

NEW TO SOCCER?

Are you new to soccer? Has your child just said, "I wanna play!" So, you are filling out the registration form wondering, "What does my kid need to be a soccer player? Is it expensive? I grew up playing other sports, how the heck will I understand this game?" Below we answer some of those frequently asked questions.

What equipment is needed? Minimally, a player must have: sneakers (or cleats), shin guards, soccer socks, and a soccer ball. Poughkeepsie Soccer Club supplies the ball for Under 5 only.

Sneakers or cleats: Sneakers are fine for a player that is entering in under-five category. The two essential elements of getting cleats or sneakers are: fit and comfort. If they fit and are comfortable, they are fine for soccer. The one advantage of soccer cleats is that they help players with stability when running and attempting to turn sharply on a wet field.

Ball: balls come in different sizes. How do you know which is the correct size?

- Under 5's: children who are no more than 5 years old by July 31, 2006. Size 3 ball.
- Under 6's: children who are no more than 6 years old by July 31, 2006. Size 3 ball.
- Under 7's: children who are no more than 7 years old by July 31, 2006. Size 4 ball.
- Under 8's: children who are no more than 8 years old by July 31, 2006. Size 4 ball.

The correct size ball is essential for young players. Attempting to learn a skill with a ball that is too large can frustrate a young player who has not yet attained the leg strength to handle a larger ball. Working with a ball that is too small causes a player to over kick, and not learn the correct mechanics. Sewn seam balls are the better quality balls, and as such cost a bit more, but they last longer, and feel better when kicked.

Shin guards: a player must have shin guards or they are not allowed to play or practice. Do not even ask for an exception. Remember, the rule is there for the safety of your child. Shin guards can be purchased at sporting goods stores. A good fit is essential for your player's comfort and safety. A good fit means that the bottom of the shin guard rests behind the tongue of the sneaker or cleat at the top of the angle between foot and ankle. The bottom of a shin guard is shaped like a "U," the bottom of the "U" should fit over the ankle. The top of the shin guard should come to just below the knee-cap when the knee is bent.

Soccer socks: must fit over the shin-guards. Socks are relatively inexpensive, available at sporting goods stores. Poughkeepsie Soccer Club provides these.

Shorts: black shorts should be worn for games. Poughkeepsie Soccer Club provides these.

What is Soccer?

Now that the equipment issues are settled, what the heck is this game called soccer (in the United States) and football (or futball) everywhere else in the world?

Soccer has very ancient origins, but within the last century a common set of rules were adopted that everyone plays by. It is by far the world's most popular sport, and is played in every country in the world. How well your national soccer team does defines how good your country is to the rest of the world. Soccer teams are a source of tremendous pride and passion among fans. The rules can be modified slightly (usually the length of time it takes to play a game) for age-groups, but the rules (or Laws of the Game) remain essentially the same for everyone. That makes soccer easy to learn, and play, since there are no "special local rules" for particular leagues, etc. Essentially soccer is played on a rectangular field by two teams. The game is played in two halves of equal time. A referee is assigned to manage the game, make certain the rules are being followed, and interpret the rules for the players (note that I did not say coaches or spectators).

Start of play: play is started by kicking the ball forward (or just touching the ball gently) at midfield by players of the team kicking off. Players can kick the ball with the foot or leg, or use their head, chest,

or back-they may not touch the ball with their hands, or use their arms or the front of their shoulders (the two exceptions to this rule are the goalies).

The ball is "in play" when it is in the field of play. When the ball completely crosses the side-line (called touch lines) on the ground or in the air, or the end lines (goal lines), it is out of play. Play is restarted either by throwing the ball in (when it is out along the side lines) or kicked in from the corner (or near the goal) when it crosses out over the end lines. Play can also be restarted by a kick (direct or indirect depending on the infraction) for fouls committed during play. Again, the clock is running, and play begins immediately, the referee just signals the foul and where it occurred, the players start play again without wasting time.

A goal is scored when the ball completely crosses the goal line into the opponent goal.

There are other rules about players not being able to foul (jump at, push, or hit) one another when playing (attempting to dribble, kick, or head) the ball, or running directly to get the ball.

That's all folks-a really simple game.

What's that offside rule? It's easy. When the ball is kicked toward the opposing goal to the attacker closest to the opponents goal, that attacking (offensive) player closest to the opponents goal must have two (or more) opposing players between him (or her) and the goal, at the time the ball is kicked (read played) to them. And the goalie counts as one of the two opposing players. So, if a player can count to two, they can understand offside.

That's it. You've had your first lesson in soccer. Children generally like soccer for the continuous action-it never stops for very long, and it is easy for them to learn to run and kick the ball. Essentially, it appeals to active children who like to run. It is a team sport, and the children have to learn to work together.