



Purpose

- Playing time is a developmental tool, not a reward for being the best player on the team.
- Players improve by playing the game
- At the same time, we recognize that a number of factors influence playing time, and this policy sets out how those factors are applied across our programs.

Grassroots Programs (U4-U12)

- All SFC players below U12 will receive the maximum playing time possible.
- Players in these programs shall receive equal playing time, to the best of the coach's ability, regardless of ability level.
- The priority at these ages is enjoyment, participation, and touches on the ball.
- Results do not factor into playing time decisions at this level.
- All Directors, Program Managers, and Coaches are responsible for ensuring this standard is followed.

Competitive Programs (U13-U18)

- A player's selection to a representative team indicates that the player has met the criteria to play at the level of that team.
- Once selected, every player on the roster is a member of the team and is expected to contribute on the field.

The 25-Minute Minimum Guideline

- All Suburban FC players from U12 and up in good standing will receive a minimum of twenty-five (25) minutes of playing time per game.
- This applies to all age groups, divisions, and levels within Suburban FC.

Note:

- The 25-minute minimum is a fixed number of minutes, not a percentage of the match.
- It does not increase as players get older and match durations get longer (for example from 50-minute 7v7 winter games, to 80-minute 11v11 summer games - the 25' doesn't change)
- In practical terms, this means younger players are guaranteed a larger share of each game, and as players develop and move into older age groups, the environment naturally becomes more competitive.
- We believe this is the right balance between guaranteed development and preparing players for the demands of the game as they progress.

Playing Time Beyond the Minimum

- How playing time is distributed above the 25-minute minimum depends on the level of the team:
 - B level (U12 to U18): Players are given equal, or as close to equal, playing time across the course of the season.
 - A, AA, and AAA level (U12 to U21): Playing time above the minimum is earned on a practice-to-practice and game-to-game basis, at the discretion of the coach.

- As a general rule, a player on an A, AA, or AAA team can expect to earn playing time above the minimum when:
 - The player adheres to the team's practice schedule and the team rules set out and communicated by Suburban FC and the coach;
 - The player's effort and dedication at practice meets the requirements of the team;
 - The player commits to their best effort within a game;
 - The player follows the coach's instructions within the team's system of play.

AAA / Academy Exception - Matches of Result Significance

- At the highest level (AAA), the 25-minute minimum is subject to the context of the match.
- In specific matches of result significance, the coach may use their discretion regarding the playing time given to each player, with the intention of providing the team with the best means of on-field success.
- Matches of result significance can entail:
 - Provincial Championship games;
 - National Championship games;
 - Tournament finals;
 - Qualification/seeding-impacting league games
- This exception does not apply to regular league play (noting context above), friendlies, or the group stages of tournaments.
- We believe that competing in these moments, whether from the start, from the bench, or in a supporting role, is part of developing the person as much as the player.
- Coaches are expected to communicate openly with players about their role ahead of these matches.

Factors That May Affect Playing Time

- The 25-minute minimum applies to players in good standing.
- The following factors may result in a player receiving less than the standard playing time in any match:
 1. Maximum substitution rules as set by the competition or tournament;
 2. Player behaviour, on and off the field;
 3. Injury or illness;
 4. Player work rate in games and at practice;
 5. Player attendance and commitment;
 6. Adherence to the SFC player code of conduct.
- Where a coach reduces a player's playing time for one of these reasons, the coach should be prepared to explain that decision to the player where appropriate.

A Note on How This Works in Practice

- This policy sets a standard, and our coaches are expected to meet it.
- The policy will not always be perfect, and we want to be honest with players and families about that.
- Coaches are managing a live game with a limited number of substitutions, players arriving late or leaving early, injuries, weather delays, red cards, and competition rules that change from one event to the next.
- A match may end early, substitution planned for the 60th minute may not happen if a player goes down injured, a tournament may only permit a set number of changes - none

of these are excuses for ignoring the policy, but they are realities of the game, and on a given day the minutes may not work out exactly as intended.

- For that reason, playing time should be judged across a block of games and across the season, not by a single match in isolation.
 - A player who falls short of 25 minutes in one game because of circumstances should see that balanced out in the games that follow.
 - Coaches are expected to track playing time and to make that correction.
 - Families are asked to extend the same good faith to coaches that we ask coaches to extend to players.
- What we can promise is that our coaches are aware of this policy, are expected to plan their substitutions with it in mind, and will be held to it by the club.

Raising a Concern

- If a parent or guardian believes their child is not receiving playing time in line with this policy, we ask that they follow these steps:
 1. Allow at least 24 hours to pass after the match before raising the matter (as per policy) Conversations at the field on game day are rarely productive for anyone.
 2. Discuss the concern directly with the coach. In most cases this is enough to resolve the issue or to understand the reason behind it.
 3. If the concern is not effectively addressed, contact the appropriate Suburban FC program manager / technical lead in writing - this will then be reviewed with the coach and responded to.
- Concerns raised in good faith will always be taken seriously.
- Playing time decisions made in accordance with the factors listed in this policy are the coach's to make, and the club will support coaches who apply the policy fairly and communicate clearly.