

### 2025-2026 HCAL Soccer Sports Plan

Date	Event	Location-Address
April 25 <sup>th</sup>	Houston Regional Championship	San Jacinto College South Campus (13735 Beamer Rd, Houston, TX 77089)
Week of April 20	Austin Regional Championship	MS- TBD HS- TBD
May 2, 2026	HCAL State Championship	TBD

#### Rules/Deadlines/District Alignments/Schedules & Standings:

- Please review all of this key information directly from our [HCAL Website](#).
- The **NFHS Soccer Manual** will govern all rules not stated in this sport plan.

#### Game Day Logistics:

- Game Time
  - Review Official Game Schedule published on the [HCAL Website](#).
  - Any request for game changes must be approved by the HCAL Director.
    - [Please review game change request protocol.](#)
    - **Game requests submitted within 72 hours of a scheduled game will not be approved.**
  - A 15-minute grace period will be allowed before a game is called a forfeit. (with no communication)
    - **If communication is provided, then there will be no forfeit, and adjustments will be made by officials to ensure games stay on time. (warmup will be limited and no more than a 30-minute grace period will be allowed)**
    - Arrival more than 30 minutes with communication will be considered a forfeit.
  - All coaches shall bring their official roster to present to the referees prior to start time.
    - *See Game Day Rosters section*
  - The HCAL Director must be notified and approve before a game is rescheduled due to weather or determined a forfeit.
- Game Play
  - Length of Play
    - High School Games = 35 minutes per half
    - Middle School Games = 25 minutes per half
    - Halftime will be 5 minutes – Teams will exchange ends & alternate the kickoff.
    - Each half may be shortened if mutually agreed upon or in case of an emergency.
    - In the event a game must be suspended due to weather conditions or other elements (if impossible to play) – the officials shall utilize criteria to determine the outcome of a game:
      - If 1 half or more has been played – results will stand.
      - If the game is at less than a half, the game may be rescheduled from the start.
    - If the results are tied at the of regulation time during district play – result will be documented as a tie in the standings (Only Playoffs will have Penalty Kicks)
  - Overtime Rules
    - Only applicable to playoffs and championship games



- Playoffs – go straight into best of 5 penalty kicks (alternating)
- Regional/ State Championships – 1<sup>st</sup> Overtimes (2x) – 10 minute per half of each (Extra Time)
- Regional/ State Championships – 2<sup>nd</sup> Overtime (Best of 5 penalty kicks, alternating)
- Game Day Rosters
  - Game cards will be the responsibility of the home team and should be presented to the center ref prior to the start of the game. [HCAL Soccer Game Card](#)
    - Both teams should complete their team rosters prior to the start of the game. (number, first and last name)
    - The home team should collect the game card after every game from the officials.
    - HCAL will utilize these game cards for accountability purposes if needed
      - Failure to provide them will result in an infraction or forfeit.
  - **Only rostered team members, coaches, ADs and athletic staff are allowed in the team bench area (verified by roster submission.)**
  - **The minimum number of players you can start a game with is 7.**
- Substitutions
  - Procedures for substitutions – Request permission to substitute from the referee prior to doing so (except for at halftime)
  - Switching goalkeeper with another player requires the same request process for a sub.
  - Substitutions will only be allowed during the following times:
    - Goal kicks, after a goal, halftime
    - On their own throw in or corner kick – If an opposing team is substituting.
    - Mandatory for an injured player or a player receiving a yellow card.
- Red & Yellow Card Expectations
  - Yellow Card – the player who receives a yellow card must leave the field immediately:
    - Coach can replace the player on the field.
    - The player who receives this yellow card may return to the game at the next substitution opportunity.
    - If this player receives 2 yellow cards in the same game = red card. They will be asked to leave the game and no replacement will be allowed on the field.
  - Red Card – the player who receives a red card is eliminated from the game:
    - The coach is not allowed to replace the player and must play a player short.
    - If the team falls below the minimum 7 players that is required, then the team will forfeit the game.
    - The player receiving the red card must also sit out the very next game on their schedule.
    - **Coaches and players CANNOT run onto the field to protest a call or join an altercation, this will result in a red card**
    - **Excessive celebrations, taunting, provoking gestures or flamboyant behavior towards the spectators, opponents or officials could be subject to automatic disqualification. (red card)**



