



Coach Toolkit

Spring 2025

This toolkit was created for the purpose of sharing information vital to the role of Coach. Please review this in full and follow up with your Age Coordinator for additional insights or questions.

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Quick start guide

Your AYSO Region 571 Coach Toolkit contains most of the information you'll need to be a successful coach, but the volume of information, especially for new coaches, can be overwhelming. See below for a **checklist** of all the key steps in a successful season. Each of these steps is supported in this Toolkit with helpful hints, links to online resources, and even sample emails you can use to communicate with parents!

- [Register](#) as a volunteer
- Complete the online [training](#)
- Attend beginning-of-season [Coaches Meeting](#)
[receive team roster and equipment from Age Group Coordinator, select practice field]
- Review Coaching materials [here](#)
- Set practice schedule (7U and above)
- Reach out to [parents](#)
- Coach weekly [practices](#) and [games](#)
- [Communicate weekly](#) with parents (all age groups) and refs (10U and above)
- Attend end-of-season [Coaches Meeting](#), collect uniforms (Fall season only)
- Provide player feedback after season end

At any point in the season, feel free to engage your Age Group Coordinator and Regional Commissioner as they are committed to your success and are available to help with answers and advice.

Everyone Plays®

Our program's goal is for kids to play soccer so we mandate that every player on every team must play at least 50 percent of every game. It's no fun to spend the game on the bench...and that's no way to learn soccer! *No player should go in for their 3rd quarter if another player has only played 1. Similarly, no player should play 4 quarters if another player only plays 2.*

Balanced Teams

Each year we form new teams as evenly balanced as possible because it's more fun and a better learning experience when teams of similar ability play. It allows for each player to gain the experience of a wide variety of teammates of different skill levels. *Teams will change from season to season, but most teams in our region, especially the younger age groups, are built around a core of players from a particular school. This is done to build camaraderie among players and parents.*

Open Registration

Our program is open to all children who want to register and play soccer. Interest and enthusiasm are the only criteria for playing. There are no elimination try-outs and nobody gets cut. *We also have kids that are part of our program that are from outside the Forest Hills area.*

Positive Coaching

Encouragement of player effort provides for greater enjoyment for the players and leads to better-skilled and better-motivated players. A coach can be one of the most influential people in a child's life, so AYSO requires they create a positive experience for every boy and girl. *Our coaches make all the difference in the season. This is the thing that is the most visible thing to parents and valuable to the player.*

Good Sportsmanship

We strive to create a positive environment based on mutual respect rather than a win-at-all-costs attitude, and our program is designed to instill good sportsmanship in every facet of AYSO. *This starts with coaches and parents. Address poor sportsmanship when you witness it.*

Player Development

We believe that all players should be able to develop their soccer skills and knowledge to the best of their abilities, both individually and as members of a team, in order to maximize their enjoyment of the game. *#1 priority is to have fun while playing the game.*

Expectations of coaches

Here is the [official position description](#) for an AYSO coach. Please read it in full.

As outlined in AYSO's national rules, it shall be the duty of each coach, referee, official, other volunteer, spectator, team member and other participant to, among other things:

- a) Conduct himself/herself in a manner becoming a member of AYSO and consistent with the AYSO Six Philosophies and the highest standards of conduct.
- b) Encourage clean competition and good sportsmanship.
- c) Prohibit and abstain from making negative comments and complaints about officiating.
- d) Present a healthy and safe athletic environment for team members, including but not limited to, not consuming alcoholic beverages, using tobacco products or smoking or simulating smoking or the use of tobacco products during practices or matches or in the immediate vicinity of the soccer fields.

It all starts with the coaches, though!

Therefore, in addition to the points above and those stressed in the position description and the national rules, AYSO region 571 holds our volunteer coaches responsible for:

- Maintaining regular contact with parents (min. 1x or 2x weekly) with clear communication
- Committing fully to the season schedule
- Recruiting an assistant coach and other volunteers (refs, team parents)
- Creating a positive environment for the kids – make it fun!
- Elevating as necessary any issues with players, parents or AYSO volunteers

Coach registration & training

Thank you for agreeing to volunteer with AYSO! To formally register and be certified to take the field with the kids, you'll need to follow a few steps which can be seen on the Registration, Certification and Training page on our website [here](#).

