



CLUB POLICY & OPERATIONS HANDBOOK



Effective Season: 2026/2027

Version 1.0 - Approved by the Board of Directors

www.pghifc.com

TABLE OF CONTENTS

1.0 INTRODUCTION & MISSION	Pg 3
1.1 Our Philosophy & Vision	Pg 3
2.0 CLUB STRUCTURE & GOVERNANCE	Pg 4
2.1 Admin Roles & Responsibilities	Pgs 5-6
3.0 PLAYER DEVELOPMENT PATHWAY	Pg 7
3.1 Academy & Select Programs	Pg 7
4.0 CODES OF CONDUCT	Pgs 8-23
4.1 Player Code	Pg 8
4.2 Parent & Spectator Code	Pgs 9-11
4.3 Coach Code	Pgs 12-15
4.6 Team Manager Policy	Pg 20
4.7 & 4.8 Zero Tolerance and Discipline	Pgs 21-23
5.0 RISK MANAGEMENT & SAFETY	Pg 24-29
5.1 Concussion & Injury Policy	Pg 24-26
5.2 Weather & Field Protocols	Pg 27
6.0 COMMUNICATION & MEDIA	Pg 30
7.0 GRIEVANCE PROCEDURES	Pg 31-32

1.0 Introduction and Mission

1.1 Our Philosophy and Mission



WELCOME TO

PITTSBURGH INDEPENDENCE FC

Formerly BVB International Academy Pittsburgh, we are the premier youth soccer club rooted in the heart of the Steel City. We are committed to building strong, skilled, and confident players through a culture of relentless development, passion for the game, and competitive excellence. Our mission is to empower every athlete to rise with independence — on and off the pitch.

Where Passion Meets Progress.

Our goal is to:

1. Touch the lives of our players through inspiration on and off the field
2. To challenge our players with the qualities of leadership, honor, tenacity, respect and a love for the game
3. To always strive, through strength of character, heart, words, and actions to help young players rise to their true potential and exceed their own expectations, thereby paving the way for our players to succeed in life for whatever challenges and opportunities lie ahead.

2.0 Club Structure and Governance



Thomas Louisy

Director of Coaching
tlouisy@pghifc.com



David Flavius

Technical Director
dflavius@pghifc.com



Blair Gantz

Director PIFC North
bgantz@pghifc.com

Administration Team

Justin Martin Club President

Michelle Botti Administrative/Registrar

Ben Mahtani Administrative/IT

Erik Meridith Administrative/Social Media

John Daykon Administrative/Scheduling

Bobby Fiori Administrative

2.1 Roles and Responsibilities

PIFC Administrative & Technical Roles Matrix

Club Position	Core Domain	Key Operational Duties	Primary Systems Managed
Director of Coaching (DOC) / Technical Director	Technical Leadership	- Establishes the club-wide playing curriculum and age-group benchmarks. - Hires, assigns, mentors, and evaluates team head coaches. - Manages long-term business budgets, facility leases, and sponsorships. - Determines and liaises with regional competitive leagues.	- Technical Guidelines - Facility Contracts - Financial Ledger
Club President	Operational Governance & Communications	- Serves as the final point of escalation for parent or staff disputes. - Designated contact point for State Association and other memberships - Attendance at State Association mandatory meetings - Designated stand-in for DOC and/or Technical Director as needed	- Documentation - Club Bylaws
Club Registrar	Data Validation & Roster Compliance	- Manages player registrations and database accuracy - Verifies player birth certificates, medical forms, and out-of-state permissions - Submits official team rosters to state associations for validation. - Issues official player passes, coach credentials, and match cards.	- GotSport - SportsEngine - State Association - SafeSport - Compliance
Club Scheduler	Facility Allocation & Calendar Logistics	- Maps out home game times and referee assignments to prevent overlaps. - Coordinates weekly/monthly field space rotations for all teams - Dynamically updates calendars for weather-related cancellations. - Coordinates field availability with local municipalities and facility complexes.	- Excel/ Field Software - Referee Assigning Software - Master Calendar

IT & Systems Administrator

Digital Infrastructure & Security

- Manages corporate staff email hosting, cloud storage, and database security.
- Builds, updates, and maintains the public club web portal.
- Integrates team communication apps for synchronized alerts.
- Troubleshoots registration system bugs and electronic payment gateways.

- Web Hosting
- SportsEngine
- GSuite / Office 365



3.0 Player Development Paths

We are proud to offer a variety of programs at PIFC to allow our athletes to feel successful. We offer programs from preschool through 18 years of age.

PROGRAMS

TRAINING PROGRAMS FOR ALL AGES

PRESCHOOL <i>Junior Academy Program</i>	AGES 3-5	Read More
ELEMENTARY <i>Junior Academy Program</i>	AGES 6-8	Read More
SUMMER CAMPS <i>Summer Camps & Clinics</i>	AGES 4-17	Read More
FOOTBALL CLUB <i>Experience Playing Against Other Clubs in Games and Tournaments</i>	AGES 5-18	Read More

Team placement is decided on a case by case basis by our Director of Coaching and Technical Director. PIFC is excited to offer different league options for our players. We constantly evaluate the best options for our families and players on the basis of cost, travel distance, competitiveness, skill, exposure and other factors. PIFC currently believes that the following options present the best balance for our families.



