

# 2026 RULES OF COMPETITION



**US YOUTH SOCCER™**

## **MARYLAND** **STATE CUP**

**2026**  
**SPRING CUP**



The rules governing the US Youth Soccer National Championship Series, as published by US Youth Soccer (USYS) will also govern the Maryland State Cup, hosted by Maryland State Youth Soccer Association (MSYSA), for all gender and age groups with the modifications listed below.

## 1. Application Process

- a. All Cup applications will be completed online (see MSYSA State Cup tab for directions) and must be received by the published deadline date.
- b. Applications that remain incomplete after the application deadline are not considered to have met the entry deadline. A complete application consists of the application form and entry fee.
- c. Teams who have met all of the eligibility and other conditions of acceptance will be notified of their acceptance. The acceptance is conditional, subject to verification of “good standing” for the club, team, and players.

## 2. Conditions for Play

- a. Team-related conditions
  1. At least 50% of the players on the State Cup roster must be properly registered with MSYSA and USYS for the current seasonal year, be Maryland residents and the team must be in good standing. District of Columbia residents will be considered Maryland residents as it relates to this rule.
  2. Each team may be required to provide volunteers to assist with State Cup activities as directed by the Cup Committee.
  3. Teams must agree to honor all sponsorships/contractual obligations of MSYSA while representing MSYSA. This may include using the MSYSA tournament balls if provided.
  4. Teams may compete in only one State Cup competition in a seasonal year.
- b. Financial Conditions
  1. The appropriate fees must accompany each application for each team entered as outlined in the Cup Announcement.
  2. Any penalties for non-performance that are assessed to MSYSA through Regional or National play will be the responsibility of the team/club
  3. Teams committing the following infractions shall be assessed a \$500 fine:
    1. Forfeiting a Cup match.
    2. Failing to fulfill the supply of, and completion of duties, of volunteers as requested by MSYSA.
    3. Failure to clean and dispose of all trash from the team bench are after the conclusion of each match.
    4. Misconduct by Coaches, other Team Officials, or spectators resulting in the termination of the match.



5. MSYSA shall arrange award ceremonies to follow in recognition of the finalists in each bracket. Finalists must participate in the ceremony in its entirety.
  4. Fines assessed to a team for violation of competition rules must be paid in full prior to the teams next scheduled match.
  5. Each team is responsible for paying their portion of the additional game fee or referee fee, in their GOT SPORT team account, no later than Thursday before their match.
- c. Withdrawals
1. Notice of intent to withdraw must be made to the State Cup Director or designee.
    1. A team may withdraw and have the application fee returned if notice is given PRIOR to the published State Cup application closing date. A small service charge will be deducted from the refund amount.
    2. Refunds will not be given after the application closes and one week prior to the published State Cup Draw date.
    3. A team that withdraws less than one week prior to the published State Cup Draw date will be fined \$500 in addition to the forfeiture of their application fee.
    4. A team that withdraws after the State Cup Draw shall forfeit its application fee, be fined \$750, and may be declared ineligible to participate in future competitions.
  2. If a team wins the State Cup Championship and does not go on to the National Championship competition, it will be fined \$1000 and may be declared ineligible to participate in future competitions. This fine is in addition to any fine that USYS Soccer may impose.
  3. A team that forfeits the National Championship by their refusal to participate in National Competition may be ineligible for State Cup the following seasonal year if more than 11 or more players return on any one roster.

### 3. Cup Draw

- a. Teams will be provided ample notice of the time and location of the Cup Draw. All teams will be responsible for information discussed and materials distributed at the Cup Draw.
- b. The champion, finalist, and semifinalists from the previous year, if entered, will be seeded into the next older age group. If possible, teams will be seeded in opposite brackets from the teams they played the previous year. 50% or more of the players from the previous year's state cup team must be rostered to the current year's travel roster to meet roster continuity requirements for advanced seeding. No other teams will be seeded before the State Cup Draw.



- c. Participation in State Cup in the lowest age bracket, 11u, is limited to teams that are rostered as 11u teams, and whose roster include a majority of players born of the correct age for 11u teams.

