

BOSTON BOLTS COLUMBUS CUP

2026 TOURNAMENT RULES & REGULATIONS

Tournament Dates: October 10-12, 2026

Location: Greater Boston, Massachusetts

Host: FC Greater Boston Bolts

These rules govern participation in the Boston Bolts Columbus Cup. The tournament will be played and officiated in accordance with the current FIFA/IFAB Laws of the Game, except as modified by these Tournament Rules and applicable U.S. Soccer and MYSA requirements.

1. Governing Rules

The Boston Bolts Columbus Cup is a Massachusetts Youth Soccer sanctioned event.

All matches shall be played and officiated in accordance with the current FIFA/IFAB Laws of the Game, except where specifically modified by these Tournament Rules, U.S. Soccer requirements, Massachusetts Youth Soccer rules, or applicable U.S. Soccer small-sided standards.

Where these Tournament Rules establish a permitted competition-specific modification, these Tournament Rules shall apply.

The Tournament Director shall have authority over tournament administration and interpretation of these rules, subject to applicable Massachusetts Youth Soccer and U.S. Soccer requirements.

2. Team Eligibility and Registration

All participating teams must be properly registered and in good standing with their applicable U.S. Soccer-affiliated organization.

Teams must provide all registration, roster, player, coach, and credentialing documentation required by the Tournament.

Teams traveling from outside Massachusetts are responsible for obtaining any permission-to-travel or other documentation required by their governing organization.

No ineligible, unregistered, suspended, or otherwise unauthorized player may participate. Guest players must be properly registered and eligible in accordance with the rules of their governing organization and the Tournament.

3. Player and Coach Credentials

Teams must have all required official rosters, player credentials/passcards, coach credentials, and other required documentation available for inspection.

Only properly credentialed players and team officials may occupy the team technical area.

All adults participating in an official team capacity must satisfy applicable registration, background-check, SafeSport, risk-management, and credentialing requirements.

4. Rosters

Unless otherwise published for a particular division, maximum tournament rosters are:

Age Group	Format	Maximum Roster
U8	5v5	10
U9–U10	7v7	14
U11–U12	9v9	16
U13–U14	11v11	20

Tournament rosters become final at the roster deadline established by the Tournament Director. Players may not be added after that deadline without Tournament approval and compliance with applicable eligibility rules.

5. Competition Format

Teams will be scheduled for a minimum of three matches, subject to weather, field conditions, emergencies, forfeits, or circumstances beyond the Tournament's reasonable control.

U10 and Younger: Divisions subject to Massachusetts Youth Soccer festival requirements will operate in festival format. Match results will not determine advancement.

U11 and Older: Competitive divisions may include group play followed by playoff and/or championship matches. Bracket structures will be determined by the Tournament based upon the number and competitive level of accepted teams.

6. Match Format

Age Group	Playing Format	Match Duration	Halftime
U8	5v5	2 × 25-minute halves	5 minutes
U9–U10	7v7	2 × 25-minute halves	5 minutes
U11–U12	9v9	2 × 30-minute halves	5 minutes
U13–U14	11v11	2 × 30-minute halves	5 minutes

There will be a five (5) minute halftime interval for all tournament matches.

The Tournament Director reserves the right to shorten match periods or halftime intervals when necessary due to weather, field conditions, delays, darkness, emergencies, or other circumstances affecting the safe and orderly completion of the Tournament.

7. Home and Away Teams

The team listed first on the official schedule will be designated the home team unless otherwise indicated.

Home team should wear light colored uniforms, away team in dark color uniforms.

If the referee determines that the teams' uniforms conflict, the home team will change jerseys.

Both teams should have an alternate uniform available.

8. Team Check-In

Teams must be prepared for referee check-in before every match and should arrive at their assigned field at least 30 minutes before the scheduled kickoff.

Players and team officials must have all required credentials available for inspection. A player or team official whose eligibility cannot be established may not participate until properly cleared.

Each team should provide an appropriate size ball to use for the match and present to the referee at check-in.

9. Substitutions

Unless otherwise restricted by applicable Laws of the Game or governing-body requirements, substitutions will be unlimited and players may re-enter.

All substitutions are subject to the referee's permission and must occur at an appropriate stoppage in play.

10. Heading Rule for U12 & Younger

Heading Rules

U11 players and younger may NOT intentionally head the ball. If, in the opinion of the referee, a player intentionally heads the ball, play will be restarted with an indirect free kick for the opposing team.

U12 players and older may intentionally head the ball.

If a player plays up in an older age division, that player will play under the heading rule applicable to the age division in which the match is being played.

5v5 and 7v7 Guidelines

- **Punting/drop kicks** are not permitted.
- The opposing team must be behind the halfway line for goal kicks to promote playing the ball out of the back.
- Throws from the GK cannot pass half field in the air.
- The offside rule will be enforced in all 7v7 games.