4.0 Codes of Conduct

4.1 Player Code of Conduct

PURPOSE

To state the expectations for players at PIFC

SCOPE & APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all activities occurring at PIFC locations or PIFC approved facilities. This policy shall also apply when players are guests at other facilities.

It is the expectation of PIFC that all players:

- Will put forth their best effort at practice and during games.
- Will make a strong attempt to attend all training for their primary rostered team
- Will play within the Laws and Spirit of the game.
- Will play because they enjoy playing.
- Will NEVER quit and will ALWAYS be positive.
- Will respect their coaches and their decisions.
- Will respect the referees and their decisions.
- Will practice soccer skills on their own several times a week.
- Will ALWAYS demonstrate good sportsmanship.
- Will be the best that they can be for themselves, their team, and the club.
- Will avoid bullying, harassment and ALL other hurtful behaviors toward their teammates.
- Players shall report bullying or hazing to a coach or parent.
- Players shall be inclusive with all teammates when creating team chats. Players agree to refrain from using offensive or racially insensitive language. Exclusive team chats intended to isolate, mock or bully teammates is explicitly prohibited.
- Players will never say or post anything on social media that includes hurtful information about any coaches, teammates, players on other teams, referees or spectators. Players will not post derogatory comments on other teams' social media pages.
- Players will not record video or take photos in private team spaces such as locker rooms and bathrooms.
- Players will not live stream footage from the bench without explicit permission from the club social media administrator.
- Our players shall not possess, distribute or use vaping devices, e-cigarettes, illegal or banned substances at any club practice, game or event.
- Players will not distribute any supplements, energy drinks, or other "legal" enhancement products to other teammates.
- Will feel comfortable to report an injury that should keep them out of a contest

PIFC reserves the right to implement corrective action up to and including dismissal from the club based on the severity and/or frequency of the infraction.

4.2 Parent Code of Conduct

PURPOSE

To outline expected behaviors of our parent members and guests while at PIFC events.

SCOPE & APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all activities occurring at PIFC or PIFC approved facilities and when guests at other facilities.

Youth soccer is for the players. All parents associated with PIFC are invited to share in the pleasure of watching their children participate in the world's most popular sport, so long as their behavior does not distract the players, coaches and officials from the play on the field or affect others ability to enjoy spectating.

1. PIFC prides itself on having respectful and engaged families, and we ask that parents, guardian and guests adhere to these guidelines:
2. It is the expectation of PIFC that a parent, guardian or guest should:
 - a. Foster an environment of respect for referees, players, coaches and spectators of the opposing team through words of encouragement and support.
 - b. Applaud superior play, effort and sportsmanship by players of both teams.
 - c. Support your coaches and team managers consistently regardless of the results on the field. Our coaches and managers have spent many hours securing licences, clearances and completing other requirements in order to lead and teach your children. They deserve your congratulations when the team wins and your encouragement when the team doesn't.
 - d. Communicate any concerns to your child's coach at the appropriate time (please allow a cooldown period of 24 hours) in a location away from players and other families.
 - e. Always remain at least 2 yards away from the playing field to ensure you are not interfering with the game being played.
 - f. Never bring pets of any kind to our facilities
 - g. Obey the posted speed limits at all facilities home and away.

3. It is the expectation of PIFC that a parent, guardian or guest must:

- a. Never use foul language or obscene gestures at a game or practice.
- b. Avoid comments and gestures that express disagreement with the calls being made by the referee.
- c. Parents may not choose to have their child attend games or practices for teams not their child's primary team at the expense of the child's primary team. The club welcomes participation in other non-conflicting practice times.
- d. Cooperate with any request made by the game officials.
- e. Never consume alcoholic beverages, tobacco, vaping products, marijuana, or other drugs on the field location, at practices or games.
- f. Never speak to the opposing coach, referee or opposing players.
- g. Never engage with opposing fans.
- h. Never say or post anything on social media any hurtful information about any coaches, teammates, players on other teams, referees or spectators.
- i. Never speak negatively about opposing players or team players on the sideline.
- j. Focus on effort and development --- not winning.
- k. Never deliberately host events meant to exclude, isolate or bully children on your child's team or in the club
- l. Avoid joystick coaching from the sideline. Any instruction to injure another player, fan, parent, spectator or referee regardless of the circumstances is considered a serious breach of the code of conduct.
- m. Parents shall not contact, message, or tag players via text, social media or group chat platforms regarding performance errors or tactical play.
- n. Parents shall not create rogue communication threads designed to complain about coaching staff, gossip about selections or other activities to divide the team community.
- o. Parents may not enter the team bench, warm up area, or locker room before, during or after a match unless requested by the coach or medical staff.
- p. Parents shall not pitch outside private training, businesses, recruitment services or rival club opportunities to PIFC families through chat or on the sidelines of club sanctioned events.