## 4. Competition Format

- a. The competition shall consist of a possibility of five stages if necessary – each stage will be single elimination:
  - i. Play-In Round – for any age group that has more than 16 teams registered
  - ii. Round of 16
  - iii. Quarter-Final Round
  - iv. Semi-Final Round
  - v. A final to determine the Champion.
- b. The State Cup Director or designee will announce the bracket size for each group at the Cup Draw. The State Cup Director has the prerogative to make changes to the competition format as needed.
- c. The 18u and 19u age groups will be combined.

## 5. Scheduling

- a. State Cup games shall take precedence over all league games.
- b. All matches will be scheduled by MSYSA, with the possible exception of winter competition and play-in matches. If winter competition and play-in matches are not scheduled by MSYSA, the following procedure will be followed.
  - 1. The home team may provide a field of their choice and schedule the match at a mutually agreed upon time.
  - 2. If agreed to by the home team and at the away team's request, the away team may provide the home field for the match.
  - 3. Failure of the teams to schedule and complete games prior to the designated deadline will result in forfeiture of the game by both teams.
  - 4. Teams must notify the Cup Director no less than seven days prior to the scheduled match of the match date, time, and location.
  - 5. Any team requested to schedule a home match must have access to use the field without requiring assistance from MSYSA.
  - 6. Cost for field usage will be reimbursed by MSYSA up to an amount of \$200 per game. Any field cost above \$200 will be the responsibility of the team that scheduled the match on their field.
- c. Scheduled match dates, times, or fields are subject to change by the authority of the Cup Director. However, every reasonable effort will be made to play the originally published schedule.



- d. All reschedule requests are subject to the discretion of the Cup Director.
- e. During inclement weather, the Cup Director or designee will make the final decision to reschedule a match. The Cup Director will notify the teams and the Referee Assignor.
- f. Unfinished games due to any cause shall be replayed in their entirety if neither team is at fault and play has not begun in the second half. If play is stopped during the second half, play cannot be resumed, and neither team is at fault, the game is considered complete. However, if the game is stopped in the second half and the score is tied, the game will be replayed in its entirety.
- g. If play is stopped at any time due to one of the teams being judged to be at fault, it shall be at the discretion of the Cup Director or designee whether the game is to be replayed or declared a forfeit.
- h. Grace Period – teams are expected to be ready to play at the scheduled time of the match. Teams that do not have the minimum number of players at the scheduled start time of the match shall be granted a ten (10) minute grace period. A minimum of seven (7) players are needed to begin the match. Games will begin when the team has seven (7) players present and ready to play. The Cup Director has the ability to waive or modify this rule based on extenuating circumstances.

## 6. Rosters

- a. General
  - 1. Teams participating in the State Cup will create a State Cup roster for MSYSA approval.
    - 1. 11U & 12U rosters shall be limited to 16 players. The competition format for 11U & 12U teams in cup play will be 9 v 9.
    - 2. 13U and older teams shall not have more than 22 players on their roster at any time during the seasonal year.
    - 3. 11U-15U age groups cannot roster players that are more than two years younger than the roster age (Ex.: 11U is the youngest allowable for a 13U team). Teams competing in the 16U-19U age groups cannot roster a player that is younger than 14U.
  - 2. A team may make changes to its roster, consistent with USYS and MSYSA policy no later than the freeze date specified each year in information distributed at the Cup Draw. Approval of roster changes is subject to the discretion of the MSYSA Registrar.
    - 1. It is the responsibility of the team to ensure their State Cup roster is completely accurate before the freeze date.
    - 2. After the freeze date, a team and its players are considered to have competed in the State Cup for that seasonal year, whether or not the team or players actually played in a match.
  - 3. Team Official movement is not limited by the freeze date. They may be added or removed at any time per MSYSA procedures.

