

# *Managing Substitutions*

*Tom Hart*

Every coach's nightmare: seven substitutes sitting on the bench. OR NO ONE! Too many or too few. The Laws of the Game originally prohibited substitutions- the USA playing in the first World Cup in 1930 had a player break his leg in a game and was forced to play shorthanded. In the 1980's professional teams in England made do with ONE substitute! In youth soccer we do not have constraints on substitutions. At the most competitive levels of youth soccer there may be only one or two substitutions the entire game whereas in recreational play substitution may occur every few minutes. "Subbing" too frequently disrupts the flow of the game. Many times I've seen a coach who subs at every opportunity whether the players needed it or not! (And kids would yell, "I just came in!")

**Recreational Play-** since participation is the priority, many leagues require that all players have a minimum amount of playing time each game (usually 50%). Since no player wants to play only half a game, coaches must maximize playing time for each player. After all if your "weakest" player only plays half a game throughout the season and your "strongest" plays every minute of every game- how will that "weak" player develop? He's only playing HALF as much AND NEEDS IT THE MOST! Odds are he/she will probably quit to PLAY somewhere else.

Many leagues use quarters rather than halves to ensure that each player gets a fair amount of playing time. For example: No child may play their third quarter UNLESS every other player has played two. No child may play their fourth quarter unless every other player has played three. Keep track on paper and the system is not difficult (or ask a parent to keep track of substitutes).

**Competitive or premier play** has increased emphasis on results and quality of play. As such, starting players "earn" their position through ability and effort. There is usually no guarantee of playing time.

## **Why substitute?**

**Performance-** In premier competition players must meet the demands of that match. Failure to perform to standard may result in being replaced.

**Injury-** Obviously if a player is injured he may be replaced.

**Tactical-** Up by a goal late in the match, coaches may elect to replace a forward with an extra defender or defensive midfielder. If losing, the coach may replace a defender with a player who has better attacking skills.

**Behavioral-** A player after receiving a caution (yellow card) will often be substituted to avoid possibility of receiving another card and subsequently missing a game due to suspension.

**Fatigue-** Out of gas? Heat a problem? Team needs "fresh" legs?

**Participation-** In recreational play because the spirit of kids soccer requires it. In premier play to "season" an inexperienced player.

## **When to substitute?**

Generally substitutions are made prior to a throw-in by your team, after a goal, prior to a goal kick by either team, at halftime, or because of injury. Referees may allow a substitution at ANY stoppage in play. Please- try not to sub a player immediately after a ball went through their hands into the goal. Have a heart and wait a few minutes. And always speak to the player coming off the field! "Good job!, get some water and stay ready" along with a high five do wonders for kids of any age.

For more coaching articles see *Coaches* on the US Youth Soccer website: [www.youthsoccer.org](http://www.youthsoccer.org)

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