4. It is the expectation of PIFC that a parent, guardian or guest understands that:
 - a. Any parent or spectator who fails to adhere to these standards will be required to leave the playing area and play will be suspended until said person complies.
 - b. PIFC reserves the right to suspend or terminate a player's enrollment in our program for their parent's persistent or extreme sideline misconduct, or other disobedience to the above mentioned expectations without refund of paid fees.
 - c. PIFC will align with US SOCCER on severe penalties for referee abuse
 - d. Parents or guardians are responsible for the conduct of their guests and must inform their guests of the expectations listed above.
 - e. PIFC is not responsible for lost or stolen items

Any breaches of this Code of Conduct can result in your child's suspension and your family's removal from PIFC. Please remember that every one of us represents the PIFC and we want to continue our tradition of being a premiere welcoming and supportive organization to our area youth.

PLEASE NOTE: When registering a child with PIFC you are signing up for a full season cycle (fall and spring, for non high school aged players; spring for high school aged players). Without explicit approval from director of coaching/technical director, self-selected departures will not be refunded. All refunds and arrangements made in contrary to those agreed upon at time of signing must be approved in writing by the technical director/director of coaching. All deposits are deemed non-refundable.

4.3 Coaching Responsibilities/Policies

PURPOSE

To clarify the responsibilities of a coach at PIFC. It is implied herein that our coaches will also comply with applicable sections of 4.1 and 4.2.

SCOPE & APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all coaches and assistant coaches participating in PIFC.

The Six Tasks of a Coach

US Soccer states that coaches take on many roles when leading a team. Youth coaches need to understand their roles within the overall player development process. The misguided desire to win at all costs at the youth level often comes at the expense of individual player development. Coaches who understand the player development process and the differences that exist between age and ability are more likely to positively influence and affect the development of a player. With this in mind, the role of a youth coach can be summarized as:

- A. Service as Facilitator.
 - a. Set up conditions and environment for learning
 - b. Players need to have fun and have positive feedback (especially young players)
 - c. The coach should be enthusiastic
 - d. Practice should be conducted in the spirit of enjoyment and learning
 - e. Activities need to be geared toward achieving success.
- B. As a positive role model.
 - a. Demonstrate respect for team members, opponents, referees, parents, spectators and opposing coaches.
 - b. Demonstrate respect for club administrators, staff, volunteers, managers, directors, etc.
 - c. Demonstrate a responsibility to the game itself.

C. Understanding who they are coaching.

- a. Recognize that children/players are not defined by chronological age only. They mature and develop at their own pace. There are also growth differences between genders.
- b. Treat each person as an individual.
- c. Recognize that their athletes' needs are different and they participate for different reasons at every level.

More recently, US Soccer has stated that the coach has six tasks he/she shall focus on:

1. **Coaching Games** – Create an environment which supports and guides players toward giving their best contribution to the game in order to further develop and score more goals than the opponent.
2. **Coaching Training Sessions** – Facilitate an environment which supports and guides players on the field in order to develop them to their full potential as well as prepare players/the team for the game.
3. **Leading the Team** – Create an environment of inclusion and engage players based on agreed upon behaviors and goals.
4. **Leading the Player** – Give all players individual, unconditional attention and mentor them to fulfill their potential.
5. **Managing the Performance Environment** – Influence off-the-field circumstances and persons in order to create the best possible conditions for the development and performance of the players. This includes appropriate levels of interaction and communication with parents.
6. **Leadership** – Demonstrate coaching actions which are guided by a player-centered philosophy in order to accomplish defined team and player goals.

PIFC specifically expects the following from its youth coaches:

The Six Tasks of a Coach

1. **Coaching Games** – All assigned players through 9v9 (U12), shall play approximately 50% of the time. This includes scrimmages. All assigned players must be invited to all games and scrimmages unless prior approval to deviate has been communicated by the director of coaching or technical director. PIFC coaches who also coach at the community level WILL NOT show favoritism by inviting a select pool of PIFC players to tournaments and events. Players should rotate positions throughout the season into spots where they can be successful. This is especially important at younger ages. The coach shall act as a positive role model and demonstrate understanding of who they are coaching. Coaches shall not at

any time yell at their players, opposing players, opposing coaches, spectators, assistants, or officials. Coaches are explicitly forbidden from contacting PA WEST, US SOCCER, USYS, US CLUB or the STATE REFEREE COMMITTEE regarding the outcome of a match (aside from uploading their game day roster to the age group coordinator) or perception of unfairness by referees. Only the club president at the direction of the Director of Coaching or the Technical Director, or the aforementioned directors will communicate officially with these organizations. All home games MUST be played at the fields and facilities of PIFC or an approved secondary location without exception. Coaches are not permitted to cancel or reschedule any scheduled games without admin notification and approval. PIFC will not sanction any event that is not offered to every child on the roster. Teams may not register as PIFC, nor may they wear a PIFC uniform or PIFC badge for unsanctioned events. No modifications to the PIFC uniform are allowed under any circumstances. PIFC coaches shall show good sportsmanship and respect our opponents by not running up the score in games.

