the scheduled kick-off, and find each other. Any member who will not arrive at least 30 minutes prior to expected kick-off time should contact the crew by phone or text to provide an ETA.

2. Field Inspection

The crew must inspect the field, ideally as early as possible and as a team. If time is short, the crew may split up. The following items must be checked and deficiencies addressed by the home team, unless easily fixed by the referee crew:

- a. Nets should be well attached with no significant holes or gaps
- b. Goals must be safe, properly placed with the back of the post in line with the back of the goal line, and centered within the goal area, with goals rechecked immediately prior to kick-off
- c. Corner flags must be at least 5 feet tall or must be removed for safety. They should be positioned with the flag pole centered on the exterior intersection of the goal line and the touch line. If acceptable corner flags are not available, cones may be used
- d. Check field markings, specifically
 - i. Build out line (7 v 7): equidistant between the halfway line and the top of the penalty area, which may be marked with cones outside the touchline
 - ii. Penalty mark: 12 yards from the goal line for 11 v 11, 10 yards for 9 v 9 and 7 v 7
- e. Move all other objects at least three yards from the field
- f. If field deficiencies cannot be addressed and do not present a safety hazard to participants, the match may proceed. Deficiencies should be disclosed to both teams prior to the match, and a [Referee Match Report](#) submitted

3. Team Staff

Referees should introduce themselves to an available team staff member (ideally the head coach) and confirm the age group, match length, age specific modifications (ball size, build out line and heading.) If this is a State Cup match, confirm whether a winner is required and overtime procedures. Address how substitutions will be handled. Players and team staff (coaches and managers) may have questions; let them ask respectfully and answer respectfully when timing is appropriate.

4. Weather

The referee crew must consult with the home team coach/club before the match in the event of severe heat, unhealthy Air Quality Index (AQI), or other significant weather events. See <https://norcalpremier.com/resources/player-health-safety/>. For thunder/lightning work with the home coach/club to ensure all participants are safe, following the procedures here: <https://www.recognizetorecover.org/environmental#lightning-severe-weather>. See Section VII-1f (Other Information-Participant Health & Safety)

5. Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC)

For matches with an ATC or Licensed Healthcare Professional (HCP), see Section VII-4 (Other Information).

6. Player Attire

- a. All attire and equipment must be deemed to be safe by the referee
- b. Players on each team (except goalkeepers) must have predominantly matching shirts which contrast with the color of the other team. Bibs should be used if needed
- c. Shirts must have unique numbers within their team. Tape may be used to alter numbers
- d. Goalkeepers must wear a shirt that contrasts in color from both teams, and are the only players who may wear pants
- e. Players' socks should match their teammates', with the exception of goalkeepers. Opponents' socks should be a different color
- f. In the event of a color conflict, it is the responsibility of the home team to change
- g. Footwear must be safe. In addition:
 - i. Metal cleats must be safe with no sharp edges
 - ii. Shoes with spikes/studs on the front/toe (e.g. baseball/football) must not be worn
- h. **No jewelry** of any kind. No plastic jewelry. No covered jewelry (band-aids, tape etc)
- i. Hard casts and splints are not permitted, regardless of them being covered/wrapped

Optional clothing/items that may be worn:

- j. Visible undershirts for each team should be the same color as the team shirt sleeve, and should be the same color for all players on that team
- k. Tights may be worn under shorts and socks, and should also be the same color as their shorts and teammates', if visible
- l. Gloves or a beanie may be worn
- m. Hooded sweatshirts may be worn under the shirt, but the hood must be tucked in
- n. Medical alert bracelets or necklaces may be worn if securely taped; the "medic-alert" symbol may be visible. Medical devices may be worn if safe
- o. Soft casts are permitted if safe
- p. Braces are allowed if safe. All hard (metal, plastic, etc.) brace supports must be adequately covered and padded to be safe
- q. Head covers must:
 - i. Be black or the main color of the shirt
 - ii. Not be attached to the shirt
 - iii. Not be dangerous to the player wearing it or any other player
 - iv. Not have part(s) extending out from the surface, except goalkeeper caps
- r. Safe eyewear is permitted

7. Team Check-In

At least 15 minutes before kick-off, both teams should be checked in.

- a. Obtain a game card from the home team, or, if necessary, the away team. If a printed game card is not available, have team staff create one on a piece of paper from their physical player passes or electronic/virtual game cards. Verify the information between the paper and GotSport
- b. Obtain player and team staff passes starting with the home team. If a player or team staff member does not have a US Club pass for that club (physical or electronic via GotSport) they **MUST NOT PARTICIPATE**

Ensure physical passes are returned immediately after check-in is complete. Individual physical passes and printed sheets of multiple passes are acceptable provided the name, date of birth, season, US Club ID number, and a suitable photo are visible for each

