

MIDWEST SUPER LEAGUE

Coaching Code of Conduct

2026-27 Season

Standards of behavior and professionalism for all MSL coaches

Section 1: Coaching Philosophy & Standards

1.1 The MSL Coaching Standard

MSL coaches are the most visible representatives of their clubs and the league. How coaches behave on the sideline, interact with referees, treat opposing players, and communicate with families defines the culture of our league. We hold coaches to a high standard because players are watching and learning from everything coaches do.

1.2 Player Development First

MSL coaches are expected to prioritize player development over match results. This means:

- Creating an environment where players feel safe to try new things
- Providing constructive feedback, not destructive criticism
- Giving meaningful playing time to all rostered players
- Teaching the game, not just trying to win it
- Recognizing that development is a long-term process

1.3 Coaching Credentials

The MSL recommends (and will eventually require) that all head coaches hold a minimum of a US Soccer Grassroots or equivalent coaching license. Clubs are responsible for supporting their coaches in obtaining appropriate credentials. The MSL will provide information on available coaching education opportunities.

Section 2: Match Day Conduct

2.1 Before the Match

- Greet the opposing coach and referees respectfully
- Ensure your team warms up in their designated area
- Submit your lineup/roster as required
- Brief your players on sportsmanship expectations
- Communicate with your parent group about sideline expectations

2.2 During the Match

Coaches MUST:

- Remain in the designated technical area
- Direct comments to their own players (coaching, not criticizing)
- Accept referee decisions without visible or verbal dissent
- Intervene if their own spectators are behaving inappropriately
- Call for medical attention if any player (either team) appears injured

Coaches must NOT:

- Shout at or berate their own players
- Direct comments at opposing players, coaches, or families
- Challenge, argue with, or show dissent toward referees
- Use profane, abusive, or discriminatory language
- Encourage dangerous or unsportsmanlike play
- Instruct players to time-waste, simulate injuries, or cheat

2.3 After the Match

- Shake hands with opposing coaches and the referee
- Ensure your players thank the referee and opposing team
- Address any concerns with the referee privately, not publicly
- Model grace in both victory and defeat

Section 3: Communication Standards

3.1 With Players

- Use positive, encouraging language - even when correcting
- Never single out a player publicly for mistakes
- Provide individual feedback privately when possible
- Be honest about playing time while explaining development goals
- Never use playing time as punishment for non-soccer issues

3.2 With Parents

- Establish clear communication expectations at the start of the season
- Enforce a 24-hour rule: no game-day discussions about the match
- Respond to parent concerns within 48 hours
- Never discuss another family's child with a parent
- Hold a preseason meeting to set expectations

3.3 With Referees

- Address referees respectfully at all times (use their name if known)
- Ask questions calmly rather than making accusations
- Accept decisions even when you disagree
- Thank referees after every match
- Remember: many youth referees are teenagers learning their craft

3.4 With Opposing Coaches

- Treat opponents as colleagues, not enemies
- Communicate professionally about scheduling, logistics, or incidents
- Never publicly criticize another club's coaching
- Share information that benefits player safety (field conditions, etc.)

Section 4: Player Welfare & Safeguarding

4.1 Physical Safety

- Never ask a player to play through an injury
- Follow the MSL Concussion Protocol for all head injuries
- Modify training and match intensity in extreme weather
- Ensure proper warm-up and cool-down routines
- Carry emergency contacts and a first aid kit to every session

4.2 Emotional Safety

- Never bully, intimidate, or humiliate a player
- Address bullying between players immediately
- Be aware of the pressure players may feel from multiple sources
- Create an environment where players can express concerns
- Recognize that a player's well-being is more important than any result

4.3 Appropriate Boundaries

- Avoid one-on-one situations with individual players
- Do not communicate privately with players via social media or text
- All communications with players should include a parent/guardian
- Physical contact should be limited to appropriate sport contexts
- Background checks are recommended for all coaches (club responsibility)

4.4 Mandatory Reporting

Coaches who observe or suspect abuse, neglect, or exploitation of any player are legally and morally obligated to report it to the appropriate authorities. This applies regardless of whether the situation involves your team, your club, or another organization.

Section 5: Discipline & Consequences

5.1 Yellow/Red Card Consequences

Coaches who receive disciplinary cards from the referee face the same consequences as players:

- Red card: Automatic 1-match suspension minimum
- Accumulation of 3 yellow cards: 1-match suspension
- Violent conduct or serious abuse: Extended suspension or ban

5.2 Additional Sanctions

The MSL Discipline Committee may impose additional sanctions for coaching conduct violations:

- Written warning
- Mandatory education/training requirement
- Multi-match suspension
- Season-long suspension
- Permanent ban from MSL sidelines

5.3 Reporting Violations

Concerns about coaching conduct can be reported by:

- Opposing coaches (via their club to the league office)
- Referees (in their match report)
- Parents (through their club administrator)
- Club administrators (directly to the league office)

All reports are reviewed by the Discipline Committee. Anonymous reports will be considered but may be more difficult to investigate.

5.4 Coach Acknowledgment

All coaches participating in MSL competition must acknowledge this Code of Conduct at the beginning of each season through their club's registration process.