2. **Coaching Training Sessions** – All training sessions MUST be conducted at the fields and facilities of PIFC or an approved secondary location without exception. No coach may mandate more than 1-2 training sessions per week for U6-U8 or 2-3 sessions per week for U9 and above. No practice session shall be scheduled in excess of 1.5 hours for any age group (camps open to all members are an exception). When PIFC makes a decision to close its facilities due to weather, it is expected that no practice shall take place at ANY PIFC approved facility unless explicitly communicated. Coaches shall stay positive during training and make our children feel successful. Coaches are expected to be on time.
3. **Leading the Team** – Coaches shall be inclusive and focus on player development for ALL players under their responsibility. *PIFC forbids coaches from making “select teams” from the children on their roster.* This practice is antithetical with being inclusive and developing all children falling under the coach’s responsibility. PIFC requires that its coaches attend technical training sessions with the club teams unless expressed permission has been granted by the Director of Coaching or the Technical Director. PIFC coaches should strive to bring the latest and best training experiences to the club by keeping up on all required coaching licenses and requirements.
4. **Leading the Player** – No coach at PIFC shall discourage a player’s participation on their team regardless of perceived skill at any time. Teams formed under guidance of the director of coaching or technical director are final. No coach may club pass players at the expense of primary rostered players without approval from the director of coaching or technical director. No player shall be embarrassed or humiliated for lacking certain qualities or skills. All coaches are expected to wear the club issued shirts, warmups, shorts, pants and jackets without modification and present a professional appearance at games and practices.

5. **Managing the Performance Environment** – Coaches shall encourage informal soccer activities as well as accommodate other soccer team needs and other activities. No coach in our club shall force a child to make a decision between soccer and other activities (exceptions may apply for league requirements at the premier level). No child shall be punished in any form for activities outside of soccer requiring them to miss some practices and/or games when notified in advance. Issues of this nature must be directed to the director of coaching/technical director. Any spiritwear, reward, party, outside event, etc. shall be open to all players of the team. If a coach suspects or witnesses abuse, it must be reported to the proper authorities per our mandatory reporting policy. Coaches shall respect Safe Sport policies with respect to communicating with and transporting players.

6. **Leadership** – PIFC coaches shall encourage player development over winning. The coach shall act as a role model when representing the club. There are other internal expectations from coaches with respect to leadership. First team coaches must not undermine second team coaches. ALL players should be encouraged to participate in club technical training. Once a roster is formed, the expectation is that the player will complete ALL of their obligations to the primary rostered team schedule unless a deviation is approved by the Director of Coaching or the Technical Director. Conversations with parents of athletes being asked to play up onto the first team should involve both head coaches for transparency. No first team coach shall make offers to second team players during the season or imply that such a condition can be arranged. Offers should be coordinated between head coaches and the Technical Director or the Director of Coaching.

Corrective Action

Coaching can be a demanding (and extremely rewarding) job when done properly. PIFC maintains the right to implement corrective action(s) when required. Corrective actions may range from coaching, fines, through dismissal from the club in accordance with the severity and or frequency of the infraction. PIFC reserves the right to implement discipline beyond what is recommended or assigned by PA WEST or its affiliation. PIFC has zero tolerance for abuse of officials, spectators, coaches, players, board members or any other individual serving in capacity of the club or our neighboring clubs.

4.4 Mandatory Reporting Policy

PURPOSE

To clarify the responsibilities of volunteers or paid staff having direct contact where they provide care, supervision, guidance or control of children or have routine interaction with children when physical, mental or sexual abuse is suspected.

SCOPE & APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all members within the club having direct contact where they provide care, supervision, guidance or control of children or have routine interaction with children. This policy shall be applied to all PIFC administrators as well. This policy is adapted from 23 Pa.C.S. §6311(a)(7).

1. As of Jan. 1, 2015, organizations such PIFC fits the definition of “program, activity or service” under Pennsylvania’s Child Protective Services Law.
2. According to 23 Pa.C.S. §6311(a)(7), an adult individual who is paid or unpaid, who, on the basis of the individual’s role as an integral part of a regularly scheduled program, activity or service, accepts responsibility for a child MUST make a report of suspected child abuse. **(mandatory reporter)**
3. Mandatory reporters require clearances prior to the commencement of service.
4. Volunteers between the ages of 14-17 (and obviously younger) are not required to have clearances.
5. Adults who only volunteer one time, such as to help with fields, clean up, etc. are not required to have clearances under the law.
6. All adults 18 years and older applying for an unpaid or paid position at PIFC responsible for the welfare or will be in contact with children must have clearances that include:
 - a. PA Child Abuse History clearance
 - b. PA State Police Criminal clearance
 - c. FBI Criminal Background Check (if not a resident of PA for 10 years)
 - d. A Sworn Affidavit that they have no convictions that would disqualify them (10 or more years in PA)