- HCAL Soccer Card Point System
  - HCAL will implement a point a system to ensure that sportsmanship is at the forefront of every game. Please review the document for further explanation. [HCAL Point System](#)
  - **There will be a zero-tolerance policy for behavior that is not positive and does not represent the values of HCAL.**
  - Game Point Systems
    - Win = 3 points
    - Tie = 1 point
    - Loss = 0 points
    - Forfeits = 3 points (will receive 3 goals for point differential)
  - Uniforms Expectations
    - All players must wear a jersey, shorts, stockings, shoes, & shin guards that will provide the adequate protection needed to play.
    - Each team should have uniforms of similar jersey, shorts, and stockings (except the goalie)
    - All jerseys shall be numbered on the back with a different number.
    - Highly recommended that the captain wears their “Captain” arm band of a contrasting color.
    - The jerseys and stockings of opposing teams shall be of contrasting colors – in the event that they are similar colors, the away team shall be responsible for making the necessary change.
    - The home team should wear dark colored jerseys.
    - The visitors should wear light-colored jerseys.
    - The following items will not be allowed to be utilized during the game for safety reasons.
      - Hats/Caps/Visors may not be worn
      - Hair control products that are not made of soft material.
      - Metal Spikes or braces with exposed metals nor shin guards with sharp edges
      - Jewelry may not be worn except for religious/medical medals approved by officials.
      - Referees will have the final discretion on these decisions at the games.
    - If any color switches are needed – this must be mutually agreed upon prior to the start of the game (failure to do so will require the team wearing the wrong color from the guidelines above to wear pennies)
  - Administrator on Duty
    - The home team must provide an administrator.
    - Teachers, School Admin, Athletic Director/Coordinators, Counselors, or Coaches could all be the Administrator on Duty – Individual must not be directly involved in the game
    - Admin on duty should present themselves to officials and coaches prior to the start of the game
    - Failure to do so will incur in an infraction and possible forfeiture.
  - Warm-Up
    - The field must be available a minimum of 30 minutes to the official start time for both teams.
    - All programs will have 10 minutes in between games to warm up (clock starts after fields are cleared)



- Officials
  - Officials will be assigned/provided by HCAL for all district and playoff games.
  - Three HCAL certified officials will be used for high school games.
  - Two HCAL certified officials will be used for middle school games.
  - HCAL is responsible for official payments for district and any playoff games.
  - Each school is responsible for referee payments for any additional non-district game.
  - Officials should arrive at least 15 minutes prior to game time. Please report this on the game report (sent by Teamsideline) if this expectation is not met.
- Official Ball
  - Any NFHS Certified ball (Size 5) will be used for district play & playoffs.
  - The home team is responsible for providing the official game ball.
  - Both teams are responsible for bringing their own warm-up balls.
- Game Scores and Protests
  - The home team is responsible for entering the official scores into the HCAL website by noon of the next business day.
    - Failure to do so will incur an infraction.
  - Protests and/or disagreements should be brought to the attention of the HCAL Director within 24 hours of gameplay.
  - Discrepancies with scores will also be verified through the game officials' reports.
  - Only eligibility or compliance will be considered for protests – Officials' calls/rulings are not allowed to be protested.
  - Game Scores – It is the responsibility of the visiting team to review within that 24-hour period and inform the HCAL Director of any discrepancies
- Mercy Rule
  - At any point of the game, if a team has an advantage of 10 goals, the game will be called under the Mercy Rule. This will be enforced by officials. A maximum of 10 goals will be given for point differential.
- Players Eligibility
  - Players must be listed (First & Last Name) on the official rosters submitted via Team Sideline
  - Any player not listed is ineligible.
  - 8<sup>th</sup> Graders are allowed to play Varsity; however, they must have a [MS Request Form for HS Eligibility](#) on file
    - Once the 8<sup>th</sup> Grader plays on the HS Team – they must remain on the HS Team for the remainder of the season.
    - The official document must be submitted to the HCAL Director.
    - 6<sup>th</sup> and 7<sup>th</sup> Graders must participate in the middle school level divisions.
  - **K-5<sup>th</sup> grade Students will not be allowed to participate in the HCAL MS nor HS Divisions.**
  - HCAL will conduct an Informal Roster Check During the Week of March 9, 2026.
    - This roster check will help Coaches/AD's/Athletic Coordinators prepare for the upcoming playoff games.
    - HCAL Director will provide further guidance the week prior with clear directions.



- Number of Players
  - Teams should consist of a maximum of 11 players (no less than 7 players) including a goalkeeper.
  - Boys cannot play on girls' teams, but girls are allowed to play on boys' teams.
  - A game cannot start with fewer than 7 players and if at any point a team has less than 7 players remaining on the field, the game will end & a forfeit will be declared.
    - Exception to the rule is if a player must leave the field for a temporary equipment repair or minor injury/blood-rule situation and is able to return upon resolution.
- Position of Players
  - A coin toss will be performed prior to the start of the game- winning team will have the option of:
    - Choosing which end of the field to attack or taking the kickoff.
    - Teams will exchange goal lines after the regular period & each overtime.