- participant, and these can be matched to participants on the game card and participants present
- c. Check player equipment. Look for jewelry and have it removed immediately after the player has been checked in. Taped or covered jewelry is not permitted
 - d. All players must wear shin guards under their socks. Players/parents/guardians are responsible for the size and suitability of their shinguards
 - e. Verify that all player equipment issues have been corrected prior to the start of the match
 - f. Read off names from player passes, confirm the picture on the pass matches the face of the player. Verify that shirt numbers are correct on the game card; write in if missing or incorrect
 - g. If a player is present, check their name on the game card. Players whom coaches confirm will not be present for the entire match should be crossed off the game card
 - h. Verify which team staff members shall be participating. All participating team staff members must have a valid US Club Pass, and their name and US Club ID must be printed or written on the game card. Absent team staff listed on the game card must be crossed out. Referees must provide every opportunity for the team to present an adult with a valid US Club coach or manager pass to supervise the team in the technical area within the 15 minute grace period after the scheduled kick-off time. There is sometimes a manager, or a coach of another team in the same club, or club director, with the spectators, who may perform this role so that the match can start. If there is no adult with a valid US Club pass for a team present, the match **MUST NOT** be played.
 - i. Suspended personnel (those with a printed line through their name on the game card) must not participate
 - i. Suspended players must not play, but may be present in the technical area if not dressed to play
 - ii. Suspended team staff must not be present in the technical area and must not interact with the team from 1 hour before kick-off until after the match has concluded. They may be in the appropriate spectator area, but must not interact directly or indirectly with any player or member of the team staff. If they do interact, do not intervene, but submit a [Referee Match Report](#)
 - iii. Suspended team staff (red or gray line through name) with a note of approval to coach from the Norcal PAD Committee are allowed to coach and be present in the technical area. Submit a [Referee Match Report](#) stating which coach was suspended on the game card but allowed to coach and why
 - j. Any player eligible for the match (same club, same age group or younger) with a US Club player pass may play in a NorCal match, provided they are printed on the physical game card, or are viewable on the electronic game card in GotSport. If not on the printed one, once confirmed on the electronic game card, they must be written on the printed game card (full name, US Club ID, shirt number), and must be verified by the referee. If their name is not on either game card, the player must not play.
 - k. If there are more players present at check-in than are allowed (18 for U13+, 16 for U11-U12, and 14 for U8-U10), a team staff member (usually the head coach) must determine who will play. Those who will not participate must not be in uniform in order to distinguish them from players, substitutes and substituted players. However, they may be in the technical area

- I. A player with a female pass may participate on a male team. A player with a male player pass must not participate on a female team

Repeat from step b. with the away team.

Super Rec may have a check-in procedure that differs from the above, depending on the region. Contact the assignor to ensure the correct procedures are followed. ECNL-RL has an all electronic check-in procedure, shown [here](#).

8. Match Balls

Request at least 3 match balls of the correct size from the home team.

- a. Verify suitability, equal and satisfactory levels of inflation, preferably using a gauge
- b. If the home team cannot provide acceptable balls, solicit balls from the visiting team
- c. Position a ball outside each goal, at the rear, and use one ball for kick-off

9. Matches Played Under Protest

A match is played under protest when a coach states they will protest the match or when one of the following situations is present:

- a. The match halves have to be shortened
- b. One or more players do not have their name printed on the game card
- c. There is no printed game card

If a match is played under protest, the referee must inform a coach from each team and record it on the game card.

10. Pre-Game with Referee Crew

The entire referee crew should conduct a pre-game meeting; the content will vary depending on the crews' familiarity with each other, their experience level, the specifics of the match, field/weather conditions, and the time available. This can include any/all of the following:

- a. Rules of Competition (age-based rules, substitutions, etc)
- b. Areas of responsibility and when to be involved
- c. Priorities of responsibility (offside, ball out of play, fouls)
- d. Communication, including mirroring, eye contact, and hints at direction
- e. Use of verbal control over players and team staff
- f. Expectations in the penalty area
- g. Control of the technical area
- h. Handling substitutions
- i. Mass confrontations
- j. Everyone records all goals and misconduct, including numbers and time (to the best of their ability) in the following order:
 - i. Trail AR (the AR farthest away from the incident)
 - ii. Lead AR (the AR closest to the incident)
 - iii. Referee

This ensures there are always at least two sets of eyes on the field

11. Referee Crew Roles

Lacking a fully assigned crew, a relative may officiate a match if they are the only unassigned

licensed official present; the ideal role is usually AR2. This relationship must be declared in writing on the back of the game card, with both coaches signatures, before kick-off.

Do not make any crew role adjustments for any reason without first contacting the assignor. If a change must be made (generally due to injury) adjust roles so that the match is officiated in the best way possible.

If a member of the referee crew is not present 30 minutes prior to the match, call and/or text the missing crew member to determine their ETA.

- a. **The dual referee system MUST NEVER be used**
- b. If the missing crew member will not arrive by kick-off or within a few minutes thereof, inform the assignor
- c. Unless otherwise directed by the assignor, a missing referee is replaced by AR1, and a missing AR1 is replaced by AR2
- d. To replace a missing AR2, use an available licensed official, preferably provided by the away team. In an emergency, a relative of a team participant who is a licensed official, may be used. This relationship must be declared in writing on the back of the game card, with both coaches signatures, before kick-off.
- e. If a licensed official is not available, a club linesperson should be recruited, preferably from the away team. A club linesperson must only indicate when the ball is out of play by raising their flag straight up. They must not indicate direction, call fouls or offside offenses. This must be explained to the club linesperson before the match, ideally in the presence of both coaches
- f. If a missing member of the referee crew arrives after kick-off, the official should take the place of the stand-in licensed referee or club linesperson, regardless of the role to which they were assigned, unless directed otherwise by the assignor
- g. If a crew member is unable to continue the match due to injury, follow steps b-d

12. Captains Meeting

Approximately 5 minutes before kick-off, the referee must call for captains from each team, ideally at the halfway line on the touchline closest to the teams' technical areas. The referee should introduce the crew, and have the captains introduce themselves to each other. Then perform a coin toss with the visitors calling heads or tails (or equivalent):

- a. The winner chooses either to kick-off first half or which direction to attack
- b. The opponents kick-off or decide in which direction to attack in the first half

13. Technical Areas and Spectator Placement

Everyone in the technical area must have a valid US Club pass (and be printed or written in on the game card), except for ATC/HCPs as covered in Section VII-4 (Other Information-Certified Athletic Trainer)

There are two options for placement of the technical areas and spectators. See Section VII-8 (Other Information).

