



September 9, 2026

NFHS Field Hockey Weekly Rule Interpretations

Rule References: 4-4-3, 4-4-7, 10-3-1

Substitution During a Penalty Corner

Purpose

The purpose of this interpretation is to explain the substitution restriction that applies once a penalty corner has been awarded. A penalty corner is a special restart with strict positioning and timing requirements. Once the penalty corner is awarded, teams may not use substitutions to gain a tactical advantage, correct a matchup or return a player early before the penalty corner has been completed. In simple terms, once the penalty corner is awarded, the players who are eligible and properly positioned must remain the players involved until the penalty corner is over, with only limited goalkeeper-related exceptions.

Rule Language

No substitute may enter the game from the time a penalty corner is awarded until the penalty corner has been completed. A suspended player whose suspension time expires during the penalty corner may not re-enter until the penalty corner is completed. The exception is the replacement of an ill, injured, suspended or disqualified defending goalkeeper with a properly equipped substitute goalkeeper. (4-4-3, 4-4-7, 10-3-1)

Interpretation

This rule prevents confusion and protects fairness during a high-pressure scoring opportunity. If substitutions were allowed during a penalty corner, one team could delay the restart, change personnel after seeing the opponent's setup or alter the number of players involved in the play. The rule keeps the situation stable: once the penalty corner is awarded, no player enters until the penalty corner has ended. This includes a player whose suspension time expires. Even though the time has expired, the player still must wait because the penalty corner is already in progress for substitution purposes.

Game Scenario

Team A is awarded a penalty corner. Before the ball is inserted, Team B's coach sends a substitute to the table to replace a field player. **RULING:** The substitution is not allowed. **COMMENT:** The penalty corner has already been awarded, so the substitution window is closed until the penalty corner has been completed.

In another situation, B3 is serving a suspension. The suspension time expires after the penalty corner has been awarded but before the penalty corner is completed. B3 attempts to re-enter. **RULING:** B3 may not re-enter until the penalty corner is completed. **COMMENT:** The expiration of the suspension time does not override the penalty-corner substitution restriction.

Points of Emphasis for Officials and Coaches

Officials should be ready to prevent improper substitutions as soon as a penalty corner is awarded. Communication with the table, coaches and players is important. Coaches should not send substitutes during a penalty corner unless the situation involves the permitted replacement of a defending goalkeeper. Players returning from suspension should be instructed to wait until the penalty corner has been completed before entering. A simple way to teach the rule is: once the penalty corner is awarded, no one comes in until the penalty corner is over, except for the specific goalkeeper replacement situation allowed by rule.