



WINTER 2026

NSSL SKILL CENTER COMPETITION HANDBOOK



TABLE OF CONTENTS

Introduction to Skill Center	03	U8/9 Festival Structure	09
Skill Center Goals	04	Add/Drop Teams & Roster Sizes	10
Skill Center Principles	05	Match Matrix	11
Skill Center Standards	06	Modified Rules 1	12
League Dates	07	Modified Rules 2	13
U10/11 League Structure	08	Contact Information	14





INTRODUCTION TO SKILL CENTERS

Every person involved in soccer in Canada deserves an enjoyable experience with the game, regardless of the role they play, their age, their level of experience or their ability. For young players, an enjoyable experience means that they have access to high-quality programs where they can have fun with their friends, learn new skills and play the game in an appropriate format. Clubs play an important role in this, as they are the primary providers of soccer programs where young players experience the game in Canada.

Canada Soccer has created the Skill Center Programs to guide clubs towards best principles in player

development by taking a nationally coordinated approach to developing young soccer players. Skill Center Programs provide a challenging, enjoyable environment for players to develop and nurture the skills required to succeed in the game of soccer.

By taking a structured, long-term approach to player development – based around the principles of Long-Term Player Development (LTPD) – our young players will develop the foundation of fundamental skills required to succeed at whatever level of the game they aspire to reach.



SKILL CENTER GOALS

The best environment possible for as many young players as possible for as long as possible

1.

Keep more young players involved in the game for longer by providing them with an enjoyable experience with the game

2.

Produce clear training guidelines for clubs so they can deliver the best possible environment for young players in their region.

3.

Produce better players across Canada by increasing opportunity & access to better training and competition for more young players.



Canada Soccer Skill Center Programs are aligned with the best principles of player development from around the world. The underlying aim of the Skill Centers Program is to provide the best environment possible to as many young players as possible for as long as possible



SKILL CENTER PRINCIPLES

01

BALL CONTACT
TIME WILL BE
HIGH

TRAINING WILL
RESEMBLE THE
GAME

02

03

TRAINING
WILL BE FUN

PROGRAMS
ARE
ACCESSIBLE

04

05

MEANINGFUL
FEEDBACK FROM
COACHES



SKILL CENTER LEAGUE STANDARDS

The NSSL Skills Center Festival League is a Standards-Based Festival League; therefore each club must ensure their programs align with the Canada Soccer Skills Center Standards. Only clubs that operate Canada Soccer Skill Center Programs will be accepted to participate in the NSSL SC League. Clubs whose club licensing window is expiring in the calendar year will be audited to ensure their programs align. Clubs that have not participated in the NSSL SC League in the prior season must submit an application to Zach Bauld, Manager of Grassroots & Community Development - zach@soccerns.ca



SKILL CENTER LEAGUE DATES & LOCATIONS

Important Dates

U10/11 League Games will take place on Saturdays, and teams will be scheduled to play 10 games total between October 31, 2026 - February 20, 2027.

U8/9 Festivals will take place on Sundays on the following dates:

Week 1 - Nov 8th

Week 2 - Nov 22nd

Week 3 - Dec 6th

Week 4 - Dec 13th

Week 5 - Dec 20th

Week 6 - Jan 10th

Week 7 - Jan 24th

Week 8 - Jan 31st

Week 9 - Feb 7th

Week 10 - Feb 28th

Game Locations

BMOSC

210 Thomas Raddall Dr.

Halifax, NS B3S 0J2

ECV

10 Poseidon Court

Dartmouth, NS B2Y 4T9

U10/11 LEAGUE STRUCTURE

U10/ & U11 teams will participate in a single match format. Teams will play one 50 minute game. (2 x 25 minute halves)

U10/11 teams will be matched up against other teams/players who are “similarly developed” as determined the club/league. There will be two pools of competition. Pool 1 - “currently more developed players” and Pool 2.

The NSSL promotes fluid rosters and player movement between teams and pools throughout the season.



U8/9 FESTIVAL STRUCTURE

U8/9 teams will participate in a festival format. Teams will play two 25 minute games.

U8/9 teams must be evenly balanced, no tiering or stacking or teams permitted.