4. Players shall be released from the team upon their request. Players released after the roster freeze date are not eligible for National Championship Series play under any State Association for that seasonal year.
  5. Players registered on secondary (multi-rostered) passes are not eligible to play in the State Cup for the team of their secondary registration.
  6. A team must demonstrate continuity of rosters between every level of the National Championship Series competition by maintaining at least 50% of players common to the roster of the team at every competition.
  7. All player passes must be individually laminated.
  8. Players may only play on one team until it is eliminated from a National Championship Series competition, and until the current Cup they are playing in is finished. Each Cup is considered a separate event – State Cup and National Cup.
  9. Teams are advised to become familiar with the USYS National Championship Series rules regarding player eligibility and team roster changes. The USYS National Championship Series rules are available at [www.usyouthsoccer.org](http://www.usyouthsoccer.org) – national championship.
  10. Club Pass Players - a team may add club pass players to their State Cup roster at the National level per the policies outlined in 6.a. The club pass players must meet the age requirements and be rostered to another team from the same club prior to 10 days before the regional/national tournament.
- b. Additional Players for Regional & National Championship
- i. A team may add a maximum of **five** players from other clubs from the prior level of competition, whose team has been eliminated and does not advance to any level of the National Championship Series.
- c. Game Day Roster
1. The Game Day Roster is a copy of the most current, approved State Cup roster. One copy of this roster is required at check-in for each State Cup match.
  2. The Game Day Roster shall have a maximum of 18 players and a minimum of 7 players for ages 13U and older. 11U & 12U teams shall have a maximum of 16 players and a minimum of 7. Only players listed on the approved MSYSA State Cup Roster are eligible to be listed on the Maryland State Cup Game Day Roster.
  3. Any team failing to provide their Game Day Roster at check-in will forfeit that Cup match.

## 7. Referees

- a. The diagonal system of control will be used for all Cup matches. USSF certified referees will be used for all matches, consistent with USYS rules.
- b. A fourth official may be used for 15U-19U games.

## 8. Match Report

- a. The Match Report will be provided to the home team at least one hour prior to the start time of the State Cup match.
- b. Both teams shall provide a copy of their Game Day Roster and the home team will provide the Match Report to the referee prior to the start of the match.
- c. A Team Official from each team must sign the Match Report at the conclusion of the match.
- d. The winning team submits the completed Referee Report and Game Day Rosters to the Cup Director or Designee.

## 9. Field and Equipment

- a. Field
  1. Fields must meet the standards established under Law 1 of the FIFA Laws of the Game.
  2. The home team shall be required to provide all equipment for the field including goals, nets, corner flags, and proper field lining if necessary.
  3. Fields must be in good condition, including keeping the grass cut.
  4. Goals must be properly anchored.
  5. An “observers’ line” shall be marked 2 yards outside of each touchline and is recommended on all fields. Restraining areas should be set up to accommodate both teams who will occupy the same side of the field. This area will begin 5 yards from the midfield line and continue for 10 yards.
  6. If a field does not have a technical area for a team/coaches, each team must supply eight cones/discs no less than 30 minutes prior to the match to the midfield line for the field marshal/referee to use in the creation of a technical area.
- b. Player Equipment
  1. Teams shall wear contrasting uniforms, with the home team wearing light-colored shirts, shorts, and socks, and the visiting team wearing dark-colored shirts, shorts, and socks.
    1. Both teams shall have a complete set of alternate shirts and socks to avoid a color conflict. If in the judgment of the referee, the team’s uniforms are not sufficiently distinguishable, the home team shall change to a contrasting color.
    2. All playing uniforms, including goalkeepers, must have clearly visible numbers, at least six inches in height, on the back of uniform shirts. Each individual must have a different number, which shall be the same number that appears on the Game Day Roster.
    3. All field player jerseys, shorts, and socks must be identical in style and color. Referees should have an alternate jersey available to distinguish themselves from the jersey colors of the teams. The State Cup Director or

Designee may waive this provision at game time in the event of extreme weather conditions.

4. Goalkeepers shall wear a color that contrasts both teams and the referee crew.
2. Shin guards must be worn by all players. Players not in compliance will be removed from the field by the Referee. The player may return during a dead ball situation after being checked by a member of the referee crew for proper attire and being beckoned by the referee.
3. There are no restrictions as to the tape color used on the socks.
4. Player jerseys must be tucked into their shorts unless manufactured to be untucked, and socks must completely cover shin guards.
5. Undergarments
  1. Teams wearing dark jerseys (visiting teams) may wear black undergarments or the predominant color of the uniform jersey while teams wearing light jerseys (home team) may wear white undergarments.
  2. Goalkeepers are permitted to wear contrasting undergarments.
6. A player with blood on their uniform shall be removed from the field by the referee. The player may not return to the field until the blood has been removed from the jersey or neutralized by a disinfecting agent.
  1. It is recommended that teams carry a “blood kit” for use in situations involving blood on a uniform. Blood kits consist of an extra pair of shorts, socks, and a jersey with a number not rostered to a player on the team. A player with blood on their uniform may use the blood kit to replace their own to re-enter the field.
  2. Players removed by the referee for blood cannot return until they have been inspected by a member of the referee crew for being free of blood on their uniform and beckoned to return by the referee.