### **Game Day Operations**

- Admission Prices/Concessions
  - Host schools can charge admissions. All stakeholders should be prepared to pay.
  - Concessions may be operated by the host school only.
- Expenses
  - The home team is responsible for the payment of athletic trainer/facility costs/security for home games during district play – security is highly recommended for all league games if possible.
  - The home team is also responsible for the cost for striping of the soccer fields and field maintenance
  - HCAL will provide these vendors for all Regional/State Championship games only.
- Facilities
  - Any Teams without a home facility – can request to play their games away.
    - Teams will need to get approval from the opposing team for field use.
    - If said team is listed as the Home Team, they are required to provide an administrator on duty at the site being utilized, even if it is not their home facility at their campus.
    - Costs could be incurred by the teams without a field to pay for field maintenance.
    - If the opponent does not have a home field, a home field must be secured.
    - HCAL Director will help delegate the responsibilities/communication.
  - All Home Teams are required to both inspect their fields for any safety hazards and ensure the field is painted/stripped for all home district games.
- Weather Reschedules
  - Field conditions for home teams should be reported to the HCAL Director by noon on game day.
  - HCAL will communicate official game cancellations due to weather by 12:30 pm with potential rescheduling needed.
  - Officials have the final call on field condition to play a game.
  - **Lightning Delay-** in the event of lightning (pregame or in game)- there will be a 30-minute delay, after the 30-minute delay, if there is a second sighting, the game will be rescheduled. Officials and HCAL will make the final call.
- Field Maintenance
  - It is the responsibility of the home team to ensure that the playing field is safe and has the proper lining for a game. Failure to provide this will result in a forfeit. The officials will make the final decision in all cases.



- [NFHS Soccer Field Dimensions](#)- these are the dimensions of a legal playing field. HCAL will need to approve any fields that do not meet these requirements.

### **Playoff Format:**

#### **Houston (MS/Varsity)**

- Top 2- Teams from each district according to the district record.
- Cross-District Format – (D1 vs. D3) and (D2 vs. D4)
- The First Round of the playoffs
  - Will be hosted by the winner of each district.
  - Host School is responsible for providing Athletic Trainers/Security
  - HCAL will provide the officials.
- The Second Round/Regional Championships
  - Will be played at a Neutral Site.
  - HCAL will provide the officials.
  - Winner of the Varsity Regional Championship games will represent Houston at the State Championships.

#### **Austin – Varsity Divisions:**

- Top 4 - Teams from each district according to the district record
- The higher seed for each district will host the first and second round games.
- Cross-District Format – (North vs. South)
- Single Elimination
- **Host School is responsible for providing Athletic Trainers/Security**
- HCAL will provide the officials.
- The Regional Championship Games will be played at a neutral site.
- Winner of the Regional Championship will represent Austin and play in the State Championship

#### **Austin – MS Divisions:**

- Top 3 - Teams from each district according to the district record advance to the playoffs
- Cross-District Format – Ex: (North vs. South)
- Single Elimination
- The First Round of the playoffs
  - District Champs receive a 1st round bye
  - The 2 vs 3 matchup will be hosted by the higher seed.
  - Host School is responsible for providing Athletic Trainers/Security
  - HCAL will provide the officials.
- The Second Round
  - Will be hosted by each of the District Champions.
  - Host School is responsible for providing Athletic Trainers/Security
  - HCAL will provide the officials
- Regional Championship Game – 3rd Round
  - Will be played at a neutral site.

#### **Tiebreaker Policy – Playoff Qualifiers:**

##### **Tiebreaker for 2 teams tied with the same record**

- Head-to-Head



- Lowest # Forfeitures (will be given 3 goals for point differential, forfeiting scrimmages will be counted as well)
- Head - to - Head Goal Differentials among games played between both teams (Max Point Differential per game 10 pts)
- Head- to – Head Lowest Total Points Against among games played between both teams
- Coin Flip- Live Recording

**Tiebreaker for 3 or more teams tied with the same record**

- Lowest # Forfeitures (will be given 3 goals for point differential, forfeiting scrimmages will be counted as well)
- Head – to – Group Goal Differential among games played between those teams
- Head – to – Group Lowest Total Points Against among games played between those team
- Lowest Total Points Against – District
- Coin Flip – Live Recording

**HCAL Honors & Awards:**

- *Team Honors*
  - District Champions (Varsity & JV, & MS Divisions)
  - Regional Champions (Varsity & MS Divisions)
  - State Champions (Varsity Divisions Only)
- Individual Awards Listed Below – Varsity Division Only
  - *Individual Player (All-District)*
    - District Champs – Receive 3 nominations
    - 2<sup>nd</sup> Place – Receive 2 nominations.
    - All other Teams – Receive 1 nomination.
  - *Individual Player (All-Region)*
    - Regional Champs – Receives 3 nominations.
    - Runner – Up Team – Receives 2 nominations.
    - All other Playoff Teams – Receive 1 nomination.
  - *Individual Player (All-State)*
    - State Champs – Receives 3 Nominations
    - Runner – Up Team – Receives 2 nominations.
  - *All-Academic Team*
    - Any athlete with a 3.75 GPA or higher during the season
  - *Coach of the Year Award*
    - Awarded to the Head Coach of the State Championship Team

Varsity Regional All-Star Games will be tentatively scheduled a week after the state championship games.

**Professional Dress – Coaches/Administrators:**

- Business casual – school polos and nice khakis pants or khaki shorts
- Jeans, t-shirts, cargo pants/shorts, tights, sweatpants, joggers, or athletic shorts of any kind are **NOT Acceptable**
- Hats are allowed.
- Thank you all for always representing your school/charter school network and HCAL well!