11. Match Officials

All matches will be officiated by qualified referees assigned by the Tournament/US Officials.

U7-12 matches should expect 1 official per match.

U13-14 matches should expect 1 center official and 2 linesmen. In the event of a missing official, both teams can agree to use a team provided AR.

Referees shall officiate matches in accordance with the FIFA/IFAB Laws of the Game, together with applicable modifications established by U.S. Soccer, MYSA, and these Tournament Rules.

The referee has full authority to enforce the Laws of the Game in connection with the match to which the referee has been appointed. Decisions of the referee regarding facts connected with play are final.

The referee has authority to take disciplinary action against players and team officials and may delay, suspend, or abandon a match when authorized under the Laws of the Game or when necessary for safety.

Players, coaches, team officials, and spectators must respect the authority and decisions of the referee crew. Abuse, threats, intimidation, harassment, or other misconduct directed toward referees will not be tolerated.

12. Scoring and Standings — U11 and Older

- Win - 6 points
- Tie - 3 points
- Loss - 0 points
- Shutout - 1 additional point
- Maximum points per match — 7 points

A team may earn a maximum of seven (7) tournament points in a single match. For example, a 2–0 win earns 7 points; a 3–2 win earns 6 points; a 0–0 tie earns 4 points; a 2–2 tie earns 3 points; and a loss earns 0 points.

Tournament points are used to determine standings and advancement and are separate from the actual match score.

13. Tiebreakers

If two or more teams finish group play with the same number of tournament points, ties will be resolved using the following criteria in the order listed:

1. Head-to-Head - goal differential will be used as a secondary head-to-head tiebreaker when necessary.
2. Goal Differential - unlimited; no per-game cap.
3. Goals For - a maximum of four (4) goals per game will count toward this tiebreaker.
4. Goals Against - a maximum of four (4) goals per game will count toward this tiebreaker.
5. Least Combined Infractions.
6. Least Yellow Cards.
7. Least Red Cards.

Three or More Teams Tied: When three or more teams are tied, the criteria above will be applied in order.

If application of a criterion separates one or more teams while two or more teams remain tied, the tiebreaker process will restart from Head-to-Head for the remaining tied teams.

If teams remain tied after all published tiebreakers have been exhausted, the Tournament Director will determine the method used to resolve the remaining tie in accordance with applicable tournament and sanctioning requirements.

14. Championship Games

In the event that a Championship Game is tied at the end of regular time, the match will proceed directly to kicks from the penalty mark. No extra time will be played.

Kicks from the penalty mark will be conducted in accordance with the applicable FIFA/IFAB Laws of the Game. Teams will alternate kicks at the same goal, with the goal selected by the referee in accordance with the Laws of the Game.

Each team will initially take five (5) kicks, subject to the provisions of the Laws of the Game that may determine a winner before all five kicks have been taken. If the teams remain tied after five kicks each, kicks will continue on an alternating sudden-death basis until one team has scored more goals than the other from the same number of kicks.

Only players who are eligible and on the field of play at the conclusion of regular time, including the goalkeeper, are eligible to participate in kicks from the penalty mark, subject to the applicable Laws of the Game. All eligible players must take a kick before any eligible player may take a second kick.

Eligible players must remain on the field of play or in the area designated by the referee following the conclusion of regular time and throughout the penalty-kick procedure.

Failure to Appear for Championship Game: If one of the two teams qualifying for a Championship Game declines or fails to appear, the next highest-ranked eligible team in that division, based upon the tournament standings and applicable tiebreaking procedures, may be substituted. Any such substitution will be at the discretion of the Tournament Committee.

15. Team Withdrawals, Forfeits and Failure to Play

Match Termination Due to Misconduct: If a team is determined by the referee and/or Tournament Committee to be responsible for the termination or abandonment of a match due to poor sportsmanship, misconduct, or inappropriate behavior toward referees, opposing teams, tournament personnel, or spectators, that team will forfeit the match. The forfeiting team will be recorded as having lost the match 0–3.

Failure to Appear or Insufficient Players: A team that fails to appear for a scheduled match or does not have the minimum number of eligible players required to begin the match will forfeit the match. The forfeiting team will be recorded as having lost 0–3.

Minimum Players - 11v11: For 11v11 matches, a minimum of seven (7) eligible players constitutes a team. If at least seven eligible players are present and properly equipped, the match may begin. A team may continue only so long as the number of players remaining satisfies the minimum required under the applicable FIFA/IFAB Laws of the Game.

Withdrawal from the Tournament: Accepted teams are expected to complete all scheduled tournament matches. A team that withdraws, refuses to play, or leaves the Tournament before completing its scheduled

matches without approval of the Tournament Director may forfeit its remaining matches and may be subject to additional tournament disciplinary action.

16. Player Equipment and Safety

All players must wear shin guards completely covered by socks. Jewelry and dangerous equipment are prohibited in accordance with the Laws of the Game.