14. Late Starts

If, at the scheduled kick-off time, a team is not present, a team doesn't have the minimum number

of players, or a credentialed adult is not present for a team, referees must wait 15-minutes (the “grace period”) and if one or more of these issues remains unresolved at that time, the match cannot be played. The facts leading to this decision must be submitted in a [Referee Match Report](#).

NorCal encourages matches to be completed, but a late-game start should not impact the subsequent scheduled game(s). In the event that a match cannot be started on time, and this match cannot exceed the allotted time (another match is immediately following, permit expires, insufficient lighting etc.) the referee must shorten the match (by playing two equally shortened halves and/or reducing halftime to 5 minutes) and they must inform coaches of both teams before the match begins. If the referee is unsure of time constraints, contact the assignor. If the assignor cannot be contacted, the referee must assume the match may not exceed the scheduled end time.

15. Unable to Start Match

If the match cannot be started (after the 15-minute grace period from scheduled kick-off time, unsafe field, no credentialed adult of the same club for a team, fewer than 7 players on a team, etc.) a whistle should be blown three times to signal the match will not be played. The facts leading to this decision must be submitted in a [Referee Match Report](#).

16. Referee Tools

Vanishing spray must not be used unless permitted by the NorCal State Referee Coordinator.

Audio communication devices are not permitted unless every member of the crew holds a Regional Referee license or above, unless permitted by NorCal State Referee Coordinator.

IV. The Match

1. Injuries

Safety is the referee crew's primary priority. Please remember this when deciding to stop play and when to let play continue.

- a. Do not stop a promising attack or obvious goal-scoring opportunity except for
 - i. A potential concussion, head, neck, or seemingly serious injury
 - ii. A potentially injured player is at risk of further injury for any reason (e.g. play is approaching)
- b. When stopping play solely for an injury, take note of the location of the ball, and who had possession, or who would have gained possession, for the dropped ball restart
- c. Attend to the injured player with a sense of urgency

2. Potential Head/Neck Injury and/or Suspected Concussion

- a. Stop play immediately
- b. If an identified certified athletic trainer (ATC) or other licensed healthcare professional (HCP) trained in concussions and/or sudden cardiac arrest (SCA) is present, have them attend to the player immediately. See Section VII-4 (Other Information). Otherwise have the coach attend to the player immediately
- c. In competitions with no ATC or HCP identified, this player may not return to the match
- d. In competitions with unlimited substitutions, it is usual to substitute the player out (rather than continue short a player)
- e. In competitions with limited substitutions/reentry, see Section VII-5 (Other Information).
- f. For more details about ATCs/HCPs, see Section VII-4 (Other Information).

3. Correcting Mistakes

During the match, if the referee crew makes a mistake, the decision can only be corrected before the next restart:

- a. If play restarts before a correction is made, allow play to continue without altering the original decision
- b. If a foul was correct but the direction was signaled incorrectly, blow the whistle multiple times to prevent the restart, signal the correct direction, allow the defense time to reposition, then restart play with a whistle
- c. If a foul was incorrectly called where no offense occurred or a whistle is blown inadvertently, explain what happened to captains or coaches, then restart with a dropped ball to the team last in possession, or the team that would have gained possession
- d. If an AR signals an offense that the referee decides not to call, the referee waves down the flag and play continues
- e. During the match, do not look at external information (provided by someone outside the referee crew) including but not limited to photographic/video "evidence". If evidence is forced upon you, do not change an on-field decision (usually misconduct or goal scored/not scored) for any reason, and submit a [Referee Match Report](#)
- f. Critical match information must be recorded on the game card, including goals scored, cautions and send-offs, time of each incident and relevant player numbers. All referees must affirm the correct information is recorded on the game card, and the record of these details should be corrected as necessary. All game card recording must be completed before coach signatures and any pictures are taken.

- g. If a player was sent off in error this must be noted on the game card. In the case of mistaken identity, it must be clear which player was sent off, and which player should have been sent off, if applicable

It should be noted that while mistakes cannot be corrected after a restart, it is permissible to administer cautions and send-offs for offenses the referee did not observe, when appropriate information is provided by another match official.

4. Everyone Records Everything

All officials should record player number and time for all goals, misconduct, serious injuries and other significant issues (e.g. mass confrontations, problematic spectator behavior) the following order:

- a. Trail AR (the AR farthest away from the incident)
- b. Lead AR (the AR closest to the incident)
- c. Referee

This ensures there are always at least two sets of eyes on the field

5. Managing Technical Area Personnel

When communicating with team staff, approach them so that raised voices are not required, but do not enter their technical area. If a team staff member shows dissent or other unacceptable behavior, take a breath, remain calm, cool and collected; do not show anger or frustration.

- a. Warn – Caution – Send-off
 - i. Warn - at the next appropriate stoppage, give a firm, polite verbal warning. *“Coach, your behavior is unacceptable. Please stop.”* Be brief, and don’t engage in a discussion or debate
 - ii. Caution - if the behavior continues, which could include conduct immediately following the verbal warning, show the coach a yellow card. *“Coach, your behavior is unacceptable. If this behavior continues, you will be sent off!”* Be brief, and don’t engage in a discussion or debate
 - iii. Send-Off - if the behavior continues, show a second yellow and then a red card. *“Coach, you are being sent off!”* Do not engage in a discussion or debate

If the behavior warrants a caution or a send-off, proceed directly to that step. However, NorCal encourages referees to provide the opportunity for the behavior to be correctly modified by warning and/or cautioning before sending off. A send off with no prior warning or caution should be reserved for serious verbal offenses, i.e. offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or action(s), similar to players.

