



## ***MERCY RULE*** ***2007-2008***

The South Jersey Soccer League has adopted mandatory sportsmanship guidelines to help avoid "running up the score" and to help control games involving teams of unequal skill or competitive levels. Pursuant to these guidelines, the league will enforce a **zero tolerance policy**.

Under no circumstances should the goal differential in a SJSL sanctioned game become 7 or more goals.

In order to minimize such unsportsmanship like behavior, in games where the coach allows the goal differential to become 7 or more goals at some point during the first half of play, for example, 7-0, 8-1, 9-2, etc., the game will be allowed to continue to first allow the coaches an opportunity to remedy the situation. If the second half starts with the goal differential being 7 or more goals, or if at any time during the second half of play the goal differential reaches 7 or more goals, the referee will immediately signal the end of the game and leave the field.

Whenever a game is terminated for a mercy rule violation, the referee is to be paid the complete game fee and he/she must report the game as a mercy rule termination on his/her report to the League. A resumption of the game is NOT permitted.

Early termination of a game for a mercy rule violation is a **sanctionable offense**. The "winning" coach will be required to attend a sportsmanship seminar conducted by the SJSL, and will be subject to fines and a suspension. See Rule 4.13. It is important for coaches, teams, and parents to understand that the league will not tolerate these types of violations.

The SJSL has developed the small-sided program in particular with the objective to have players enjoy the game and develop their skills. Extreme score differentials are not in keeping with this philosophy, regardless of the intent of the opposition. It is possible that there will be teams in the small-sided program that are scheduled against each other that are not competitively matched. It is the responsibility of both coaches, regardless of which end of the score you are on, to manage the remainder of the game within the rule. The critical concept here is communication. The League expects both coaches to collaborate in managing the game so that a potentially embarrassing and disheartening event can become as much of a positive experience as possible.

Coaches may wish to consider the following options for managing the game when it becomes obvious that the competition is unevenly matched so it does not reach the point where the Mercy Rule is applied:

- Restrict shooting to outside the penalty area
- Require players to shoot with their non-dominant foot
- Designate a player who normally does not score as an individual through which the ball must go
- "Quietly" remove one or two players. You may only go down to six players.

It is important to remember that these or similar actions should be taken well **BEFORE** the goal differential reaches 7. Please be reminded also that adding players to the field of play is not an acceptable solution. Please retain a copy of this document with your game day materials to clarify any confusion on the part of the referee or coaches in the application of the rule.