Any questions along the way, feel free to ask your division coordinator.

Note that you may be contacted by our CVPA (child, volunteer and player advocate) to ensure that you've completed your training before the season begins. **Please plan the time to get them done.**

Season schedule

The following schedule is to be updated by the Board prior to the beginning of each season:

Event	Date
Rosters posted	Wednesday 3/26
Season kickoff Coaches meeting *VIRTUAL*	Thursday 3/27 8:30-9:30pm on Google Meet
Game schedules published	On or before Tuesday 4/1
Make contact with your team via email	By Wednesday 4/2 (before Spring Break)
Practices can start for 7U and above	Monday 4/14
1 st game of the season	Saturday 4/19
Picture Days	Saturday 4/19 and Saturday 4/26
Final game of the Spring season	Saturday 5/31

Game schedules will be posted on our website as part of your Team Page.

Communications

The kids will appreciate you making practice fun for them, but the #1 thing that parents will appreciate about the season will be your communication with them. This is so important to the AYSO experience.

Your Age Coordinator will provide you with profiles for each player on your team along with contact info for the parents. We strongly recommend creating a separate email address (Gmail, Hotmail, etc.) just for AYSO related communication. Start a distribution list for all parents and update it throughout the season as parents request additions/deletions. Alternately (and perhaps a better choice): use the email/contact features within Sports Connect to manage communication with parents throughout the season.

Regardless, your first contact with them is a great opportunity to set the tone for the season.

Kickoff

Following is an email you can send to parents to welcome them to AYSO and kick off the season:

"Dear Parents,

Spring soccer season is here! We just received our team assignments from AYSO. We have a big team this season, which should make for some competitive games and fun practices. I wanted to take this opportunity to introduce myself and share some info on the upcoming season.

Hi! My name is _____. This will be my ___ year coaching an AYSO team. [SHARE ANY PERSONAL DETAILS YOU'D LIKE HERE.]

About this season:

GAMES:

- *For [AGE GROUP], games are played on Saturday mornings at [FIELD LOCATION(S)]*
- *There are seven games on the schedule this season*
- *The first game of the season is Saturday April 13th*
- *No games Memorial Day weekend (May 25th)*

PRACTICE:

- *Practices will be held on a weekday in the evening for 1 hour*
- *The town makes certain soccer fields available on certain days and during certain timeslots*
- *I'd like to schedule our first practice [DATE] ___ pm at [FIELD LOCATION]*
- *Let me know if this time will absolutely not work with your schedule each week*
- *Please plan on sticking around for the first 15 minutes of our first practice so we can all meet each other and hand out uniforms*

EQUIPMENT:

- *A big part of your AYSO registration fee covers your child's soccer uniform (shirt, shorts and socks), which I have for every player on the team.*
- *For players who are new to AYSO, I will bring your uniform to the first practice.*
- *For players returning from the Fall season, please use your uniform from the Fall.*
- *The players will get to keep their uniforms at the end of the season.*
- *For both games and practices, you will be responsible for ensuring your player has:*

- shinguards that fit under socks
- soccer cleats
- their own size ball
- water to stay hydrated
- no jewelry

OTHER:

- We currently have ___ players registered on our team: [list first names]
- For this age group, our local AYSO region calls for [example: 3v3 – see page 14]
- [FOR 10U AND UP...] As you know, AYSO is a volunteer-driven organization, and we can use all the help we can get! Our team will be responsible for sourcing a referee for our 4 “home” games. I’ll be reaching out to confirm with a few of you that you’ll be willing to help referee a game or two.

To conclude, please reply to this email by [date] for two reasons:

- Confirm you’ve received it and reviewed the details above. (In some cases, I’m sending this to both parents so I’d like to hear from at least one of you.)
- Let me know if you have a major conflict with the practice timeslot noted above.

I look forward to seeing/meeting you all on April ___th for our first practice to kick off what is sure to be a fun season! If you have any questions at any point, please do not hesitate to contact me by phone, text or email.

Best regards,

“Coach ___”
[phone #]

Feel free to use something similar or copy this exact email and personalize it with your details, exact dates, practice and game locations etc. Note that it helps to add something in your subject line indicating you need their response, like “AYSO Soccer Season Kickoff ****Reply Requested****”. Track the responses you get. It may be necessary to send a follow up email. Ideally, you’ve heard from the parents of every player before the first practice.

