



April 15, 2026

NFHS Soccer Weekly Rule Interpretations

SITUATION 1: Before the game, Team A's head coach confirms their players are legally and properly equipped. During the first half, player A10 appears to have conspicuously small shinguards. At the next stoppage, the referee delays the restart to inspect A10's equipment. Neither shinguard has the NOCSAE seal marked anywhere on it. **RULING:** Illegal. **COMMENT:** Shinguards without the NOCSAE seal are illegal and not permitted. Rule 4-1-5a requires shinguards to provide adequate and reasonable protection. A shinguard's safety is not under the purview of the player, coach, or official. What constitutes "adequate and reasonable" is solely determined by NOCSAE, and Rule 4-1-5e requires all shinguards to have the NOCSAE seal. Shinguards that appear properly sized, conforming to the uniform appearance compared to other players, may be reasonably assumed by officials to be legal, even without having to inspect every shinguard for the NOCSAE logo. However, shinguards that appear suspiciously small, or look undersized compared to other players, require closer scrutiny. Once examined by the official, the legality of the shinguard is determined only by the visible presence of the NOCSAE seal marked somewhere on the shinguard. [4-4-1]

SITUATION 2: An attacker takes a shot on goal, and the goalkeeper deflects the ball over the crossbar. Before the corner kick, the referee discovers the goalkeeper is not wearing shinguards. The referee delays the corner kick and removes the goalkeeper from the field for illegal equipment. The referee cautions the goalkeeper's head coach and allows a substitute goalkeeper from the bench to enter the game. **RULING:** Correct procedure. **COMMENT:** On the first occurrence of illegal equipment, the head coach is cautioned. Subsequent offenses for illegal player equipment are sanctioned by cautioning the player with illegal equipment. Regardless of who is shown the yellow card, the illegally equipped player must leave the field of play. This includes the goalkeeper. The earliest opportunity to re-enter the game for any player who was required to leave the field due to illegal equipment is at the next legal substitution opportunity for that team. [4-4-2]

SITUATION 3: While dribbling with the ball, player A1's shoe falls off their foot. A1 then shoots the ball into the goal. The referee awards the goal, and before the kickoff, asks A1 to correct their equipment. **RULING:** Correct procedure. **COMMENT:** Officials do not have to stop play immediately when an equipment violation is discovered, including illegal and/or improper equipment. Only if the equipment issue presents a dangerous situation to the player should play be stopped. If play is allowed to continue during such a situation, and an illegally or improperly equipped player scores, then the goal is not nullified because of an equipment violation. [4-4-4]

SITUATION 4: Player A2 and opponent B7 are challenging for control of the ball. During shoulder-to-shoulder contact, A2's shoe accidentally falls off their foot. Both players continue to fairly challenge each other for the ball. The referee stops play and directs A2 to correct their equipment. The referee awards Team B an indirect free kick. **RULING:** Correct procedure. **COMMENT:** Officials do not have to stop play immediately when an equipment violation is discovered, including illegal or improper equipment. However, if the equipment issue presents a danger, play should be stopped immediately. If play is stopped for an improperly or illegally equipped player, then it is considered dangerous play by the player with the equipment issue. The restart is an indirect free kick for the opposing team, taken from where the player became illegally or improperly equipped. If the player is readily able to correct their improper equipment, they are not required to leave the field. If play was stopped for an illegally equipped player, then the player must leave the field of play, and either the illegally equipped player or their head coach is cautioned. [4-4-4]