6. Player Send-Offs

If a red card is shown to a player, that player must leave the match and take no further part, but may remain in the technical area. The player must change or cover their shirt as a clear indication that they can no longer participate in the match.

7. Coach Send-Offs

If a red card is shown to a coach or manager, they must leave the technical area and take no further part in the match. The sent-off coach or manager may observe the match from the spectator area. If the sent-off coach or manager continues to coach from the sideline or interacts with their team, submit a [Referee Match Report](#) as this is not permitted, but the referee should not attempt to intervene.

If there are no other credentialed adults for that team/club, the match must be abandoned. Note that ANY credentialed adult (coach or manager) for the club may “coach” the team. They do not need to be present in the technical area until needed and they do not need to be printed on the game card. Referees must give every opportunity for the team to present an adult with a valid US Club coach or manager pass to supervise the team in the technical area within a reasonable amount of time. There is sometimes a manager, or a coach of another team in the same club with the spectators who may perform this role so that the match can continue.

8. Managing Problematic Spectator Behavior

Referees must not engage directly with spectator(s) behaving problematically. Typical unacceptable behaviors include:

- a. referee abuse
- b. repeated profanity
- c. repeated dissent

These behaviors must be addressed. For discriminatory behavior see Section VI (Discriminatory Behavior).

Scenario 1 - Offender is Spectator and Identified as Being Associated with a Specific Team

One or more of the referee crew witnesses problematic behavior by a spectator who can be identified as being associated with a specific team.

For the first offense by spectators of their team, the senior credentialed staff member is informed of the problematic behavior, and receives a warning for failure to control their spectators. The staff member must ensure that their spectators are informed that any further problematic behavior will result in spectator removal.

For the second offense by any spectator of their team, the senior credentialed staff member is informed of the problematic behavior, shown a yellow card and is cautioned for failure to control their spectators. The staff member is informed that they must ensure that the offending spectator leaves the area immediately.

For a third offense / second caution, the senior staff member is shown a red card (after the yellow card) and sent off. The next senior staff member (usually an assistant coach or manager) must ensure that the offending spectator also leaves the area immediately. If there are no other credentialed staff members in the technical area, the match is abandoned. See Section IV-16.iv (When to Abandon a Match).

Scenario 2 - Offender is a Spectator but Cannot be Identified as Being Associated with a Specific Team

If a member of the referee crew witnesses problematic behavior, or a team participant informs the referee crew that problematic behavior has occurred which comes from the spectators, but the offender cannot be identified as being associated with a specific team, then for the first occurrence, if play is currently stopped or at the next stoppage of play, the following steps are

taken:

The referee gathers the pertinent information from the referee team and/or team participant

1. The referee calls both senior coaches together, and states that further unidentified problematic behavior will result in:
 - a. If from a spectator, all spectators being required to leave the area
 - b. If from a participant, the match being abandoned
2. Play is restarted promptly with the appropriate restart from when play stopped

For second/subsequent occurrences of offenses that fall under these two scenarios, the actions above (1.a and 1.b) are taken without further warning to team staff.

Where the safety of the referee crew and/or any of the participants is threatened, the match must be abandoned.

9. Competition Protocols

See the [Rules of Competition \(Match Rules\)](#), and event information, especially for State Cup and other matches that need a winner.

10. Weather

For lightning and severe weather, work with the home team/club to ensure all participants are safe, following the US Soccer procedures here:

<https://www.recognizetorecover.org/environmental#lightning-severe-weather>

11. Late Arrivals

If a player arrives after check-in, before they may participate in the match, during an appropriate stoppage a member of the referee crew must:

- a. Verify they have a valid US Club pass
- b. Ensure their player information is correct on the game card (adding as required) and check them as present
- c. Verify their equipment meets the requirements stated above

If a team staff member arrives after check-in to participate, one of the referee crew must:

- a. Verify they have a valid US Club pass
- b. Ensure their information is on the game card (adding as required) and check them as present

12. Official Unable to Continue

If a member of the referee crew is unable to continue, see Section III-11, b-d (Referee Crew Roles).

13. Match Results

Members of the referee crew must only state the score of a match; they must never state that a match is or may be forfeit. Only the NorCal League Office can make that determination.

14. When to Suspend a Match

A match must be suspended when, in the opinion of the referee, it would be unsafe to continue,

or as required by the Laws of the Game or competition standards/protocols, and is likely to be resolved within a short amount of time. Inform the assignor of the suspension immediately.

Submit a [Referee Match Report](#) for all suspended matches.

Common reasons are:

- a. Serious injury that necessitates a significant delay
- b. Lighting is inadequate but there is an expectation it will be corrected
- c. Field deficiency but there is an expectation it will be corrected
- d. Weather issue but there is an expectation it will adequately improve
- e. Any other issue where the match cannot continue but there is an expectation that it can do so within an appropriate amount of time

Try to suspend play at a natural stoppage. Record the minute the match was suspended, what the restart is, for whom, and where it should take place. Restart the game with a whistle. The match must be abandoned if the reason for the suspension cannot be corrected in a reasonable amount of time.

