



March 18, 2026

NFHS Soccer Weekly Rule Interpretations

NFHS 25-26 POE: Team Areas and Bench Decorum

Effective communication is essential for officials in maintaining control over the match, particularly when dealing with bench decorum and sportsmanship. An official's role is to keep the game safe, fair and fun, which requires adapting to the level of play and responding to game situations as they develop. High school soccer is an extension of the

classroom, meaning officials must uphold the highest standards of professionalism, composure and integrity. By setting a respectful tone, referees can prevent escalation and unnecessary conflict. Recognizing and addressing dissent early is crucial while emotional reactions can be ignored, public, provocative or



persistent complaints must be dealt with decisively. Coaches and bench personnel set the tone for their teams, and poor behavior can spread if not managed properly. In education-based athletics, adult leaders must be champions of character. Bench decorum must be actively monitored, as unchecked misconduct from the team area can quickly influence players and spectators. The head coach has an obligation to manage their team's behavior. A firm but fair approach ensures that the game remains under control while demonstrating respect for all participants. Officials have tools to warn coaches and must act to sanction misconduct when it occurs. Ultimately, head coaches are responsible for their team area, including assistant coaches and substitutes, and must be held accountable for any misconduct occurring within this area and the field.

SITUATION 1: After already warning Team B's head coach to control their assistants in the team area, the referee hears an assistant coach for Team B directing abusive language across the field. The referee ejects the identified assistant coach per 12-6-1e and cautions Team B's head coach for unsporting conduct per 12-5-1g. **RULING:** Legal. **COMMENT:** Head coaches are responsible for the behavior of their rostered personnel inside their team area. While the misconduct of using abusive language is sanctioned to the identified individual, the head coach is additionally cautioned for failing to address their team's behavior, especially after being warned as in this situation. [12-4-4]

SITUATION 2: Dissent is publicly directed to the referee originating from Team A's team area. The referee could not identify the offender. The referee cautions Team A's head coach for unsporting conduct as per 12-5-1g. **RULING:** Legal. **COMMENT:** The head coach is responsible for their team area and should be held accountable for any misconduct occurring within this area. [12-4-4]

