



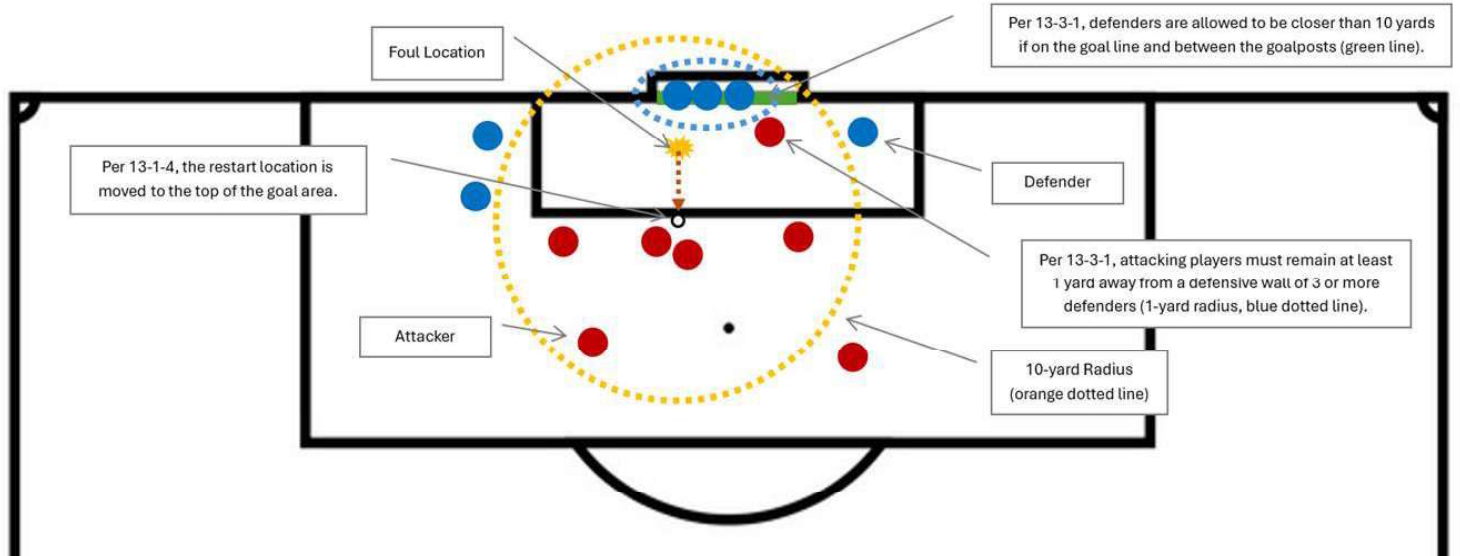
April 8, 2026

NFHS Soccer Weekly Rule Interpretations

The NFHS recently received an inquiry into indirect free kick taking place in the defending team's penalty area. When can a defending team stand closer than 10 yards away from the ball? This situation can only legally happen when the attacking team is awarded an indirect free kick (IDFK) inside their opponent's penalty area, and the IDFK is closer to the goal line than 10 yards.

Things to remember:

- **Rule 13-1-3:** "Any free kick awarded to the defending team within its own goal area may be taken from any point within the goal area."
 - This is just like a goal kick, the ball can be placed anywhere within the goal area that extends 6 yards from the goal line. That covers IDFKs awarded to the defending team.
- **Rule 13-1-4:** "Any indirect free kick awarded to the attacking team within its opponent's goal area shall be taken from the part of the goal-area line which runs parallel to the goal line at the point nearest to where the offense was committed."
 - This ensures IDFKs are at least 6 yards away from the goal, so the restart is fair.
 - If this did not exist, then imagine placing the free kick 1 foot from the goal line: it would just not be fair because there would be no room for a defensive wall.
 - This allowance creates the necessity to carve out an exception for opponents who would normally have to be at least 10 yards away from the ball on any free kick.
- **Rule 13-3-1:** "Players opposing the kicker shall be at least 10 yards from the ball until it is kicked, unless the players are standing on their own goal line between the goal posts."
 - This covers the exception created by 13-1-4 and is the only exception where an opposing player may legally be positioned closer than 10 yards to the free kick: if they are standing on their own goal line between the goal posts.
 - Note, players cannot be off the field of play (they can't be standing inside the goal).
 - I.e., defenders must be on the goal line and between the goalposts to be closer than 10 yards. If they are on the goal line, but outside the goalposts and closer than 10 yards to the ball, then they must be moved to at least 10 yards away.
- **Rule 13-3-1 further:** "Where three or more defending team players form a wall, all attacking team players must remain at least 1 yard from the wall until the ball is in play."
 - This requirement is not waived even if the defending team is closer than 10 yards from the free kick.



SITUATION: The referee awards Team A an indirect free kick two yards in front of Team B's goal. The free kick is positioned at the top of the goal area, six yards from and parallel to the goal line, nearest to where the foul occurred. Team B has players positioned closer than ten yards from the free kick by placing (a) three defenders in a wall on the goal line and between the goal posts; (b) a defender on the goal line, next to the goal post, but outside of the goal. **RULING:** (a) legal; (b) illegal. **COMMENT:** In (a), the opponents are allowed to be closer than ten yards to the free kick because they are on their goal line and between the goalposts. In (b), the opponent must be positioned at least ten yards from the free kick, or move between the goal posts.