The referee determines whether braces, protective equipment, casts, or other equipment are safe for match participation. The referee's match-day safety determination is final.

17. Concussions and Injuries

Player safety takes priority over competition. Any player suspected of sustaining a concussion must be removed from play and managed in accordance with applicable Massachusetts Youth Soccer, U.S. Soccer, and Massachusetts requirements.

A player may not return to participation contrary to applicable concussion protocols or medical restrictions.

18. Send-Offs and Suspensions

Players: A player who receives a red card, whether by a direct send-off or as the result of receiving a second yellow card in the same match, shall take no further part in that match and will be suspended for the team's next tournament match.

A player serving a red-card suspension may remain on the team bench during the suspended match but may not be in uniform or participate in the match in any capacity. The Tournament Director may impose additional suspensions when warranted by the nature or severity of the misconduct and applicable governing-body requirements.

Coaches and Bench Personnel: A coach or other authorized bench personnel who is sent off must immediately leave the field and surrounding playing area and must remain away from the field for the team's next match. The referee will not restart the match until the dismissed individual has left the required area.

Spectators: A spectator or other non-player, non-coach, or non-bench individual who is directed to leave during a match must immediately leave the field and surrounding playing area. The Tournament Director reserves the right to suspend or prohibit a spectator from attending additional tournament matches when warranted by the individual's conduct.

19. Sideline Behavior

Both teams shall occupy the same side of the field. Only rostered players and authorized coaches may occupy the players' sideline.

Spectators must remain on the opposite side of the field, positioned opposite their respective team's bench.

Coaches, players, and authorized team personnel must remain within the designated technical area on their sideline, generally between the penalty-area lines, unless otherwise directed by the referee or tournament staff.

No spectators are permitted behind either goal.

Harassment of match officials by coaches, players, team personnel, or spectators will not be tolerated.

The head coach is responsible for assisting tournament and match officials in controlling the conduct of the team's players, bench personnel, and spectators.

20. Alcohol, Smoking and Tobacco

NO alcoholic beverages are permitted at tournament playing sites or associated parking areas where prohibited by the facility or tournament. Violation may result in removal from the facility and may subject the associated team to disciplinary action, including forfeiture of one match, as determined by the Tournament Director.

Smoking, vaping, and the use of tobacco products on or near the playing fields are prohibited, subject to applicable facility policies.

21. Protests

Decisions of the referee concerning facts connected with play are final and are not subject to protest.

Protests concerning player eligibility or an alleged misapplication of tournament rules must be submitted to the Tournament Director within 60 minutes following completion of the match.

Video recordings will not be used to overturn ordinary referee judgment decisions. Tournament administrative decisions concerning protests are final for tournament competition, subject to any applicable rights required by the sanctioning organization.

22. Weather, Lightning and Field Conditions

The Tournament Director and facility management may delay, suspend, shorten, relocate, reschedule, or cancel matches because of weather, lightning, unsafe field conditions, darkness, emergencies, or circumstances beyond the Tournament's reasonable control.

Teams and spectators must immediately comply with instructions to clear or evacuate fields when directed. The Tournament Director will determine whether a suspended match is resumed, considered complete, rescheduled, or otherwise resolved consistent with applicable rules.

23. Canceled or Terminated Matches

The Tournament will make reasonable efforts to provide the advertised number of matches. However, the number or duration of matches cannot be guaranteed when circumstances beyond the Tournament's reasonable control prevent play.

The Tournament Director may modify match duration, competition format, advancement procedures, or schedules when necessary to complete the event safely and fairly. Any refunds resulting from cancellation of some or all tournament matches will be governed by the Tournament's published registration and refund policy.

24. Field and Facility Rules

All participants and spectators must comply with rules established by tournament facilities, including applicable restrictions concerning parking, pets, tents, food and beverages, grills, alcohol, tobacco, artificial-turf footwear, drones, portable goals, and restricted areas.

Teams are responsible for leaving their bench and spectator areas clean after each match.

25. Match Schedules

Teams are responsible for reviewing the Tournament's designated official scheduling platform throughout the event. Schedules may change because of weather, field availability, bracket adjustments, or other tournament requirements.

The schedule displayed on the designated official tournament platform will control over previously printed, downloaded, or distributed versions.

26. Tournament Authority

The Tournament Director shall decide administrative matters not specifically addressed by these rules, consistent with applicable Massachusetts Youth Soccer, U.S. Soccer, and FIFA/IFAB requirements.

The Tournament Director may modify administrative procedures when extraordinary circumstances require it, provided such modifications do not conflict with mandatory sanctioning-body requirements.

TEAM PARTICIPATION ACKNOWLEDGMENT

By registering for and participating in the Boston Bolts Columbus Cup, each participating club, team, coach, player, and team representative agrees to comply with these Tournament Rules, applicable facility rules, and the requirements of the applicable governing and sanctioning organizations.

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October 10–12, 2026
Greater Boston, Massachusetts**