See the [Games](#) section for the AYSO rules of play for each age group referenced in the email above and feel free to copy the text from that section and paste at the bottom of your welcome/kickoff email.

First practice

While the welcome/kickoff email helps set the tone, your first practice is the single most important way to make a great first impression. Provided you’ve set aside the first 15 minutes to meet with the parents and meet the players, here are some talking points:

- Shake hands and learn as many first names as possible
- Review highlights of welcome email – ask if there are any questions
- Parents are free to drop off their kids to practice but AYSO policy says we must have two adults on or near the field for every practice (coach + assistant coach, coach + team parent, etc.)
- Please arrive 5-10 mins early to practice and 15-20 mins early to games
- Ask parents to stick around until uniforms are handed out
- Ask players to introduce themselves to each other (name, school, age, how many years playing soccer)
- Hand out uniforms – ask the kids to line up by height, then pass out smaller numbers to shorter kids and larger numbers to taller kids; once all players have shirt, shorts and socks, ask them to give them to their parent in attendance

- Check for volunteers (asst coach or referee(s) if you don't already have them, plus team parents/snack coordinator)
- Snack schedule – low tech solution is to hand around a sheet of paper, higher tech solution is for the team parent to create a sign-up genius; usually do separate sign-ups for food & drink; **ask if anyone has allergies to be aware of**
- AYSO's policy for rain/thunder/lightning is as follows: we'll practice and play if it's raining, but if we hear thunder or see lightning, we need to take shelter. We can't get back on the field until we're thunder-free for 30 mins.
- Please do not bring pets to practices or games (sorry, AYSO policy says they are a liability and as a coach, they are a distraction)
- I will do my best to keep you informed throughout the season with reminders on our schedule
- I have an open door policy – call, text or email me whenever you have questions or feedback
- If you have feedback on me as a coach, you can contact [Age Coordinator]

By this point, you may already have the game schedule for the entire season, but whenever you hear that it is finalized, please send a note to parents linking them to its location:

<https://www.ayso571.org/Default.aspx?tabid=958805> (click on the Game Schedule link).

Weekly updates

Weekly, you should:

- Send an email to parents reminding them of practice time (7U and above)
- Confirm who will referee your game if you are the 'Home' team (10U and above)
- Send an email to parents reminding them of Saturday's game time and location (esp. for 12U and up where travel may be required)

When parents do reach out to you, please reply within 24 hrs.

Other contact

Toward the end of the season, your Region Coordinator and/or Age Coordinators will announce that registration for the next season is now open. Please help spread the word to your players & parents.

There may also be opportunities to do Winter indoor soccer or Summer skills workshops. To the extent you are made aware of these, again please help spread the word to your players & parents.

Recruiting volunteers

AYSO is a volunteer-driven organization, and we can use all the help we can get! If you are coaching 10U or above, you will need to find a referee for your 4 “home” games. You will also find that the season will go a lot smoother with help from other positions:

Roles

- **Assistant coach** – to help run practices and games, esp. if you have scheduling difficulties; makes it a lot easier to ‘split up’ the team during practices and provide more personalized instruction
- **Team parent** – most often the snack coordinator and potentially to help with the distributing uniforms at the first practice and collecting uniforms at the end of the season; it also helps to have another adult near the field during practice if a player needs something
- **Referee** – ideally, you have two parents who are willing to get trained and ref a couple games throughout the season; start recruiting them in 8U, use them in 10U and up; this is a HUGE help to have them lined up, willing to help in later age groups; alternately, recruit from high school students

Best practices for getting their commitment

- Don’t assume they know that you need volunteers – you need to tell them and you need to **ask** for help!
- The best way to solicit help is **in person** and the best environment in which to do so is a non-rushed environment (social setting, team get-together, etc.)
- Even if not in a social setting, leverage every moment you have with parents, whether it’s before practice, after practice, after a game, etc.
- After your first contact with them and before the first practice is the most critical opportunity to ask for help. Email is good, but a personal phone call is even better.
- Target parents of players that are new to soccer – they want to be involved and supportive of their kid trying something new.
- Reassure them that they do not need any coaching or playing experience or knowledge of the game – training is provided.
- Tell them it’s okay to nominate their spouse!
- Check in with the families whose kids you know will be returning to play next season. Mid-summer updates and mid-winter updates are a great way to stay engaged with these most committed families. Personal phone calls are even more effective than emails. (Sound familiar?)
- If they are engaged as a volunteer and seem to have ideas about how things could be done better/differently, ask them if they would like to be on the Board.