15. When to Abandon a Match

- a. A match must be abandoned when, in the opinion of the referee, it would be unsafe to continue, or as required by the Laws of the Game or competition standards/protocols, and is unlikely to be resolved within a reasonable amount of time. This decision should not be taken lightly and should only be used as a last resort. The assignor must be informed of the abandonment as soon as possible. Submit a [Referee Match Report](#) for all abandoned matches
- b. Common reasons are:
 - i. Safety of the referee crew is seriously threatened (call 911 if necessary)
 - ii. Suspension of a match when the delay has been significant and the assignor has confirmed that it should be abandoned
 - iii. Suspension of a match when the delay has been significant and further delay will impact the start of the next match
 - iv. One team has no credentialed adult (of the same club) in the technical area - see Section IV-7 - Coach Send-Offs
 - v. Fighting, if resuming the match would probably be unsafe/lead to another fight
 - vi. Mass confrontation (when three or more team participants are involved in a physical and/or verbal confrontation), where resuming the match would probably be unsafe/lead to a fight
 - vii. A number of spectators behaving problematically enter the field and do not immediately leave when directed by the coaches, or the coaches are not cooperating with the referee crew to have spectators leave
 - viii. The number of players on a team able to play drops below the stated minimum number of players
 - ix. Extreme weather that is not expected to improve
 - x. Lack of lighting where restoration is not possible

16. Ending the Match

A whistle must be blown three times:

- a. At the end of second half
- b. At the end of the second period of extra time (if applicable)

- c. At the end of penalties (penalty shoot-out, if applicable)
- d. When a match abandoned
- e. When a match is unable to be started

V. After The Match

1. Game Card Reporting Process

- a. Fill out the game card legibly with the following:
 - i. Scores (at the top and bottom of the game card)
 - ii. Time and player number of goal scorer
 - iii. Misconduct (all participants)
 - iv. Referee crew names: for minors, put their first name only followed by U18
- b. If there was a serious incident (match suspension, abandonment, serious injury, etc.), record it on the game card
- c. If a player was sent off in error this must be noted on the game card. In the case of mistaken identity, it must be clear which player was sent off, and which player should have been sent off, if applicable
- d. Verify with all members of the referee crew, that the score is recorded properly and not reversed, and that all player misconduct is properly recorded
- e. Use the following procedure to complete the game card
 - i. Have a home team staff member review and sign the game card
 - ii. Have an away team staff member review and sign the game card. Have them take a photo of the game card
 - iii. The referee takes a photo of the **entire completed game card**, including the back if necessary
 - iv. The referee crew returns the game card to the home team for them to take a picture of and keep
- f. A [Referee Match Report](#) must be filed within 24 hours for each of the following incidents, and each send-off:
 - i. Referee abuse
 - ii. Fight or mass confrontation
 - iii. Spectators exhibiting problematic behavior, e.g. entering the field of play, refusing to leave the field area
 - iv. Serious injuries
 - v. Match suspension or abandonment
 - vi. Unsafe playing conditions
 - vii. Coaches trying to play a suspended, illegal or ineligible player
 - viii. Anything else that isn't normal or expected in a soccer match
- g. Ensure that reporting is done as soon as possible: see Section V-4 (Reporting)
- h. For serious incidents, the assignor must be informed immediately after the match

2. Post Match Crew Debrief

If time allows, the referee crew should take a moment to discuss their performance, focusing on positives, as well as what can be improved in future matches.

3. Leaving the Area of the Field/Venue

- a. Referees should ensure that their uniform shirt is not visible before leaving the area of the field, so they are not immediately recognizable as a referee. Uniform shirts should not be taken off if there is no undershirt - cover the uniform shirt instead
- b. Ensure that all crew members safely depart the match area where necessary

4. Reporting

All send offs and significant incidents must be reported within 24 hours of the match

- a. Fill out the [Referee Match Report](#) form. Report only the facts. Do not include opinion or other determinations that are not the responsibility of the referee (e.g. what the punishment should be or which section of the RAP Policy an offense falls under.)
- b. Send-offs must be reported individually (one [Referee Match Report](#) each.) If a player was sent off in error it must be reported as a send off for that player. The description must state the identity of the player who should have been sent off, if applicable.
- c. Incidents (other than send offs) in the same match may be reported together.
- d. Once any reports have been submitted, do not comment in GotSport on any conversations by team staff! If there is additional relevant material, please email the NorCal State Referee Coordinator

VI. DISCRIMINATORY BEHAVIOR

This section describes the on-field procedure to be employed by referees when they witness discriminatory behavior (language or actions) or if discriminatory behavior is reported to them. In all cases it is important that participant victims, when known, are listened to thoroughly and that any allegations are taken seriously.

Scenario 1 – Offender is Team Participant and Identified by Referee Crew

One or more of the referee crew witnesses the discriminatory behavior directly, and can identify the offender, and the offender is a player on the field, or a substitute, substituted player, team staff member or trainer in or around the technical area (i.e., a team participant.)

The offender is shown a red card and is sent off for offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or action(s).

Scenario 2 - Offender is Team Participant Within/Around Specific Technical Area but Not Identified by Referee Crew

One or more of the referee crew witnesses the discriminatory behavior, which comes from team participants in or around a specific technical area, but not from players on the field, but the offender cannot be identified.

If the offender is identified by a team staff member then the identified offender is shown a red card and sent off. If that team's senior credentialed team staff member (usually the head coach) cannot or will not identify the offender, then they are shown a red card and sent off.

Scenario 3 - Offender is Spectator and Identified as Being Associated with a Specific Team

One or more of the referee crew witnesses discriminatory behavior by a spectator who can be identified as being associated with a specific team (regardless of whether the individual spectator can be identified or not).

For the first offense by spectators of their team, the senior credentialed staff member is informed of the discriminatory behavior, shown a yellow card and is cautioned for failure to control their spectators. The staff member is informed that they must ensure that the offending spectator leaves the area immediately.

For a second offense, the senior staff member is to be shown a subsequent yellow card for failure to control their spectators. This is immediately followed by a red card and the senior staff member is sent off. The next senior staff member (usually an assistant coach or manager) must ensure that the offending spectator also leaves the area immediately. If there are no other credentialed staff members in the technical area, the match is abandoned. See Section IV-16.iv (When to Abandon a Match).