7. Any individual supervised or managed by a **mandatory reporter** are also deemed to be **mandatory reporters**.
8. Any individual who suspects child abuse **MUST** call the Pennsylvania Statewide toll-free **ChildLine** at **1-800-932-0313**.
 - a. Said reporter must then make a written report, which may be submitted electronically, within 48 hours to the department or county agency assigned to the case (as required). Instructions will be provided after communication with ChildLine.
 - b. Said reporter must also inform the Director of Coaching, the Technical Director and the Club President immediately after suspecting child abuse and reporting the abuse to ChildLine.
9. PIFC is an affiliate of **US Soccer** via PA WEST. Please note that reporting to US Soccer does not fulfill one's obligation to report under federal law. However, you are encouraged to also report the incident to **US Soccer** by calling **312-528-7004**.
10. For the purposes of this policy, child abuse shall be defined as set forth in Pennsylvania's Child Protective Services Law (23 Pa.C.S. §6301 et seq.). More specifically, 23 Pa.C.S. §6303(b.1) defines "child abuse" as meaning intentionally, knowingly or recklessly doing any of the following:
 - a. Causing bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
 - b. Fabricating, feigning or intentionally exaggerating or inducing a medical symptom or disease which results in a potentially harmful medical evaluation or treatment to the child through any recent act.
 - c. Causing or substantially contributing to serious mental injury to a child through any act or failure to act or a series of such acts or failures to act. Causing sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any act or failure to act.
 - d. Creating a reasonable likelihood of bodily injury to a child through any recent act or failure to act.
 - e. Creating a likelihood of sexual abuse or exploitation of a child through any recent act or failure to act.
 - f. Causing serious physical neglect of a child.
 - g. Engaging in any of the following recent acts:
 - i. Kicking, biting, throwing, burning, stabbing or cutting a child in a manner that endangers the child.
 - ii. Unreasonably restraining or confining a child, based on consideration of the method, location or the duration of the restraint or confinement.
 - iii. Forcefully shaking a child under one year of age.
 - iv. Forcefully slapping or otherwise striking a child under one year of age.

- v. Interfering with the breathing of a child.
 - vi. Causing a child to be present at a location while a violation of 18 Pa.C.S. §7508.2 (relating to operation of methamphetamine laboratory) is occurring, provided that the violation is being investigated by law enforcement.
 - vii. Leaving a child unsupervised with an individual, other than the child's parent, who the actor knows or reasonably should have known:
 - 1. Is required to register as a Tier II or Tier III sexual offender under 42 Pa.C.S. Ch. 97 Subch. H (relating to registration of sexual offenders), where the victim of the sexual offense was under 18 years of age when the crime was committed.
 - 2. Has been determined to be a sexually violent predator under 42 Pa.C.S. §9799.24 (relating to assessments) or any of its predecessors.
 - 3. Has been determined to be a sexually violent delinquent child as defined in 42 Pa.C.S. §9799.12 (relating to definitions)
 - 4. Causing the death of the child through any act or failure to act.
11. "Recent" as stated above shall mean an abusive act that has occurred within two (2) years from the date that ChildLine is called.

4.5 Drug Policy

PURPOSE

To outline the PIFC policy around drugs, alcohol and tobacco usage.

SCOPE & APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all activities occurring at PIFC or PIFC approved facilities and when guests at other facilities.

1. PIFC has a zero-tolerance policy regarding the use of alcohol, drugs and tobacco products at any PIFC event. We are proud to be a drug free organization at all times. Please note the following:
 - a. Alcoholic beverages, tobacco and drugs (including marijuana and misuse of prescription medications) are not permitted at any PIFC event including practices and games.
 - b. No coach or volunteer should participate in any PIFC activity while under the influence of drugs or alcohol.
 - c. Smoking or the use of tobacco products including vaping is not permitted around youth sports practices or games.
 - d. PIFC may at any time, without updating of this particular policy, ban any substance and use of said substance from any of its locations at any time regardless of the legality of a substance. Communication will be made regarding any substances banned from our facilities. This includes, but is not limited to, over the counter products, drinks, supplements, etc.

PIFC reserves the right to revoke membership, remove, and/or forbid entry of any guest found in violation of this policy.

4.6 Team Manager Policy

Scope & Objective

PIFC Team Managers are appointed administrative positions that act as the primary liaison between team families, the head coach, and the Club Registrar. The objective of this role is to streamline communication, manage team logistics, and ensure absolute compliance with league and state governing bodies. It is implied that managers will comply with other codes of conduct within this section.

Modern Communication & Media Policies

- **Exclusive Platform Compliance:** Managers must conduct all official team scheduling, rosters, and updates exclusively through the club-mandated platform. Personal text threads may not replace the official team platform chosen for communication. Unauthorized messaging apps and secondary team apps are prohibited.
- **The "Two-Adult" Digital Rule:** In compliance with SafeSport mandates, Team Managers shall never send direct messages or emails to a minor athlete without copying another background-cleared adult (the Head Coach or the player's parent/guardian).
- **Media and Privacy Restrictions:** Managers shall not publish team rosters, player injury updates, or medical statuses on public social media. Game photos or videos featuring youth players must not include full player names or tags without verified, written parental consent. It is our policy not to include names on game writeups.