Rules and regulations

In addition to the Summary of the Rules of the Game covered in the Coaches training section, following this [link](#) for a separate document outlining the AYSO National Rules & Regulations. Please consult pages 35-44 and 172-175 for age-specific guidelines from AYSO National.

Please be aware that our region differs in a few key ways in how we apply these rules when coaching our kids and managing games:

AYSO National Rule	Region 571 Rule
Matches shall be of two equal halves with 5-10 min. break between halves	<p>We play 4 quarters:</p> <p>5U & 6U = 5 mins 7U & 8U = 10 mins 10U = 12 mins 12U = 15 mins</p> <p>Timing in between quarters will be at the discretion of the referee but shall be discussed at the beginning of each game with the coaches.</p> <p>Coaches who wish to substitute for one or more players at any point during the quarter shall first check with the referee (or, in absence of a ref, the other coach), and do so only when the ball is out of play (ex: throw-in near midfield).</p>
For 5U to 8U, the throw-in is replaced with the pass-in	<p>5U and 6U will do kick-ins.</p> <p>We will instruct all of our players from 7U and up how to execute a proper throw-in. In-game instruction is okay. Referees allow for 'do-overs' if the throw-in is not done properly at first</p>
Both 6U and 8U play 4-a-side (no goalies) with 6 players max on the team	<p>5U and 6U will play 4-a-side (4v4, no goalies) with 7 players max on the team</p> <p>7U and 8U will play 4-a-side (4v4, no goalies) with 8 players max on the team</p>
<p>Max players per team for 7v7 10U is 10.</p> <p>Max players per team for 9v9 12U is 12.</p>	<p>Because players sometimes miss games, we have approval to carry more players on a team than what's listed on the left. We still honor our commitment to Everyone Plays, meaning every player will play at least half of every game, guaranteed.</p>

Running practices

Start with the [basics](#). Practice time is designed for the coaches to play games with the kids that will teach them the fundamentals of soccer. Read [this](#) to get up to speed on 'small-sided matches.'

Teaching the game of soccer to kids while trying to run an organized practice can sometimes seem like 'herding cats'. The time will definitely fly by quickly, so ask your players to show up 5-10 mins early for every practice to ensure you can start on time with a full team.

The best piece of advice you might get is this: Design your practice to **maximize the time that the kids have their feet on the ball**. I.e. Avoid having the kids 'stand around' in a line.

Finally, here are some additional skills to focus on with your players in practices (and games) and points of emphasis. These were originally authored for 10U and 12U players, but the basics of these skills would be appropriate to start teaching in 8U or younger age groups as well.

Dribbling / Ball Control:

- Inside of foot "[tick-tocks](#)" as warmup
- [Outside of foot](#)
- Right or left foot only [around the circle](#)

Passing & Trapping/Receiving:

- [Trap w/ inside of foot](#), step, pass
- [Push pass](#) for accuracy
- Go [towards the ball](#) to receive it
- [Wall pass](#)

Throw-ins:

- Both feet on the ground or [drag back foot](#)
- For repeat offenders, have them cross their legs to keep both feet on the ground
- Best advantage you can create is to make the throw-in quickly
- Throw towards the goal or down the line
- Okay to throw to open space
- Closest midfielder or defender should take the throw
- Coach may assign someone if we have a scoring opportunity

Attacking/Shooting:

- If you don't have the ball, use angles to get open! ([Wall pass](#))
- Okay to pass to space
- Forwards: Keep an eye on the defense – watch for off-sides (10U and above)
- If you're in the box, shoot!
- [Shoot low, fast](#), away from goalie
- Work on striking hard (w/ laces & center of ball)

Defending:

- Defend your portion of the field – don't bunch up!
- [Stay low, close out quickly](#), be aggressive
- Rotate to help a teammate if the opposing player gets through
- Clear! Your hardest kick when the other team has the ball in your box
- When you get possession, look up-field and advance the ball to your teammate
- Up-field & outside is best; "when in doubt, kick it out"
- Tackle – push through the ball with your hips, thighs and locked ankle (14U and up)

