

ENGLISH SUBBUTEO ASSOCIATION

# Subbuteo

OLD SCHOOL

PLAYING RULES



Subbuteo Playing Rules  
for Old School Tournaments  
Based on the 1974 Subbuteo Handbook  
Edited by Simon Goodman  
Updated for 2024/2025



# GENERAL RULES OF PLAY

The general rules of play are basically the same as those for Association Football, with some necessary additions to govern their application to Subbuteo Table Soccer.

## THE LINE-UP

Place the rod of the goalkeeper underneath the bottom of the goal net so that the goalkeeper can be manipulated from behind the goal. If there is a back bar on the goal the goalkeeper can be placed under or over it as desired, assuming that the net fixing allows this.

## FLICKING

The playing figures are propelled in the following manner:

- (1) Place the first or second finger of the right or left hand immediately behind the figure, with the tip of the finger-nail just touching the pitch. Using the pitch surface slightly as a 'spring' gently flick the figure against the ball.
- (2) DO NOT use the thumb as a 'spring', the thumb does not enter into propulsion.

The figures must be flicked cleanly as described, with the nail part of the finger, and NOT knocked, scraped, or pushed. A free kick should be awarded against any breach of this rule. This includes touching any other figure whilst in the action of flicking or not cleanly flicking the base of the figure. An accidental touch of a figure from either team can be replaced and play can then continue – it is only if the touch is made during the action of flicking that a free kick for a finger foul is appropriate. Also if the attacker is not in the action of flicking (which means that the flick must actually be in motion) and obstructs a block flick this is a back for the defender, not the attacker. It is not ok to obstruct the defender by placing your finger and waiting for the block to hit it.

## GOALKEEPING

The standard Goalkeeper is on a player rod so designed that the goalkeeper is limited in action to the goal area. Where it is desired that the goalkeeper takes a goal kick, free standing 'spare' goalkeepers are available for this purpose. This goalkeeper can be brought into play to take the kick and then be removed from play. Whilst the kick is being taken the goalkeeper on the rod is out of play and should be withdrawn into the back of the net, coming back into play after the kick is taken and the kicking goalkeeper removed.

## THE KICK-OFF

As in real football, a coin is tossed for ends and the losing team kicks off.

## EXTRA TIME and SHOTS.

In competition play if the score is level at the final whistle, extra time periods of five minutes each way may be played. If still level after extra time the following formula is recommended. Each side to be allowed FIVE consecutive shots at goal, as for penalties but taken from the following positions along the SHOOTING AREA LINE.

- (1) Where the shooting area line joins the touchline on left of pitch;
- (2) Opposite the penalty area line on the left;
- (3) Opposite the penalty spot, centre of shooting area line;
- (4) Opposite the penalty area line on the right;
- (5) Where the shooting area line joins the touchline on right side of pitch.

In each case the ball should be placed in a shootable position (ie completely within the shooting area, just inside the shooting area line). A coin should be tossed and the winner can decide to shoot or keep first. The goal shots should be controlled by the referee, as with penalties, and all figures other than goalkeeper should be withdrawn from the shooting area. The goalkeeper is not confined to the goal-line. If scores are still level after shots then sudden-death shots from the third position should be taken until a winner is found.

## TEAM EVENTS

For matches in team events each team captain should write their team order down and provide it to the competition organiser prior to kick-off. Matches will be 1 v 1, 2 v 2 etc based on the team orders provided. Where the allowed squad is larger than the number of games being played in a session, substitutions can be made at half-time only, with the maximum possible number being allowed (but without being able to move a player from one match to another). For example, for a match involving three games but with a squad of five players, up to two substitutions could be made at half-time.

In team events if there is a tie in a knock-out match after goal difference and goals scored are taken into account across all matches then shots should proceed for all matches as described above. All players should complete all five shots and the aggregate score will determine the winner. If it is still tied then the aggregate of sudden-death shots as described above should be used to determine the winning team, as many rounds as are needed to provide a winner.

## SPORTSMANSHIP

In all sports and games there must be honour between competitors, at all levels. The losing side has the right to declare the length of time that shall be taken for the replacing of the figures for a goal kick. When 'free flicks' take place the defending side should be the last to move a figure. Players should mutually agree as to procedure when in doubt over any matter relative to the game. If a third person is acting as referee his decision should be accepted as final without dispute.