Administrative & Match-Day Logistics

- **Credential and Roster Security:** The Team Manager is the sole custodian of the official team binder. This binder must contain certified state rosters, verified player passes with photos, and medical release waivers as required. Binders must be present at every match—loss of credentials resulting in a game forfeit will be handled by club administration.
- **Match-Card Verification:** Prior to kickoff, the Manager must supply the match card to the head coach and/or the center referee to verify jersey numbers and player eligibility.
- **Score Reporting and Compliance:** The Manager is responsible for reporting final match scores, referee signatures, and any cards issued (yellow/red) if required to the league portal within the mandatory window.
- **Sidelines** – Unless explicitly requested by the coach, team managers should not sit on the player sideline. Permission must be granted in advance for each individual game by the head coach. Prior permission does not imply future permission, even on the same day. Managers must complete SafeSport training as a requirement. No adult who has not completed SafeSport of its annual refresher can be on the player sideline.

Boundary Lines & Conflict Resolution

- **Enforcing the 24-Hour Rule:** Managers shall act as a buffer for the coaching staff. If a parent attempts to lodge a complaint regarding playing time or tactics, the Manager must direct the parent to honor the 24-Hour Cool-Down Rule and facilitate scheduling a formal weekday meeting.
- **Sideline Behavior Monitoring:** Managers are empowered to calmly remind PIFC spectators of the Parent Code of Conduct if sideline behavior degrades into referee harassment or "joystick coaching." Unresolved spectator issues must be escalated immediately to the Club President.
- **Rostering** – Managers must take direction from the directors or the head coach regarding club passing

4.7 Letter to Club Regarding Zero Tolerance

Dear Parents and Guardians,

We are writing to address recent reports of inappropriate behavior directed toward match officials. As a club, we maintain a zero-tolerance policy for referee abuse. Such behavior is unacceptable in any form. National data reflects a troubling trend: more than 90% of officials report that abuse has increased in the past five years, and nearly 60% have chosen not to recertify due to harassment or threats. Referees are an essential part of the game—without them, matches cannot be played.

PIFC participates in multiple platforms governed by United States Youth Soccer (including GA, E64, GLC, and state associations such as PA West Soccer Association) and US Club Soccer (including ECNL, GLA, and ORL). All operate under the authority of U.S. Soccer Federation. In response to the growing concern surrounding referee abuse, U.S. Soccer has implemented updated guidelines with significantly enhanced penalties—particularly when youth referees (identified by a bright green badge) are involved.

Policy Applies to All Spectators

These policies extend beyond coaches and players. The US Club Soccer Policy Manual (Section 9.06) clearly states that individuals associated with a club or team—including relatives and spectators—are subject to its authority. Club coaches and administrators may be held responsible for the conduct of individuals identified as supporters of their team. State associations, including PA West, follow similar guidelines.

Updated U.S. Soccer Policy 5319 (Effective March 2025)

Policy 5319 defines both non-physical and physical misconduct toward referees and establishes minimum game suspensions and time-based sanctions. Examples include:

- Verbal taunting (e.g., yelling insults): **Minimum 2-game suspension**
- Harassment or intimidation (repeated abusive language): **Minimum 4 games**
- Threats or violent language: **Minimum 6 games and 6–24 month suspension**
- Offensive or discriminatory conduct: **Minimum 10 games and 12–24 month suspension**
- Minor physical contact: **Minimum 3 games and 1–6 month suspension**
- Pushing or grabbing: **Minimum 10 games and 6–24 month suspension**
- Violent contact or assault: **12–24 month suspension or greater**

Sanctions may extend beyond a single match and can impact coach eligibility, team rosters, and a club's standing in sanctioned competitions. Our club is required to enforce these policies and report incidents when mandated by governing bodies.

Enhanced Penalties Involving Youth Referees

When a youth referee (green badge) is part of the officiating crew reporting abuse, U.S. Soccer applies a threefold multiplier to standard penalties. Additionally, PA West may issue a five game suspension for red cards related to referee abuse involving a youth official. Accumulation of three abuse reports involving youth referees may result in a proposed lifetime ban under U.S. Soccer guidelines.

Club Expectations

We hold our coaches to these standards and expect the same from all players, families, and supporters. When incidents are reported, the club will investigate and may impose additional disciplinary measures consistent with Policy 5319, including game suspensions, season-long bans, or longer-term sanctions. We ask for your partnership in ensuring that all matches are conducted with respect for officials, opponents, coaches, players, and the game itself. Thank you for your cooperation and continued support of our athletes.

Sincerely,
PIFC Administration

4.8 Discipline Matrix

The club will follow a progressive discipline matrix for most minor infractions. Penalties will escalate for unacceptable behavior that occurs in our club. Parent and spectator behavior is cumulative across all teams as well as for coaches. While we reserve the right to deviate from this matrix based on the severity of an infraction, the general flow will be (except where other policies dictate a different approach):

First Offense: Written Warning

Second Offense: Suspension (not to be less than 2 weeks including all practices and games)

Third Offense: Season Suspension (includes all postseason activities, games, and practices) Not to be less than six weeks and will carry into the next season (fall to spring)

Fourth Offense: Removal

Our policies have already established immediate consequences beyond the aforementioned and will be enforced as described in those policies. Immediate discipline will be implemented for:

Mandatory Reporting Violations

Confrontations with parents, referees, players, spectators, sidelines

Violation of the Drug and Alcohol Policy

Referee Abuse

Player Insubordination

Bullying and Harrassment

Safesport Violations

Social Media Abuse

In all cases of immediate discipline, a letter will be sent to the guardian(s) on record as part of the discipline. Grievances will follow the grievance policy outlined in Section 7.