Corner Kicks:

- Coach will assign who takes the kick
- Forwards in front of the goal
- 1 midfielder top of box, 1 near the corner
- Look first to blast the ball right in front of the goal (especially 8U and below w/ no goalie)
- If the other team is blocking, pass in to nearest teammate
- For older age groups, learn about ['bending' the ball on the kick](#)

AYSO national, in line with the way soccer is taught to young kids all around the world, advises for younger age groups spending the most time in practice on the fundamentals of ball control, passing & receiving and defense. This is called 'small-sided games.' But whatever technique you are teaching, make it as fun as possible! Divide your team into squads that compete against each other for proper execution of a technique (successful pass, a takeaway, etc.) Your players will get a lot more out of practice if you make practice a fun game!

Finally, here are some additional thoughts on the benefits of running 4v4 drills in practice:

- [Why 4v4 is good for youth soccer coaching](#)
- More in-depth [explanation](#) of how to leverage 4v4 drills during practice
- Some [additional drills](#) inspired by Dutch-style soccer

Games

Whereas practices are designed to teach the fundamentals of soccer, the Saturday games are designed to allow players to discover the game for themselves and have fun. Here are some guidelines for game day for all age groups:

- Ask your players to arrive early for the game in full dress, ready to play. We suggest 5-10 mins early for 5U & 6U, 10-15 mins early for 8U & 10U, 15-20 mins early for 12U and 20-30 mins early for 14U. Arriving early allows for sufficient warmup and to meet with the referees and opposing coach.
- Coaches should meet each other on the field with the referee before the game. Both coaches should demonstrate teamwork by communicating and working with each other to ensure that both teams are having fun.
- **Safety first!** Absolutely no jewelry on players. That means no watches, Fitbits, or bracelets of any kind. No earrings as well (and taping them is not acceptable.) Players who refuse to remove jewelry will not be allowed to play...period! No dogs are allowed on the field or on the sideline. No hanging from the goals. These policies are all part of AYSO's Laws of the Game. Players and volunteer coaches are all covered by AYSO's insurance policies and we can't take on the extra liability incurred when players want to play wearing jewelry, horse around or if someone is hurt by a dog. Please reinforce these rules with parents and players.
- Let's try and have team unity when it comes to team attire. Ensure that players are playing in their AYSO-provided jerseys, shorts and socks. If replacements are needed, please reach out to your Age Coordinator. On cold days, the jersey should be the outer-most layer. Shinguards are to worn underneath socks.
- A minimum of 2 quarters is required for each player and it is recommended that no one play 4 quarters until everyone has played 3 quarters.
- The **mercy rule** is a goal differential of seven. Try not to reach that. Coaches are there to ensure that both teams are learning and enjoying the game. If you have to mix up the teams to do that, then do it. There are other things to try first, though. The coach of the dominant team can ask their players to focus on executing 3 or more passes before taking a shot on goal. They could move their more offensive-minded players back on defense for a quarter. Both teams can implement a **build-out line**, where on goal kicks the opposing team must wait behind an imaginary line halfway between midfield and the top of the goalie box where the goal kick is being taken – this gives the team kicking off a better chance to build momentum moving up the field.
- During the game, the job of the coach is just to keep the game going. Encourage the positive things and try to limit the directions. Most of the coaching should be done at practice; the game is where the players discover what they can do. We want them to be creative and independent players.

- For age groups 7U and above, we recommend coaches take a spot on the opposite side of the field as parents and encourage your players to stand/sit near you while they are not playing. That way, you can give them pointers during game action. The more they are focused on watching their teammates play, the more they learn! Note: This same idea can be used at 6U and 8U but keep in mind that as a coach, you will also likely be the referee during the game, so consider 'coning off' a players-only section of the sideline so you know where your reserves are. Also as you are refereeing in 6U and 8U, please be aware of your position on the field – stay near the sidelines, not in the middle of the action – so as to avoid being a blocker. Most importantly, stay away from the goals.
- All parents should be encouraged to cheer positively and refrain from "coaching" (giving directions) from the sideline. This is the time for the kids to play – let them! Check out our '**Parent Pledge**' and if you see issues in your parent group, gently remind them of our expectations for them (and any guests that are with them at the game).