Scenario 4 - Offender is Team Participant or Spectator but Cannot be Identified as Being Associated with a Specific Team

If a member of the referee crew witnesses discriminatory behavior, or a team participant informs the referee crew that discriminatory behavior has occurred, which comes from team participants or spectators, but the offender cannot be identified as being associated with a specific team, then for the first occurrence, if play is currently stopped or at the next stoppage of play, the following steps are taken:

1. The referee gathers the pertinent information from the referee team and/or team participant
2. The referee calls both senior coaches together, and states that further unidentified discriminatory behavior will result in:
 - a. If from a spectator, all spectators being required to leave the area
 - b. If from a participant, the match being abandoned
3. Play is restarted promptly with the appropriate restart from when play stopped

For second/subsequent occurrences of offenses that fall under these two scenarios, the actions above (2.a and 2.b) are taken without further warning to team staff.

Match Incident Reporting

In all cases above, the referee must submit a [Referee Match Report](#), explicitly describing the specific discriminatory behavior(s) witnessed and/or alleged. All such behavior witnessed/alleged in a match must be submitted in a single [Referee Match Report](#).

Send Offs

All team participant send offs must be submitted by the referee using a [Referee Match Report](#), one report per send off.

VII. OTHER INFORMATION

1. Important Links

a. NorCal Handbook

<https://norcalpremier.com/resources/handbook/>

The Super Rec, ECNL-RL and NPL Handbooks are linked at the end of the NorCal handbook

b. Match Rules 2025/26

https://docs.google.com/document/d/1lukq0oiqlrsNn2jo4C6Btu0qRxw3Uj3zEbFRp_bPPrQ/edit?tab=t.0#heading=h.gjdgxs

Important match specific Rules of Competition for Referees and Coaches. Note that rules are based on the age group of the match, not of any of the participants

c. Participant Verification Information 2025/26

<https://docs.google.com/document/d/1gBrOI1WdHsL9c3193GkkVbl9EkFWfNvdMNf0XB7vZZY/edit?tab=t.0>

Very important information regarding passes and game cards

d. Laws of the Game 2025/26

<https://drive.google.com/file/d/1KhjhQsW4Cq616pPp5e0NsS1qSGRxAZZt/view?usp=sharing>

The Laws of the Game!

e. Reporting - Referee Match Report

<https://norcalpremier.com/resources/referees/reporting/>

This provides instructions and the link to the one form to be used for all referee reporting

f. Participant Health & Safety

<https://norcalpremier.com/resources/player-health-safety/>

Provides information and links related to extreme temperatures, AQI etc

<https://www.recognizetorecover.org/environmental>

US Soccer guidelines and procedures for various environmental conditions

g. Webinars

<https://norcalpremier.com/resource/referee-webinars/>

This contains recordings and presentations of all Referee webinars since the start of 2023

h. Resources Library

https://drive.google.com/drive/folders/1IPwfZALeb_HOJZEMvullhIRUdIcbm04Y

This contains important and useful information

i. CNRA Webinars

<https://www.cnra.net/on-demand-web-training/>

A comprehensive collection of technical training webinars for referees

j. **US Soccer Learning Center Directory**

<https://learning.ussoccer.com/directory>

Used to verify the validity of individual referee licenses

k. **ECNL-RL Check-In**

https://drive.google.com/drive/u/0/folders/16HlcD_N-VhzyC2EIsAdePdFglSTo1ap2

Information on conducting check-in at ECNL-RL matches

2. Questions

For any questions, please contact the assignor first especially for match-day issues. After that, contact the NorCal State Referee Coordinator, Aidon Jennery: ajennery@norcalpremier.com

3. 4th Officials

If a 4th official is assigned, the referee should ensure that the 4th official's role is fully understood before the match. At a minimum, the following should be covered:

- a. Managing substitutions
- b. Control of technical areas
- c. Authority to make calls, and mechanics of doing so
- d. Role in mass confrontation
- e. Foul tracking - assisting the referee with tracking persistent offenses
- f. Recording match incidents: goals, goal scorers, injuries and misconduct

A referee may be a 4th official only if explicitly assigned to that position by the assignor

4. Certified Athletic Trainer (ATC) / Licensed Healthcare Professional (HCP)

For matches with an ATC or HCP:

- a. The referee crew must be informed before the start of the match by the home team staff if there will be an ATC/HCP present for any portion of the match
- b. If present before the start of the match, an ATC/HCP must be identified to the referee by the home team staff
- c. If arriving during the match, an ATC/HCP must be identified to the referee by the home team staff as soon as possible (i.e. at a suitable stoppage of play)
- d. A player suffering a potential head/neck injury and/or suspected concussion **MUST NOT** return to play until they have been cleared by the identified ATC/HCP. No one, other than the identified ATC/HCP may clear a player to return to play in the match.
- e. If there is no ATC/HCP present, a player suffering a potential head/neck injury and/or suspected concussion **MUST NOT** return to play

The actions in a, b, and c above are not required at NorCal hosted events when NorCal provides ATCs/HCPs. In this case the only ATCs/HCPs able to clear players to return to play are those provided by NorCal.