5.0 Risk Management and Safety

5.1 Concussion Policy

PURPOSE

To outline procedures to prevent head injury and properly intervene when one is suspected.

SCOPE & APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all activities occurring at PIFC or PIFC approved facilities. This policy is adapted from USYS and USCLUBSOCCER.org.

For the purposes of this policy, an APPROVED individual is one whom has obtained proper clearances, completed SAFESPORT training and has completed the US SOCCER RECOGNIZE TO RECOVER initiative or similar concussion training.

1. A concussion is a brain injury that interferes with normal brain function. Concussion results in a constellation of physical, cognitive, emotional and sleep related symptoms.
2. Concussion should be diagnosed and evaluated by medical professionals.
3. In the event that no medical professional is present during training or match play, the coach, his/her assistant(s), team manager or other APPROVED sideline personnel may need to explore the possibility of a head injury.
 - a. Under no circumstances will a coach or sideline personnel argue with a referee who requires an athlete to leave the field to be examined for possible head injury. If a referee recommends that a player not re-enter the game, we will respect that decision.
 - b. If a head injury is suspected, a player MUST leave the field
4. It is understood that adults participating in the sport are looking to protect the athletes. A player may be sent off from a collision or event, but not have a concussion.

5. If the following symptoms are observed, a player MAY NOT reenter play. Please contact the parent as soon as possible:

- a. Dazed look or confusion about what happened
- b. Memory difficulties
- c. Neck pain, headaches, nausea, vomiting, double vision, blurriness, ringing noise or sound sensitivity.
- d. Short attention span. Can't keep focused.
- e. Slow reaction time, slurred speech, body movements lagging, fatigue and slowly answers questions or has trouble answering questions.
- f. Abnormal physical or mental behavior.
- g. Coordination skills are behind, ex: balancing, clumsiness, reaction time

6. If the following symptoms are observed, a medical emergency is occurring. Call 911, then contact a parent:

- a. Spine or neck injury or pain, especially that which is getting worse
- b. Behavior patterns change, cannot recognize people/places, less responsive
- c. Loss of consciousness
- d. Headaches that worsen during evaluation or while on the sideline
- e. Seizures
- f. Very drowsy, Cannot be awakened
- g. Repeated vomiting
- h. Increasing confusion or irritability
- i. Weakness, numbness in arms and legs

No player may return to practice or play in either #5 or #6 scenarios without a signed letter from their physician.

The following steps will be taken to reduce the chance of a head injury occurring:

7. In the event that a player's head makes contact with another player's body, the ground, the goal or a ball being shot or cleared while unprepared, head or neck injury may occur. Remove the player for evaluation.
8. Players in U-11 programs and younger shall not engage in heading either in practices or games.
9. There will be limited heading in practice for players in U-12 and U-13 programs. These players will be limited to a maximum of 30 minutes of heading training per week and no more than 15-20 headers per player, per week. There are no heading restrictions in games.
10. A 10 year old playing at U-12 should not head the ball at all.
11. An 11 or 12 year old playing at U-14 or older should abide by #9.

5.2 Severe Weather Policy

PURPOSE

To state PIFC requirements for suspending practices and contests due to inclement weather.

SCOPE & APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all activities occurring at PIFC or PIFC approved facilities. This policy is adapted from the National Federation of State High School Associations.

1. When thunder is heard or lightning is seen*, the leading edge of the thunderstorm is close enough to strike the location with lightning. Suspend play immediately for at least 30 minutes and vacate the outdoor activity.

*** - At night under certain atmospheric conditions, lightning “flashes”, rather than bolts may be seen from significant distance. In these cases, it may be safe to continue an event. If no thunder can be heard and the flashes are low on the horizon, the storm may not pose a threat.**

2. The safest place to evacuate is to a fully enclosed metal vehicle. In the event this is not possible, a pavilion may be used.
3. Play must be suspended immediately when thunder is heard.
4. Play must be suspended immediately if a school lightning detection system can be heard.
5. If a weather app indicates that lightning has struck within 10 miles of our location, this may be used to suspend play.
6. Once play has been suspended, wait 30 minutes after the last thunder is heard or lightning is witnessed.
7. Any subsequent thunder or lightning will reset the thirty minute clock.
8. When any team applies the above criteria to suspend play, all teams must suspend play. Coaches, parents, referees, administrators and other members are encouraged to communicate in order to suspend play across the entire facility.
9. Review the lightning safety policy annually with all administrators, coaches and game personnel and train all personnel.
10. Inform athletes and parents at the start of the season.
11. Only coaches, board members and referees may terminate play.
12. The Director of coaching or the Technical Director may cancel practices due to extreme temperatures both hot and cold, wildfire smoke or other environmental reasons. No coach may hold practice when such a determination is made.