## **THE REFEREE'S DECISION IS ALWAYS FINAL.**

# ADVANCED PLAYING RULES

## **POSITIONING**

Tactical positioning (by placing for goal kicks) shall be governed by the rules that the figures shall be placed at least one inch (2.5 cm) apart. Also at a goal kick figures may be placed anywhere except that they must NOT be positioned within the opposing SHOOTING AREA.

At a goal kick or free kick no more than three defending figures may be placed in the penalty area with the exception of forming a barrier for a free kick (see Rule 5(l) below).

### **Rule 1. THE KICK OFF**

- (a) The centre-forward kicks off forward over the half-way line, after which he may not touch the ball until it has been played by another figure of his side.
- (b) The side in possession shall be deemed the attacking side. No single figure may play the ball more than three times in succession, unless it rebounds off another figure of the same side.
- (c) A side may continue to play the ball until their figure misses the ball or it touches an opposing figure.
- (d) Each side must have at least three figures within 3.5 inches (9cm) of the half-way line and the defending side shall have no figures inside the centre circle.

### **Rule 2. THE BALL OUT OF PLAY OR FIGURE LEAVING THE FIELD OF PLAY**

When the ball passes completely over the touch-line a 'throw-in' must be taken from the spot where the ball left the field. The ball is flicked into play. The figure may only flick once and must not travel over the touchline, otherwise it is a 'foul throw' and will be penalised by the award of a throw-in to the opposing side..

The throw-in is made by a figure opposite to that side which touched the ball last before it travelled over the line. 'Forcing' a throw in off an opponent can only be made subject to the following conditions:—

- (a) The ball and players concerned must be in the same quarter of the field and the ball must leave the field within the limits of that quarter.
- (b) A shot at goal is made and the ball rebounds off the goalkeeper (or handle) and goes into touch.
- (c) Figures outside the touch-line, but not off the baize cloth, may be forced off (as long as the ball hits the figure before it goes out of play).
- (d) After a figure has taken a throw in, it shall be placed exactly on the touch-line and within an inch of where the throw in was taken.
- (e) A player may (after being flicked) leave the field of play (i.e. cross the line) and return again on to the pitch proper (i.e. a swerve) without penalty provided it does not leave the green baize or touch the fence surround. If the latter occurs, it should be placed on the touch-line at the spot it first crossed the line.
- (f) A figure flicked successfully at the ball but then travelling over the touch-line may be placed on the touch-line at the point of departure and then be used to flick immediately.
- (g) A figure travelling into goal.
  - (1) If an attacker, the figure shall be placed just outside either goal-post on the goal line.
  - (2) If a defender, the figure shall be placed anywhere within the goalkeeper's box.

In the real game, under normal circumstances, it would be almost impossible for a full-back clearing from his own penalty area to kick the ball on to an opponent and gain a corner at the other end of the field. It would, however, be reasonably simple to do so in Subbuteo Table Soccer. It is, therefore, the rule that before gaining a corner, goal-kick or throw in off an opponent the ball must be forced off an opponent within the limits of the quarter it was originally in. In the case of a throw in both figures must be in the quarter to start with; with corners the figure forced off and the ball must be in the same quarter, the forcing figure in the same half.

### **Rule 3. GOAL SCORING**

- (a) Before a shot may be taken at goal, the ball must be (entirely) in the Shooting Area, but the figure making the shot need only be in its opponent's half. No shot taken with the ball outside the area can score, no matter what figures the ball touches en route to the goal. No corners, or alternatively goal-kicks, can be attained in this manner. Similarly, if a ball does go into the net in this fashion a goal-kick is awarded. (Rules 3(f) and 5(e) are exceptions to this rule).
- (b) The ball must be entirely over the goal-line to score.
- (c) The figure MUST be flicked in the correct manner, not pushed, scraped or knocked.
- (d) As in real football, the ball may be hit whilst rolling.
- (e) Attacking players do not have to wait for a goalkeeper to be ready. Likewise, they do not have to wait for the defender's blocking flicks.
- (f) The ball passed back into one's own goal from any part of the field—is a goal, or, if travelling over the dead ball line, a corner.
- (g) The goalkeeper that drags a stationary ball into his own goal concedes a goal.