For those just learning the game, here are the basic rules of play. Note that these would be helpful as reference for parents who wish to understand the game and learn it the same time their kids are learning:

- Start of play: To start the first and second halves, and following each goal, play is started or restarted with a kick-off in the center of the field. A coin toss is used to determine which team kicks off to start the game and the other team kicks off to start the second half. Following a goal, the team scored upon kicks off. Follow the guidelines above for the start of the 2nd and 4th quarters in 8U and below. For 10U and up, resume play where the 1st & 3rd quarters were stopped (same team keeps possession and same location on field).
- The Kick-off: The kick-off is taken from the center of the field with each team in their own half and the team not kicking off at least 8 yards from the ball.
- Ball In and Out of Play: The ball is out of play when it **completely** crosses the touch line (side line) or goal line (end line) either on the ground or in the air. The official will determine when the ball is in and out of play. Encourage your players to '**play until you hear the whistle**' and be prepared to keep playing if the referee misses the call. Especially in younger age groups (8U and below), if the ball is just a little bit out (width of the ball or less), then please 'play on' and keep the game moving.
- Throw in: When the ball goes out of play across the touch line (side lines) a throw in is awarded at the point it crossed the line. The throw in is awarded to the team that didn't touch the ball last. In 10U games, if the throw in is taken improperly, the team will be allowed a second attempt to make a proper throw in. If a player is not successful on the second attempt then the other team gets to take the throw in. Work on that at practice. Keep the game moving and fun. Note that players in 8U and below will be given more latitude and it is okay to stop play briefly to 'coach' proper throw-in technique.
- Method of Scoring: A goal is awarded when the ball **completely** crosses the goal line into the goal. Goals should be enthusiastically celebrated.

- Fouls and Other Stoppages: The official is responsible for calling all fouls. Teach the players to respect his/her ability to call the game. All others (i.e. coaches and parents) should attempt to refrain from voicing their opinion.
- Fouls: Fouls called against one team will result in the opposing team receiving an **indirect free kick** at the spot of the foul. (Indirect means the ball must touch someone else before it goes in the goal.) For 8U and below, if the foul occurs inside the penalty box, the indirect free kick will be taken from the spot on the penalty box marker closest to the foul.
- Penalties: Penalty kicks may be awarded in 10U and above for infractions inside the penalty box, with the direct penalty kick taken from the penalty line. No yellow or red cards are given in age groups 10U or lower. Yellow and red cards can be given in 12U for repeated infractions but must be preceded by a **verbal warning** from the referee.
- Offsides: 'Offsides' will be enforced at 10U and above. If you want to improve your understanding of the rule there are several visual explanations that you can find online. [This](#) is a great one and so is [this](#) one. Unfortunately, the easiest way for the kids to learn 'offsides' is to be caught. Use the opportunity in the game to teach.
- End of game / Sportsmanship: After the final whistle, it is common practice for teams to line up single file as a team and walk through and ~~shake hands with the other team~~, then thank the referee (if applicable). Then, and only then, it's **snack-time!**

Referees

We've already covered how important it is to recruit referees from among your parent group or friends or schoolkids. Chances are, if you are coaching 8U or below, YOU will be both the referee and the coach! Don't forget to bring your whistle to each game.

Regardless, as coaches, you should work with your referees to prioritize in-game instruction where possible (especially at younger age groups like 5U, 6U and 8U). For example, on throw-ins, give the player up to 3 chances to execute a proper throw-in.

Ultimately, the referee controls the field of play so abide by their commands and refrain from questioning their calls during the match. Seeking clarity on a ruling in a private conversation with the referee between quarters is okay.

When it comes to player injuries, as you learned in Concussion awareness training, it is your responsibility as coach to protect the welfare of your players. In the case of an injury to one of your players, the referee will err on the side of caution. If either or both of you believe it is in the best interest of the child to leave the field for any reason, that is the best course of action, period. Coaches are allowed on the field to tend to injured players. Parents may come out, too, to check on an injured son/daughter (somewhat common in lower age groups, less common in older age groups). Encourage your players to 'take a knee' when an injured player is being tended to on the field and applaud when they get back on their feet.

If an injury requires medical attention, an Incident Report Form must be filled out by the coach and submitted to the region safety director. Please ensure you have a copy of an Incident Report Form with you at all times (practice and games). The form has instructions attached. See it [here](#).