5. Limited Substitution Matches

In competitions with limited substitutions or reentry restrictions:

- a. If an identified ATC/HCP is present, and a player is substituted out for evaluation for a potential concussion, head or neck injury, they may return to play after being medically cleared by the identified ATC/HCP (replacing the player who replaced them) without the

team losing a substitution, substitution moment, or affecting a player's ability to reenter the match. If the player is either not cleared to re-enter or the coach elects not to sub them back in a reasonable amount of time after being cleared, the temporary injury substitution must be counted as a standard substitution

- b. Temporary medical substitutions do not count against the team's allocation of regular substitutions provided the injured player is medically cleared and returns to play
- c. A substitute or substituted player may be the temporary substitute and this does not count for their substitution reentry purposes, provided the injured player is medically cleared and replaces the temporary substitute

6. Game Cards

This is an example of a game card before the start of a match. Please note specific areas for:

- a. Scores (two for each team - top by the team personnel and above the signature area)
- b. Team personnel
- c. Player uniform shirt numbers
- d. Player checked-in
- e. Player and Team personnel misconduct (cautions/yellow and send-offs/red)
- f. Goals scores (time and player uniform number)
- g. Team personnel signature area
- h. Referee names



2023 NorCal Regional Spring League: Region 3/4

system.gotsport.com/scoring
Event Code: 1bc38a
Event PIN: 2022

Printed At: 03/13/23 11:13AM EDT



Field: Bancroft Middle School: BMS 11v11

Date: 03/11/23

Time: 03:00PM PST

U8B 3/4 Division

Game#: 355

H ALBION SC SILICON VALLEY EAST BAY EB B15 ACADEMY Score:

Coach (Primary) 2920032
Coach (Assistant 1) 3127435
Manager (Primary) 2776727
Manager (Assistant 1) 2776726

ID	#	Name	✓	DOB	Yellow	Red
1	8339541	8		02/15		
2	3127424	13		01/16		
3	8794235	10		12/16		
4	8648739	7		08/15		
5	8799990	9		03/16		
6	3127430	4		03/15		
7	9065600	15		03/15		
8	9123531	14		09/15		
9	9406152			11/15		
10	8772589	25		08/15		
11	10231658	11		08/16		
12	8541306	17		08/15		
13	9955191	19		08/16		

A FCA SOCCER CLUB FCA 15B BLUE Score:

Coach (Primary) 8461456
Coach (Assistant 1) 2448239
Manager (Primary) 1097740

ID	#	Name	✓	DOB	Yellow	Red
1	8516748	0		03/15		
2	2448318	3		10/15		
3	7058964	18		05/15		
4	8524513	99		01/15		
5	2448319	5		11/15		
6	2448277	30		05/15		
7	2448248	23		01/15		
8	2448314	21		10/15		
9	8531759	22		09/15		
10	10267043			05/15		
11	8382049	16		10/15		
12	2448238	4		01/15		



Home Goals

By #	Min.	By #	Min.	By #	Min.	By #	Min.	Final Score

Home
Official
Sign

By signing this report you agree all items reported are valid



Away Goals

By #	Min.	By #	Min.	By #	Min.	By #	Min.	Final Score

Away
Official
Sign

By signing this report you agree all items reported are valid

Referees

Grade USSF ID Number

Instructions/Notes

Cautionable Offense Codes

UB = Unsportsmanlike Behavior
DT = Dissent by word or action
PI = Persistent infringement
DR = Delays restart of play

FRD = Fails to respect required distance
L = Leaves the field without permission
E = Enters the field without permission

Sending-Off Offense Codes

SFP = Serious foul play
VC = Violent conduct
AL = Offensive, insulting, or abusive language
DGH = Denies opposing team of obvious goal-scoring opportunity
DGF = Denies obvious goal-scoring opportunity to an opponent
S = Spits at opponent
2CT = Receives 2nd caution



2023 NorCal Regional Spring League: Region 3/4

system.gotsport.com/scoring
Event Code: 1bc38a
Event PIN: 2022

Printed At: 03/13/23 11:13AM EDT

7. Player, Coach and Manager Passes

Here are examples of physical player, coach and manager US Club Soccer passes. Remember to check that the information is valid for the match, particularly picture, club, season, expiration date and birthdate. 📄





Megan 

Competitive

Club: Montclair Soccer Club

Birthdate: 03/05/ 

Gender: F

Season: 22/23

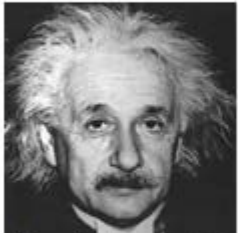
Expire Date: 07/31/2023

ID#: 1546426



Player





David 

Competitive

Club: Montclair Soccer Club

Birthdate: 10/19/ 

Gender: M

Season: 22/23

Expire Date: 07/31/2023

ID#: 2537277



Coach




Aidon Jennery

Competitive

Club: FCA Soccer Club

Birthdate: [REDACTED]

Gender: M

Season: 22/23

Expire Date: 07/31/2023

ID#: 1567080




Manager

8. Team and Spectator Placement

There are two options for the placement of the teams and spectators. If in doubt, the crew should verify with the home team which system is to be used, as the hosting club determines the layout.