### **Rule 4. OFFSIDE.**

- (a) At least one defender, other than the goalkeeper, must be in the defending area before 'offside' can be claimed.
- (b) Any attacking figure nearer to the dead ball line than the defence, other than the goal keeper (or other figure), is in an offside position.
- (c) If the ball is flicked past the last defender, whether or not it is passed directly to the attacking figure, that figure is offside.
- (d) A figure in an offside position may be flicked onside at any time by a player asking permission providing the player asking is in possession of the ball. A figure flicked onside should not touch an opposing figure and may not be used until another of that side has been flicked and when flicked should be aimed to travel generally speaking parallel with the touch-line and not more than six inches 'onside'. Non-compliant onside flicks should be ordered to be re-taken by the referee.
- (e) A figure in an offside position (as 4(b)) is not actually offside until the ball is passed through, but if from this position he attempts (is flicked) to play the ball he is immediately penalised unless this figure has just played the ball on the player's previous flick or the ball has just hit that figure from a throw-in or corner taken by the player in possession (or as is 4(h) below).
- (f) When a 'goal' is scored by a figure from an offside position, and a goal is signalled by the referee before noticing that the figure was offside, unless the situation is apparent at this time enabling the referee to give a sound decision—the decision of a goal should stand. If the game is competitive and has a linesman, the referee may consult him but the referee's decision is final whatever the outcome of this consultation. Any claim to a figure being offside by the defence must be made immediately after the ball enters the net, and before the field has been re-arranged for the kick-off.
- (g) If, through the play of his opponents, a figure in an 'offside position' is 'left with the ball', this has the effect of playing him onside and he may continue in the normal manner.

- (h) If a ball is passed through to a player in an offside position and touches an opponent before ultimately touching him, he is 'played on' and may continue.
- (i) For each 'onside flick' taken by the attack, the defence may have an extra blocking flick for marking purposes.
- (j) No figure outside the shooting area can be adjudged offside.
- (k) No figure can be offside from the taking of a goal-kick, corner-kick or throw-in.
- (l) No figure can be offside unless it is nearer to its opponent's goal line than the ball when the ball is played.

#### **Rule 5. FOUL PLAY.**

- (a) It is a foul if the attacking figure hits the defending figure without having first touched the ball. A free kick or penalty is awarded accordingly. The player to whom the award is made can accept the free kick or indicate 'play on', whichever is to his advantage. A goalkeeper is a special case, see Rule 10(i).
- (b) A figure hitting a goal upright, corner flag or surround and rebounding on to the field and hitting an opposing player does not commit a foul, play continues.
- (c) A figure over the touch-line but not off the baize can be fouled.
- (d) A player laying down CANNOT be fouled and if the ball touches such a player he should be penalised for HANDBALL. Within the penalty area — a penalty. With regard to handball, a referee should give a player reasonable time to stand a player upright.
- (e) If the player's hand prevents the ball going into the net through negligence or accident, a penalty should be given. If in the opinion of the referee it is done deliberately, a goal should be awarded. Should a player pick up the ball whilst play is continuing, a free kick should be awarded — if in the penalty area — a penalty. If the ball hits a player's hand accidentally when he is in possession — possession goes to the other side or a corner, throw in etc. is given away.
- (f) If a defending player obstructs his opponent round the table, a direct free kick should be given from the position of the ball at the time. (Two warnings should precede action).
- (g) If the goalkeeper touches the ball outside his 'box' whilst on the handle whether in possession or not it is a penalty. (One warning should be given).
- (h) A player shall not put both hands on the table at the same time, in a manner that may interfere with play, though he may hold the goalkeeper whilst flicking. Indirect free kick. (One warning).
- (i) A figure being flicked four times in succession. Indirect free kick.
- (j) Offside — indirect free kick.
- (k) Handball (as 5 (d)).
- (l) When a direct free kick is taken inside the shooting area, the defending side may place up to four figures (by hand) as a "barrier" in defence. Subject to Rule 7(d) (3.5" clearance).

#### **Rule 6. DEFENCE.**

The side not in possession (the defence) may have alternate flicks to the attack's positive flicks for defence purposes, but when taking these flicks they must not touch the ball or any of the attacking figures, should they do so, the attack may appeal "Back" and have figure and ball restored to their former positions. On resuming, the defence forego the block flick that was replaced in penalty — ie the one that was replaced and not the next block flick. If either the ball or attacking figure was touched whilst it was moving, the attacking player may replay the move. If he does so, the defending player may not have a block flick for the replayed move — ie they forego the first block flick when the attacker restarts the move. Should a mix up occur, which in the referee's opinion is blameless to either side, he can restore both figures and ball to their former positions and then order a restart to play from that point.

