

Referee Field Guide

2026–2027 Season | U11–U12

A quick-reference guide for Inspire match officials

CONFERENCE-SPECIFIC PROCEDURES: Inspire operates under national standards with approved conference and regional variances. Officials must confirm the applicable conference format and procedures before each match. The Mid-Atlantic Inspire competition is administered through the Maryland State Youth Soccer Association (MSYSA) in collaboration with the United Clubs League (UCL). For Mid-Atlantic matches, MSYSA/UCL procedures govern referee assignment, payment, match-day check-in and referee reporting, together with any Girls Academy-approved regional competition modifications.

[View the MSYSA/UCL Referee Procedures.](#)

1. MATCH BASICS

1.1 Governing Laws

Unless modified by the Inspire Framework or an approved conference framework, Inspire competition is played under the FIFA/IFAB Laws of the Game. Inspire age-specific modifications take precedence where applicable.

Standard	U11	U12
Playing format	9v9	11v11; *9v9 approved in select conferences
Ball	Size 4	Size 4
Standard league duration	2 x 30 min; 10-min halftime	3x25 minute periods recommended; 2 x 35 min also approved; 10-min halftime*
Two-game event duration	Recommended 2 x 25 min	Recommended 2 x 30 min
Game-day roster	12 minimum / 16 maximum	14 minimum / 18 maximum
Substitutions	Unlimited; max 3 moments per half	Unlimited; max 3 moments per half/period
Officials	1 center permitted; 3 recommended	3-person crew required at 11v11
Games per day	Maximum 2 when league approved	Maximum 2 when league approved
Minimum recovery between games	2 hours	2 hours

** U12 format is subject to approved conference variance. Officials should confirm the applicable conference format before kickoff.*

IMPORTANT: Conference variances may affect playing format, match duration, referee crew, roster limits, substitution procedure, assignment/payment process and reporting workflow. A conference-specific procedure applies only where it has been approved by the Girls Academy; otherwise this Inspire Field Guide governs.

1.2 U11 9v9 — Build-Out Line & Offside

- Inspire recommends a build-out line for 9v9 competition. Position it approximately halfway between the top of the penalty area and the halfway line.
- On goal kicks and when the goalkeeper has possession, opposing players retreat behind the build-out line. Once the ball is put into play, opponents may cross the line and normal play resumes.

OFFSIDE: For 9v9 competition utilizing a build-out line, the build-out line also serves as the offside line. A player may not be penalized for an offside offense between the halfway line and the build-out line. Offside is enforced once the player enters the attacking third beyond the build-out line.

1.3 Heading

- U11: Follow applicable age-specific U.S. Soccer heading rules.
- U12: Heading is permitted under the Inspire Framework.

2. PRE-GAME DUTIES

2.1 Match Card & Player Check-In

- Both teams provide the standard non-photo match card listing participating players, coaching staff and team managers.
- Players who are injured, suspended, not dressing or otherwise not participating must be crossed off the match card.
- Check in players against the official roster. A player checked in counts as a rostered participant for that match/fixture.
- No write-in players are permitted.
- Only properly registered/approved players and staff may occupy the technical/team area.

2.2 Field, Goals & Equipment

- The referee has final authority to determine whether the field, goals, match ball and player equipment are safe for play.
- All goals must be securely anchored before warm-up and play.
- Home team provides at least three suitable Size 4 match balls; Adidas balls are preferred.
- Four matching corner flags should be available. Modified fields may use approved flat markers where permitted; cones/discs are not approved as field-boundary markers.

Field Standard	U11 9v9	U12 11v11
Recommended length	70–80 yards	90–100 yards
Recommended width	45–55 yards	60–70 yards
Goal size	Approx. 6.5 x 18.5 ft where available	7 x 21 ft minimum; 8 x 24 ft maximum

3. SUBSTITUTIONS

- Unlimited substitutions are permitted.
- Teams are limited to a maximum of three (3) substitution moments per half or period.
- Halftime and scheduled period breaks do not count as substitution moments; teams may substitute freely during those intervals.
- An injury substitution is permitted and does not count as one of the team's three substitution moments.
- Substitutions remain under the referee's control and may not be used to intentionally delay the match.

