



Niagara Falls SC Grassroots Program: Rules, Standards, and Expectations



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Introduction

Welcome to **Niagara Falls SC Grassroots Program**! We are excited to have you and your child join our soccer family. At the grassroots level, our primary focus is on **fun, development, and fostering a love for the game**. We believe that soccer is more than just a sport—it's an opportunity for children to learn important life skills, make new friends, and grow both on and off the field.

This document outlines the **rules, standards, and expectations** for players, parents, and coaches within our grassroots program. These guidelines are designed to create a positive, safe, and enjoyable environment where every child can thrive. While we emphasize fun and participation, we also maintain high standards to ensure that our players develop good habits, respect for others, and a strong foundation in soccer.

At Niagara Falls SC, we measure success not by wins and losses, but by the **progress and improvement** we see in our players. Our goal is to help each child build confidence, learn teamwork, and develop a lifelong passion for soccer. We encourage parents and guardians to support this journey by embracing our club's values and working together with coaches and staff.

Thank you for being part of the Niagara Falls SC family. Let's work together to create a memorable and rewarding experience for your child!



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Our Philosophy

- Our primary focus is on **fun, participation, and individual development**.
- Winning is not the measurement of success. Instead, we measure success by the **progress and improvement shown from game to game**.
- We aim to help children build confidence, learn teamwork, and develop a strong foundation in soccer—both on and off the field.
- Our goal is for every player to leave the program with a smile on their face, new friends, and a passion for the game.

Training Attendance

- Regular attendance at training sessions is important for player development and team cohesion.
- While we understand that young players may occasionally miss training due to other commitments, **regular absences** may result in limited game time. This ensures fairness to players who consistently attend and contribute to the team.
- We encourage open communication with coaches about any absences to help us plan accordingly.

Training and Game Attire

- Players must wear **shin pads and appropriate soccer attire** (e.g., cleats, socks, and shorts) to all sessions.
- On game days, players should arrive in their **team uniform** or designated club attire.
- This helps create a sense of team spirit and prepares players for the game.

Respect and Greetings

- Players are encouraged to greet coaches and staff with a **handshake, fist bump, or high-five** upon arrival and departure.
- If a coach is speaking with someone, players should also greet that person.
- This simple act of respect helps build good habits and fosters a positive, inclusive environment.

Respect for Referees

- Referees play a vital role in ensuring fair play and maintaining the integrity of the game. All players, parents, and coaches are expected to treat referees with **respect and courtesy** at all times.
- **Players:** Do not argue with referees or question their decisions. Focus on playing the game and let the coaches handle any concerns.
- **Parents and Spectators:** Avoid making negative comments or gestures toward referees. Instead, encourage the players and respect the referee's role in the game.
- **Coaches:** Set an example by showing respect for referees and addressing any concerns calmly and professionally after the game.
- **Remember:** At the grassroots level, many referees are also learning and gaining experience. Mistakes are part of the learning process for everyone, including referees. Let's support them as they develop their skills, just as we support our players.

Sideline Conduct

- Spectators are asked to **cheer, encourage, and support** the players but avoid giving on-field instructions (e.g., "pass," "shoot," "run").
- Allowing players to make their own decisions—even if they result in mistakes—is a key part of their development.
- Coaches will provide guidance and feedback during games, and sideline instructions can create confusion.
- Remember, the goal is to let the kids play, learn, and have fun!

Call-Up Players (If Applicable)

1. **Challenge younger players** by giving them the opportunity to train or play with an older age group.
2. **Fill in for absent players** when needed to ensure the team can participate fully.
 - Call-up players are selected based on their **effort, attitude, and willingness to learn**. Coaches and staff look for players who demonstrate good sportsmanship, a positive attitude, and a commitment to improving their skills.
 - Players may be called up from the age group below or within the club's player pool, depending on the situation.
 - Call-up players are treated as part of the team and will be given opportunities to participate, though playing time is not guaranteed.
 - These decisions are made by the **technical staff and the player's coach**. Call-up opportunities will be communicated by the coach or team manager. Parents and players should not request call-up opportunities.

Open Roster Policy

What is Open Roster?

At Niagara Falls SC, our Open Roster system breaks down traditional "A" or "B" team barriers. Instead, **all players within an age group train together as one pool**, working with every coach assigned to that age group. For games, players may be assigned to different teams based on developmental needs, performance, or tactical goals—allowing for fluid movement throughout the season.

How It Works

- **Shared Training Environment:** Players train in mixed groups, learning from all coaches and interacting with every peer in their age bracket.
- **Flexible Game Rosters:** Coaches and technical staff may adjust team assignments weekly to ensure:
 - Balanced competition.
 - Opportunities for players to experience different roles (e.g., leadership, new positions).
 - Exposure to varied playing styles and challenges.
- **Transparent Communication:** Parents will be notified of team assignments ahead of games.

Why It's Important for Development

1. **Equal Access to Coaching:** All players benefit from the expertise of every coach in the age group, not just one assigned team coach.
2. **Reduced Pressure:** Removing fixed "tiered" teams (e.g., "A" vs. "B") fosters a growth mindset, where mistakes are part of learning—not reasons for relegation.
3. **Stronger Community:** Players build relationships across the entire age group, creating a supportive club culture.
4. **Adaptability:** Regular changes in teammates and opponents teach players to adjust quickly—a critical soccer (and life) skill.

Why Ontario Soccer Requires It

Ontario Soccer's Open Roster mandate aligns with its **Long-Term Player Development (LTPD)** model by:

- Prioritizing **individual progress** over rigid team structures.
- Ensuring no player is "locked" into a limited role due to early-season assessments.
- Encouraging clubs to focus on holistic development, not short-term wins.

Parent Interaction with Coaches

- The "**Rule of 2**" applies to all conversations between parents and coaches. A manager or staff member will be present during discussions.
- **Serious Matters:** Parents must wait **48 hours** before requesting a meeting with the coach. This ensures that conversations are calm and productive.
- **Non-Urgent Matters:** All non-urgent questions or concerns should be directed to the **team manager**, who will consult with the coach if needed.
- This process helps maintain clear and respectful communication.

Tournament and Event Participation

- Participation in tournaments and events is **encouraged but not mandatory** at the grassroots level.
- These opportunities are a great way for players to experience different levels of competition, build teamwork, and have fun. They also provide opportunities for players to experience new challenges and grow in a supportive environment.
- Details about upcoming events will be shared by the team manager.

Raising Standards

- While we prioritize fun and development, we also aim to maintain high standards for behavior, effort, and respect.
- We believe that these values help create a positive environment where every player can thrive.
- By working together, we can ensure that our grassroots program is a place where children grow, learn, and fall in love with soccer.

Conclusion

At **Niagara Falls SC Grassroots Program**, we are dedicated to creating a welcoming, fun, and development-focused environment for every player. Our goal is to help children fall in love with the game, build confidence, and develop important life skills like teamwork and respect. By following these rules and standards, we can ensure that our young athletes have a positive and memorable experience that sets the foundation for a lifelong passion for soccer.

Our vision is to create a program where every child feels valued, supported, and inspired to grow—both on and off the field. Thank you for being part of our soccer family. Together, let's make this season a joyful and rewarding journey for every child!



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