If play is interrupted for any reason, for example to stand up a figure, replace the figure that took a throw in, remove a spare keeper, take an onside flick, repair a figure, check on possession etc any outstanding block flick should be taken before play resumes.

#### **Rule 7. GENERAL RULES FOR SET PIECES** (Corner kick, free kick, penalty kick and throw in)

- (a) The figure taking the award shall *be picked up first and* placed where kick or throw in is to be taken. The attacking side then take their flicks for positioning—three for a corner, two for a free kick and one for a throw in, the defence then do likewise to mark up etc.
- (b) A figure taking any of the above awards may not play the ball immediately afterwards until another figure has been flicked at the ball.
- (c) Offside in relation to the above awards. See rule 4 (k).
- (d) No figure may approach within 3.5" (9cm) on these occasions.
- (e) A goal can be scored direct from a corner. A shot deflected from the goalkeeper or it's rod into the net is a goal.
- (f) Direct free kicks must not be taken until signalled by the referee.
- (g) Forcing of the above off opponents. (See rule 2.)
- (h) Clarification—Movement of players on these occasions. Goal-kick by picking up the figures and placing. Three FLICKS for a corner, two FLICKS for a free kick and one FLICK for a throw-in.

#### **Rule 8. INTERCEPTION**

- (a) The last figure to intercept (touch) the ball is ruled to be in possession.
- (b) If a goalkeeper saves a shot possession goes to the goalkeeper's side. A save by the goalkeeper does not concede a block flick, only the movement of a previously stationary ball by the goalkeeper concedes a block flick.
- (c) Where two figures contact the ball at the same time, the last side to play the ball assumes possession and it is their flick, but when played, unless they can hit the ball to touch one of their own side, possession goes to their opponents.
- (d) If a figure is flicked at the ball, does not connect, but causes another of the same side to connect with it (providing no other infringements occur), contact has successfully been made.
- (e) Any figure moved extraneously (such as a figure rebounding off the fence or being moved aside legally to allow another figure to be played), should be replaced to its correct position, and the opposing side may demand this if they consider the matter vital.

#### **Rule 9. INJURIES.**

Should a figure suffer damage or fall apart during a game, it may be taken off and repaired. The referee should note any 'injury time' and allow accordingly. If the same figure is 'injured' again, it must be withdrawn from the game. Substitution for injured or ineffective players should be agreed by the players BEFORE the match and in accordance with current F.A. rules on substitutes. Goalkeepers are not subject to this rule and may be replaced at any time. (This rule may be altered in Official Tournaments & figures replaced when broken).

#### **Rule 10. PENALTIES AND GOALKEEPERS**

- (a) When a penalty is taken a goalkeeper is to be on his goal-line touching the cloth and stationary until the ball is actually played. (If this rule is infringed three times a goal should be awarded.) Figures of both sides that were within the penalty area, apart from the penalty taker, must be withdrawn outside the area and 'D' and behind the penalty kicker.

- (b) When a penalty is awarded, a player shall keep his hands off the table until the referee gives the order "Play on!" The penalty is then taken.
- (c) When a figure is flicked at the ball when taking a penalty, providing the defending side has not infringed, the shot is ruled as taken—even if the ball is missed.
- (d) A goalkeeper must always be ready during play. No hindrance to a shooting figure is allowed. If the player tries to adjust his goalkeeper and the ball hits his hand—a penalty is awarded.
- (e) A goalkeeper on the handle must not touch the ball out-side their own 'box' in any circumstances (see 5(g)).
- (f) The goalkeeper may be taken off the playing handle, or be substituted with a 'Spare Goalkeeper' without handle for taking goal kicks or advancing outside his area to clear the ball up field. He may only be used in this capacity when the ball is in his side's possession. Once on the field of play he becomes an ordinary figure and prone to the same rules. If, during an attempt to clear in this fashion, he misses (or loses possession of) the ball, he cannot be re-instated into goal until the opposing side has had up to three flicks (assuming they keep possession in the normal way). During this time, of course, the attack may shoot into an empty net. They must, however, on completion of the three flicks, wait for the goalkeeper to be re-instated in goal before proceeding further.
- (g) A spare goalkeeper on the field of play and out of possession of the ball may be used for defensive flicks in the normal way. Whatever capacity a spare goalkeeper is on the field of play, as soon as he has completed his task, he should be withdrawn and the goalkeeper proper put back in goal.
- (h) When a spare goalkeeper is on the field, the proper one should be taken out or pushed well back into the back of the goal. If a spare goalkeeper is on the field and a shot is saved by the goalkeeper on the rod — a goal should be awarded.
- (i) A referee will not normally give a foul when a goalkeeper is "fouled" but the defence may appeal on such occasions and if the referee feels the defence are being vitally threatened or penalised in such a situation he may award a free kick or, alternatively, wave play on.
- (j) The goalkeeper must not be waved rapidly 'to and fro', neither may he be pushed or knocked outside his box—'Billiards style'—with the handle.
- (k) The goalkeeper and his handle are as one. The handle can deflect a shot into the net or save it, as part of the goalkeeper, or give away a corner etc.