4. CARDS, DISMISSALS & REPORTING

The referee's responsibility is to issue the appropriate card/send-off and accurately report the incident. The Girls Academy administers subsequent suspensions and eligibility.

- A player or coach receiving a red card is removed for the remainder of that match.
- Document all player/coach red cards and significant send-offs involving staff or spectators, including violent conduct, abusive language or abusive behavior.
- Yellow and red cards must be reflected in match reporting. Significant safety, misconduct or abandonment incidents should be escalated promptly through the designated Girls Academy process.

5. REFEREE CREW & FEES

5.1 Crew Requirements

- U11: One (1) center referee is permitted; a three-person crew is recommended.
- U12: A three-person crew is required for 11v11 and recommended at 9v9; one center referee and two assistant referees.
- Officials should be properly registered and in good standing with U.S. Soccer. Clubs are expected to seek the highest-qualified officials reasonably available.
- If a U12 assistant referee becomes unavailable immediately before or during a match, the home club should notify the visiting club and league. A temporary club linesperson may be used only if permitted by the league and is limited to signaling when the ball is out of play; the center referee retains all officiating authority.

5.2 Assignment & Compensation

- The home/host club is responsible for the referee assignment process unless an approved conference or event procedure states otherwise.
- Referee fees are split between the participating clubs and are based on prevailing rates in the local market. Fee information should be communicated before match day. The Home team is responsible to ensure match officials are compensated.
- At a neutral site, the designated home team remains responsible for the assignment process unless otherwise approved.

5.3 Mid-Atlantic / MSYSA-UCL Procedures

- Mid-Atlantic Inspire matches operating through UCL use the MSYSA referee assigning process. UCL states that U11 and older matches are assigned a three-official crew.
- Referee fees for UCL matches are included in the UCL registration fee and are paid through GotSport-GotPay. Officials should not collect payment from teams at the field.
- For UCL matches, the home team provides the printed match card. MSYSA/UCL requires player/team-official passes and prohibits written-in names.
- UCL referees report scores, misconduct and injuries through the UCL/GotSport reporting process. Red cards also require the applicable USSF Supplemental Report.
- If an assigned official is missing, follow the MSYSA/UCL absence procedure. Do not use a two-whistle system. Where permitted, a club linesperson may be used with authority limited by the applicable procedure.
- MSYSA/UCL procedures govern referee assignment, payment, match-day administration and referee reporting. Girls Academy Inspire competition rules remain in effect, including the Inspire substitution framework and any approved age-specific playing modifications.
- **Substitutions:** Mid-Atlantic Inspire matches follow the Girls Academy Inspire substitution rule: unlimited substitutions, with a maximum of three (3) substitution moments per half or period. Halftime and scheduled period breaks do not count as substitution moments. Injury substitutions are permitted and do not count as a substitution moment.

Mid-Atlantic officials: [MSYSA/UCL Referee Procedures](#)

6. MATCH-DAY NOTES FOR OFFICIALS

- No Inspire match should be scheduled before 9:00 AM unless both clubs agree in writing.
- Matches should end at least 30 minutes before sunset unless lights are available and the visiting club has agreed to the later time.

- Athletic trainer coverage is not mandated for Inspire in Year 1. Player safety remains the priority, and potential head injuries/concussion concerns must be managed under applicable Girls Academy/U.S. Soccer safety policy.
- Inspire may use league, event/festival or conference-specific formats. Before kickoff, officials must confirm the approved age-group playing format, game duration, roster limit, referee crew and authorized regional administrative procedures. Regional administrative procedures apply; Girls Academy Inspire competition standards apply unless the Girls Academy has expressly approved a competition-rule variance.

INSPIRE: CONSISTENT IN PURPOSE AND STANDARDS.