

USL Academy Substitution Protocols 2026 Season

Substitutions

Teams are allowed a maximum of seven (7) substitutes during regular season games. These substitutions may take place at three different moments within the match. Halftime does not count as one of these moments. In the interest of clarity, teams may not substitute one player at seven separate occurrences throughout the match. Substitutes shall report to the 4th Official or Assistant Referee at midfield and may not enter the field without the permission of the referee. A player who has been replaced by a substitute may not return to the field in the same game. Any player re-entering the game will be deemed an Ineligible Player. Any player that enters the game after the substitution allotment or moment allotment has been used will be deemed an Ineligible Player.

Exhibition Games (paid gate) - There is no limit to the number of substitutions in friendly matches as long as both teams agree on the number and the officials are informed of the special arrangement upon arrival at the venue.

Scrimmage Games (non-paid gate) - Unlimited substitutions.

Goalkeeper Substitution - The goalkeeper may change places with a field player as long as the referee is informed of the change and the change is made during a stoppage in the match. *Note: Delay or time wasting is not acceptable during the exchange process. The match should not be held up to allow for a complete change of equipment by either player.*

Concussion Substitution

The USL will implement a concussion substitution policy. The policy will act as follows.

Principles:

- Each team is permitted to use a maximum of two “concussion substitutes” in a match.
- A “concussion substitution” may be made regardless of the number of substitutes already used.
- A “concussion substitution” does NOT count as one of the team’s three “substitution windows” UNLESS the team makes a “normal” substitution at the same time as a “concussion substitution”.
- A “concussion substitution” is permanent, not temporary.
- In competitions in which the number of named substitutes is the same as the maximum number of substitutes that can be used, the “concussion substitute” can be a player who has previously been substituted.
 - o A player that has previously been substituted may only re-enter the field if all other substitutes have been used.
- When a “concussion substitute” is used, the opposing team then has the option of using an “additional” substitute for any reason.
 - o The Additional Substitute may only be used if all other substitutes or moments have been exhausted, unless it is made concurrently with the “concussion substitution.”
 - o The Additional Substitute may be a re-entering player only if all other substitutes have been used.
 - o The Additional Substitute moment does not allow for “normal” substitutions to occur concurrently.
 - Ex. A team has used all (3) substitution moments and has used (5) out of (7) available substitutes. The team has an Additional Substitute available.

When making the Additional Substitute, the team must send on one of the (2) players that have not played yet. The team cannot also send on their final player who has not played yet as a “normal” substitute.

Concussion Sub Procedure:

The substitution procedure operates in accordance with Law 3 – The Players (except as outlined otherwise below).

- A “concussion substitution” may be made:
 - immediately after a concussion occurs or is suspected
 - after an initial three-minute on-field assessment, and/or after an off-field assessment; or
 - at any other time when a concussion occurs or is suspected (including when a player has previously been assessed and has returned to the field of play).
- If a team decides to make a “concussion substitution”, the referee/fourth official is informed, ideally by using a concussion substitution card.
- The injured player is not permitted to take any further part in the match (including kicks from the penalty mark) and should, where possible, be accompanied to the changing room and/or a medical facility.
- The opposing team is informed by the referee/fourth official that it now has the option of using an “additional” substitute. This substitute will not count towards the 3 moments, but it must be a player that has not previously been on the field. If all the available substitutes have been on the field, the player may re-enter.
- This option may be used concurrently with the “concussion substitution” made by the opposing team or at any time after all legal substitutions and/or moments have been used (except as outlined otherwise by the Laws of the Game).

On-field Assessment

At least one (preferably two) medical staff members should be available to assess the player on-field for a potential concussion. In the interest of clarity, those two individuals can be the Team’s ATC and/or the on-site physician. On-field medical staff must have the ability to communicate back to the bench (i.e. radio communication). Referees are to provide the medical personnel with all requisite time needed to evaluate the individual.