### Rule 11. THE GOAL-KICK

A goal-kick is given in circumstances similar to that under F.A. rules subject to:—

- (a) A goal-kick may only be forced when both figures and ball are in the defensive area and the ball goes over the dead ball line inside that area. It may be forced off a figure that is off the field (as Rule 2(d)).
- (b) The player taking the goal-kick may pick up his figures and place them wherever he wishes, except in the opposing area and in his own goalkeeper's box. Three figures must be placed within 3.5" (9cm) of the half-way line if a side is concentrated in their own half. Either an outfield playing figure or the spare Goalkeeper may be used to take goal kicks. As in real football these are taken from the side where the ball went out of play.
- (c) When taken, the ball must pass outside the defending penalty area and not touch any figure inside the penalty area whilst doing so, or the goal-kick must be re-taken.
- (d) Should a defence be unusually slow in 'marking up', the referee may give permission for the kick to be taken forthwith. Conversely, the referee may also hold up briefly the taking of a kick to enable the defence to re-arrange.
- (e) Spacing of players should be at least 1" apart for placing or marking with the exception of a direct free-kick within the shooting area, whereby the defence may form a defensive 'wall' of not more than four players, which may be closer than 1" but not touching.

### Rule 12. CORNER KICK.

A corner kick is given in circumstances similar to F.A. rules subject to: —

- (a) A corner kick cannot be forced unless the ball and defending figure are both inside the defending area. The attacker figure concerned must be in his opponent's half. The defending figure may be off the field of play (see Rule 2(d)).  
*Note:* Similarly, a figure in its own defending area forcing a goal kick off an opponent must be in that area when achieving this (as also must be his opponent and the ball).
- (b) A goal may be scored direct from a corner.

### Rule 13. REFEREES

- (a) In all competitive games a referee should be in control. In Friendlies it is desirable.
- (b) If possible, a referee should appoint a linesman. The linesman may indicate a point but shall not voice an opinion until asked to do so by the referee.
- (c) The referee shall enforce the laws but should refrain from penalising where he believes the infringing side may gain advantage.
- (d) Competitors have the right to appeal for or against a decision but not to haggle.
- (e) *Time Wasting* — If the referee is of the opinion that a competitor is wasting time deliberately, however this is accomplished, even within the normal laws of the game, he should award an indirect kick to the opposing side.

**THE REFEREE'S DECISION IS ALWAYS FINAL.**

## EQUIPMENT GUIDELINES

### PLAYING FIGURES

The general intention is that the figures used to play to these rules should be of a style that is pre-1994 – ie that they should not be played to with modern 'flat-based' figures like the Subbuteo/Hasbro Monoblock figures, Parodi figures or later flat-based figures. In saying this post-1994 'retro' figures made in the style of pre-1994 figures should be accepted – eg Santiago (but not 'Spitfire'), Top Spin, La Leggenda, Zeugo HWs (but not Flat Base), Pendle Falcon, Nuovo Falco, Replay or similar. This also means that pre-1994 non-Subbuteo figures should be allowed, eg Newfooty, Swiss (SSTV) flats, ETSAs flats etc.

It is acceptable to mix a flat keeper with an OO team or vice-versa.

In case of any doubt the tournament director will make a judgement on what is allowed or preferably state any specific requirements in the tournament advertising.

### THE BALL

The 1" (25mm) or 7/8" (22mm) ball may be used but the default ball is the 1" ball unless both players agree to use the 7/8" one. In selecting the ball in case of the players not agreeing the referee should choose the ball which rolls best or is most clearly visible – there is no preference as to colour or type.

# IT'S COMING HOME



We are excited to announce the launch of a new fortnightly Subbuteo club in Tunbridge Wells, Langton Green Subbuteo Club.

This welcoming and inclusive club is open to everyone—whether you're a complete beginner or a seasoned player.

For more information,  
please contact Alan Lee at:  
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