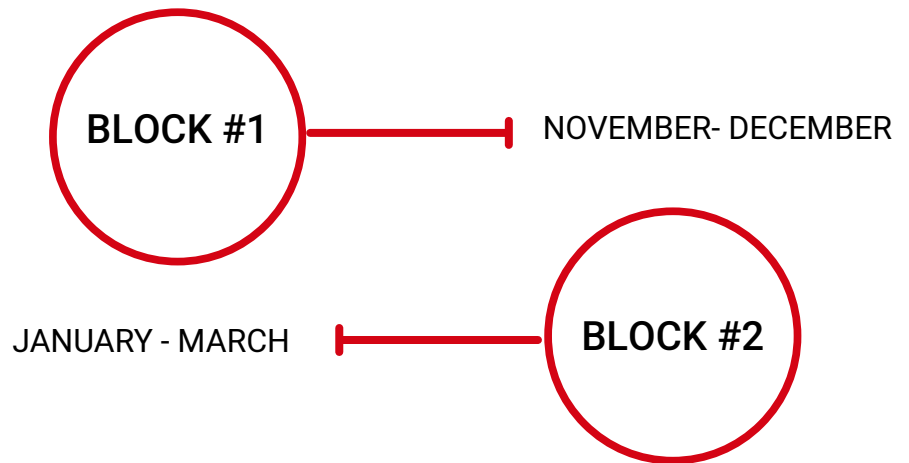
The NSSL promotes fluid rosters and player movement between teams throughout the season.





ADDING/DROPPING TEAMS & ROSTER SIZES

The season will be split into 2 blocks. Clubs will submit their teams at the declared NSSL league deadlines. U8/9 teams must have a roster size of no fewer than eight players. U10 & U11 teams must have a roster size of no fewer than ten players. Teams that do not meet these minimum numbers by the roster deadline will not be included in block #1 of the schedule



Team deletions or additions for Block #2 are due by Dec. 1st
Please note, team additions will only be approved based on field availability.

Exceptional circumstances on roster sizes may be granted, but must be approved by Zach Bauld, Director of Grassroots Programming & Dan Clark, NSSL League Operations Manager.



NSSL MATCH MATRIX

The NSSL SC Festival / League match format will fully align with Canada Soccer Grassroots Standards.

Criteria	U8/U9	U10/11
Match Format	5v5	7v7
Match Length	25 minutes	50 minutes
Field Size	25m x 30m	30m x 45m
Ball Size	Size 4	Size 4
Net Size	5ft x 8ft	6.5ft x 16ft
Retreat Line	Halfway	1/3rd
GK Area Size	5m x 10m	10m x 15m
PK Spot	5m from Goal	9m from Goal
Throw In or Kick/Dribble In:	Kick/Dribble In	Kick/Dribble In

MODIFIED NSSL MATCH RULES

U8/9 - U10/11 Modified Match Rules - Winter 2026/27

KICK OFF

A coin is tossed prior to the start of the game and the team who wins the toss will kick-off first in the middle of the playing area.

KICK IN / DRIBBLE IN

Throw ins will not take place. Instead, restarts will happen with either a pass-in or dribble-in from the sideline.

Opposing players should be 3m from the player kicking or dribbling the ball into play.

GOAL KICK

Goal kicks happen when the ball exits the end of the field, last touching the attacking team.

Goal kicks can be taken anywhere in the Goal Keeper area.

CORNER KICK

Corner kicks happen when the ball exits the end of the field, last touching the defending team.

Corner kicks should be treated similarly to when the ball goes out on the sidelines.

Corner kicks can be passed or dribbled into the field of play

PENALTY KICK

There is no penalty spot marked on the field for U8/9 competition.

Referees will need to walk out 5m from the goal for U8/9 and 9 yards out from the goal for U10/11.

FREE KICK

Free Kicks happen when a foul or handball takes place.

The opposing player must back up three (3) meters.

All free kicks are direct.

MODIFIED NSSL MATCH RULES

RETREAT LINE

The retreat line will come into affect when the GK has:

1. A Goal Kick
2. The ball in their hands.

During these moments the opposing team must back up to the retreat line.

The retreat line will be clearly marked by cones or poles.

The retreat line is set at the halfway line for U8/9 and 2/3rds for U10/11.

RESTARTS / STOPPAGES

All restarts should be done as quickly as possible.

After a goal is scored, restarts happen from the middle of the field

SUBSTITUTIONS

Substitutions are on the fly, no stoppage is required.

POWERPLAY RULE

If a team is winning by 4 or more goals, the trailing team is permitted to add an additional player onto the field.

GK AREA

The Goalkeeper Area is 10m x 5m for U8/9 and is 15m x 10m for U10/11.

Only Goalkeepers may only use their hands inside this area.



CONTACT INFORMATION



www.soccerns.ca



Dan Clark dan@soccerns.ca



Zach Bauld zach@soccerns.ca