5.3 Play Up Policy

PURPOSE

To clearly state the club's policy toward players playing up age groups in soccer.

SCOPE & APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all players U6-U19.

1. PIFC does not believe that playing up on a primary roster is generally beneficial to youth players.
2. As rule, the club does not permit players to play up age groups as their primary rostered team. Exceptions to the rule must be approved in advance by the Director of Coaching or the Technical Director.
3. PIFC may allow interested and capable players to play U9 early. These players will be required to play U9 for an additional year and move with their age appropriate group.
4. In exceptional circumstances not related to a child's ability, the Director of Coaching or Technical Director may allow playing up to ease the burden of families, single parents or caretakers.
5. As a reward for strong play with their age appropriate team, a player may be club passed to a roster one year up, or even two years up however, the player must never miss games for their appropriately aged team in order to play on the older roster unless approved by the Director of Coaching or the Technical Director.
6. No younger player may be club passed to an older team at the expense of a primary rostered older player's playing time prior to 11v11. See Coach's Responsibilities policy. It is understood that with substitutions and fitness level, not every player will be equal. Large deviations from 50% will be explored by the Director of Coaching or the Technical Director.
7. No coach may inconvenience other coaches, the age group coordinator, or PA WEST leadership to coordinate games to accommodate club passing players. When necessary, these communications will come from the club president at the direction of the Director of Coaching or the Technical Director. Club passing should generally be done on an ad-hoc basis, after games are scheduled and the times and locations are verified between both coaches.
8. No coach may club pass a player without first talking to the players primary roster coach. This is common courtesy and part of leading the team. If the player's primary roster coach suggests that the player is injured or overused, regardless of parental consent, the club must look out for the best interest of the player.
9. Players should never play more than 2 games in one day due to club passing.

5.4 Logo Policy

PURPOSE

To clearly state the club's policy toward use of the club logo

SCOPE & APPLICABILITY

This policy applies to all members of the club.

The PIFC logo is property of PIFC. No member shall, without expressed written permission of either the Director of Coaching or the Technical Director, use the PIFC logo to create banners, tents, spiritwear, favors, etc. Please bring your ideas forward, we want to have our name out there, but we do have contractual obligations that must be followed.

6.0 Communication and Media

6.1 Official Communication Channels

- All official PIFC communications will be distributed exclusively through our club-approved platform (e.g., SportsEngine/GotSport).
- Coaches and Team Managers are prohibited from using personal texting, WhatsApp, or unauthorized third-party apps for official team business.
- In compliance with SafeSport, no adult staff member or volunteer may initiate a direct, private digital communication with a minor athlete without a parent or another certified adult copied on the message.

6.2 Social Media Conduct

- Players, parents, and coaches are expected to represent PIFC with integrity across all personal social media platforms.
- Posting disparaging remarks, identifying mistakes of specific players, or criticizing match officials online will be treated as a direct violation of the PIFC Code of Conduct.
- Tagging minor athletes in public posts without written parental consent is strictly prohibited.

6.3 Sideline Recording and Photography

- Parents and spectators may record video or take photographs for personal, private family use only.
- The use of elevated tactical cameras (e.g., VEO, Trace) by individual parents is prohibited unless explicitly authorized by the Director of Coaching.
- Publicly sharing game footage that negatively highlights an opposing player, or monetizing footage containing PIFC athletes, is strictly forbidden.

7.0 Grievances

7.1 The 24-Hour Cool-Down Rule

- Soccer is a passionate game, and emotions can run high following a heavily contested match or a frustrating training session.
- Parents and players must wait a minimum of 24 hours following an incident, game, or practice before initiating contact with a coach or club official to lodge a complaint.
- Violations of the 24-hour rule will result in the immediate termination of the conversation and potential disciplinary action.

7.2 Chain of Command for Issue Resolution

- **Step 1:** The parent or player must first address the issue directly with the Head Coach in a scheduled, private meeting (not on the field or via text).
- **Step 2:** If the issue remains unresolved, the complainant may escalate the issue to the the Director of Coaching or Technical Director.
- **Step 3:** For severe disputes, or if the grievance involves the Technical Director or Director of Coaching, the issue may be escalated in writing to the Club President.
- **Step 4:** The Club President represents the final point of escalation for all disputes, and their ruling on the matter is final.

7.3 Reporting Format and Timeline

- All formal grievances escalated past the Head Coach must be submitted in writing via the official PIFC Grievance Form available on the club website.
- Verbal complaints, text messages, or informal emails will not be processed as formal grievances.
- PIFC administration will acknowledge receipt of a formal grievance within 48 hours and aims to provide a final resolution within 10 business days.

7.4 Non-Retaliation Policy

- PIFC strictly prohibits any form of retaliation against a player whose parent or guardian has submitted a grievance in good faith.

- Coaches found to be reducing playing time or mistreating an athlete as a result of a club-approved grievance process will face immediate suspension.