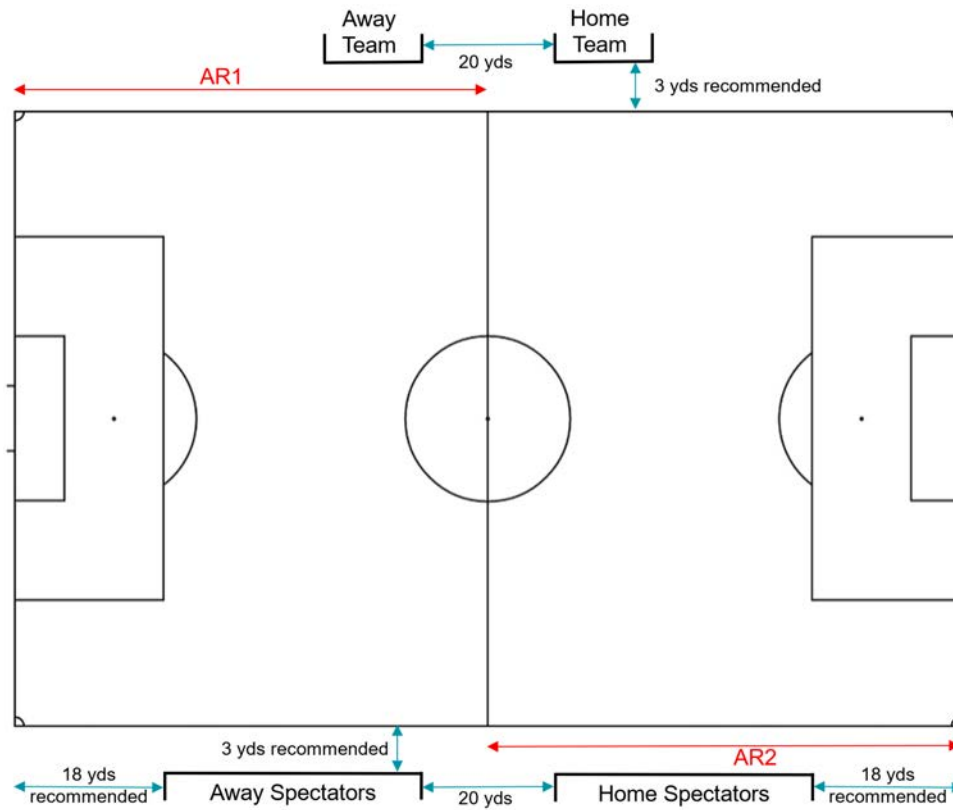
- a. Standard - Both teams on one touchline, and all spectators on the other
 - i. Technical areas should be 10 yards from the halfway line, and at least 3 yards from the touchline, and extend 10 yards towards the goal line
 - ii. All spectators must be on the opposite side, at least 3 yards off the touchline, or such distance as the Assistant Referee deems safe
 - iii. Spectators must not remain behind either goal line
- b. Alternate - Each team and their spectators occupy opposite touchlines
 - i. The home team should set up behind AR1, and the visiting team behind AR2
 - ii. Technical areas should be 10 yards from the halfway line, and at least 3 yards from the touchline, and extend 10 yards towards the goal line
 - iii. Spectators should be on the same touchline as their team, at least 10 yards on the other side of the halfway line from their team's technical area
 - iv. No spectator should be in or around the team's technical area
 - v. Spectators must not remain behind either goal line

When the alternate layout is used, the crew's pre-game should include expectations of how AR2 will assist with the visiting team's substitutions, as well as different expectations for handling mass confrontations.

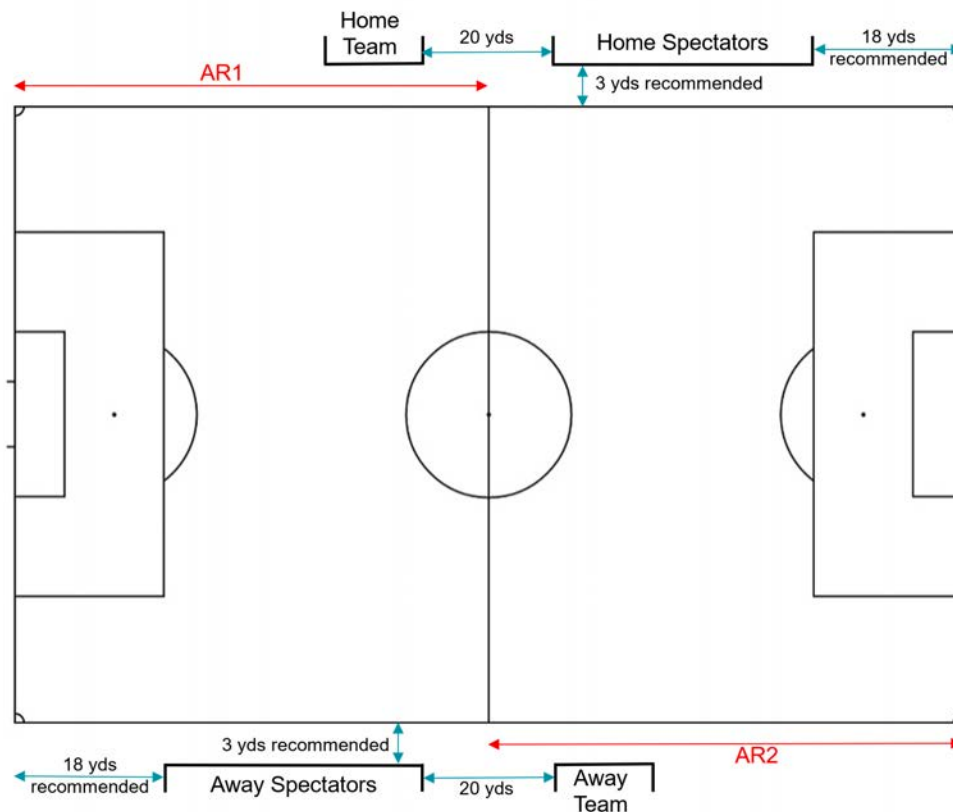
If spectators are incorrectly positioned, referees should require that the coaches address the issue before the match can start or continue. It is not the referee's responsibility to dictate any specific layout, or to enforce any specific layout.

The following diagrams depict the ideal traditional and alternative recommendations for full-size 11 v 11 fields. Measurements may be adjusted for smaller fields, and the layouts may be modified to accommodate the field area, facility or other constraints.

NorCal Recommended **Traditional** Field Area Layout



NorCal Recommended **Alternative** Field Area Layout



Feedback or comments on the information set forth herein, should be submitted to the NorCal State Referee Coordinator using the following form: <https://forms.gle/PYjy27G3A4qUVkqd9>

— End of Handbook —