## 10. Rules of Play

- a. The FIFA Laws of the Game shall apply to all age groups except as noted herein or in the USYS National Championship Series Rules.

Heading the ball is prohibited in 11U games. Whenever the ball strikes a player in the head, play is stopped. If deliberate, then the proper restart is an indirect free kick to the opposing team. If this occurs within the goal area, the indirect free kick should be taken on the goal area line parallel to the goal line at the point nearest to where the infringement occurred. If the play by the head is deemed inadvertent, then the proper restart is a dropped ball.
- b. The State Cup Committee will enforce all procedural rules for all matches scheduled by MSYSA. Enforcement for all matches scheduled by clubs at the direction of MSYSA shall be the responsibility of Team Officials from both teams.
- c. Head Injury





1. Under Maryland law [(Md. Code Ann. Educ. § 7-433) and § 14-501 of the Maryland Code under the health title in the chapter related to general daycare and subtitled youth sports programs, and Maryland HB 0427 (Chapter 403) amending §14-501],
  2. coaches, referees, medical staff, or tournament officials must remove a player that has sustained a head injury and exhibits signs and/or symptoms of a concussion.
  3. The player is not permitted to return to play until they have been assessed by a trainer, if one is present. If a trainer is not present, that player cannot re-enter the match under any circumstance. Referees will only allow the player to return in the event after they receive direct communication from the designated tournament medical staff that the player is cleared.
  4. If a player is not cleared to return to play before the end of the game, the player's card must be turned over to the Cup Director or Designee by the referee crew.
  5. MSYSA must receive written clearance signed by a licensed healthcare provider. Upon receipt, the player's card will be returned to the team and the player will be permitted to return to play.
- d. Teams shall occupy the same side of the field and are restricted to opposite sides of midfield. Substitutes should remain in the technical area unless warming up, then restricted to their half of the field. Coaches are restricted to the technical area.
1. Players that are warming up shall wear pinnies to distinguish themselves.
  2. Players that are listed on the State Cup Roster, but not on the Game Day Roster may be on the team bench but shall not be in uniform.
  3. Suspended players shall not be on the team bench.
  4. It will be the choice of the home team as to which side of midfield it will occupy.
- e. Spectators are required to remain on the opposite side of the field from the side utilized by the teams.
- f. The length of matches, ball size, and tie-breaking rules for each group shall be as follows:

Age Group	Half Length	Ball Size	Extra Time
11-12U	30'	4	Two 10' periods
13-14U	35'	5	Two 10' periods
15-16U	40'	5	Two 15' periods
17-19U	45'	5	Two 15' periods

- g. Format Rules
1. Matches in all rounds of the competition must have a winner. Games ending regulation with a tied score will play the extra time period specified in 10.f. If it is still tied at the end of extra time, the Kicks from the Mark procedure will be used to determine the winner.



- h. Teams that forfeit shall be removed from competition. Any forfeited match shall be recorded as a 4-0 loss.
- i. Match Conduct
  - 1. Team Officials and spectators are not permitted on the field during the match unless beckoned by the referee. Violations of this rule will subject the offender to removal from the match site. Multiple violations by the same team may result in the referee terminating the match.
    - 1. Players sent off by the Referee will remain on the bench and must remove their game jersey. Any persistent issues with the disqualified player while on the bench shall result in removal supervised by MSYSA staff.
  - 2. Team Officials or spectators who have been removed from a match are required to be "out of sight and sound" before play will resume. They will be barred from the site and having any contact, electronic or otherwise, during matches while they serve the full term of their suspension.
  - 3. The referee may terminate a match for unsporting behavior or use of foul language by players, Team Officials, or spectators. Individuals responsible for match termination may be barred from future matches at the request of the referee and discretion of the Cup Director.
  - 4. No alcoholic beverages are permitted at event sites. Teams will be disqualified in the event alcohol is found in the possession of their Team Officials, players, or spectators.
  - 5. Smoking, including e-cigarettes, is not permitted at event sites. Repeated violations will result in removal from the site.
  - 6. Dogs are not allowed on field sites, except for service animals.
  - 7. MSYSA reserves the right to review all misconduct. A minimum one-match suspension will be automatically imposed for all send-offs. Further penalties may be imposed by the Cup Committee as deemed appropriate. A team's poor behavior can affect their future participation in State Cup play.
  - 8. Suspensions incurred through misconduct in a team's final game of the tournament shall be served in the following year's State Cup should the team not advance, or the National Championship in the event of advancement.
    - 1. Suspensions will be served regardless of whether or not the person is rostered to the same team during the following year.
    - 2. Suspensions incurred through misconduct in a team's final match at the National Championship tournament will be served at the team's first state cup match during the following year.
  - 9. Noise-making devices (drums, horns, cowbells, etc.) are prohibited.
  - 10. In compliance with USYS policy, the use of unmanned aircraft (drones) is prohibited. Any person violating this policy shall be immediately removed from the event.

j. Substitutions



- 1. Substitutions may be made during any stoppage and at the referee's discretion. Re-entry is permitted at designated substitution points or at any time during play if the referee permits.**
- 2. Unlimited substitutions are permitted in the 11u-12u age groups.**
- 3. Unlimited substitutions are permitted in the 13u & 14u age groups over three moments per half plus halftime.**
- 4. Unlimited substitutions are permitted in the 15u through 19u age groups over four moments per match plus halftime.**
- 5. If the match requires overtime, each team will receive one additional moment plus the interval between the two equal halves.**

1. Players suspected of having a head injury may be substituted to receive an evaluation without the substitution counting against the teams' total number of allowed substitutions during the given play period.
  - a. If the player suspected of injury has received clearance from the event medical staff, the player may enter at any stoppage of play and must replace the original substitute to not count as a substitution. The temporary player may then re-enter as a regular substitute.
- k. Teams not ready to play at the scheduled start time of any match shall be granted a ten-minute grace period. A minimum of seven players are required to begin the game and games shall begin when this requirement is met.

## 11. Appeal and Protest Procedures

- a. Protests based upon field conditions, including field layout and dimensions must be registered with the Cup Director or designee no less than 45 minutes prior to the match. The Cup Director or designee will provide direction to the referee and will include this note on the Match Report.
- b. All protests lodged by a team regarding player eligibility may be emailed directly to the Cup Director and must be submitted in writing to the Cup Director at the MSYSA office with a \$500 protest fee, payable to MSYSA within 48 hours of the conclusion of the match. Mail postmarked after this time will not be considered. Metered mail will not be acceptable proof of timeliness.
- c. The Cup Director can investigate and rule on any player eligibility questions at any time.
- d. Any team found to be in violation of player eligibility rules shall automatically forfeit the match where the violation occurred.



## 12. Awards Presentation

- a. Individual and team awards will be presented to both the Champion and Finalist immediately following the Final. Teams are required to participate in the Awards Presentation and are directed to go to the awards area immediately following the completion of the Final.
- b. If the coach is not able to attend the awards ceremony, another Team Official must attend with the team.

## 13. National Competition

- a. Winners of the State Cup will represent MSYSA at the USYS National Championship (exception: the 11u & 12u age groups).
- b. Finalists and/or semifinalists must be prepared to represent MSYSA in the event the State Cup Champion is unable to attend.
- c. Entry into the Maryland State Cup competition acknowledges the above and represents an agreement to participate in the USYS National Championship competitions. Should the State Cup Champion (or their replacement) not attend these competitions, the Championship will be forfeited and the team subject to a \$1000 fine from MSYSA.
  1. Teams will be responsible for any fines or assessed to MSYSA as a result of their non-performance at the National Championship competitions. If the fine and fees go unpaid, the club and/or team will be considered in "poor standing" until payment is rendered.