



## MEMORANDUM

To: Referees Officiating in the Professional Leagues

From: Alfred Kleinaitis  
Manager of Referee Development and Education

Re: **Substitution Requirements in Professional Games (MLS 3 + 1)**

Date: May 1, 2003

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As a result of some confusion regarding the 3+1 substitution rule in a recent MLS game, USSF is providing this memorandum to clarify the issue of substitutions after a goalkeeper or a field player has been sent off or has been injured and must be replaced.

It is permissible under the Laws of the Game for the goalkeeper and a fieldplayer to change places, provided it is done in accordance with the requirements of Law 3:

- the referee is informed before the change is made and
- the change is made only at a stoppage in the match.

Delay or time wasting during the exchange process is not acceptable. The game will not be held up to allow for a change of equipment by either player. The former goalkeeper, if not in proper field uniform (jersey or shirt, shorts, socks) must leave the field to correct his equipment. During that interim period, his team must play short, just as when a player leaves the field for treatment of bleeding. When the player is ready to re-enter the game, the fourth official will check the player's uniform and equipment to ensure that they comply with Law 4. The player is permitted to return to the field either at a stoppage or during play, with the permission of the referee. The specific procedures for performing these tasks must be discussed by the officials in their pre-game meeting.

The following guidelines and examples are intended to help referees prevent confusion in dealing with substitutions after a goalkeeper or a field player has been sent off or has been injured and must be replaced. All are applicable to MLS matches.

- If 3 substitutes have entered the game to replace field players, the remaining substitute can only be a substitute at the goalkeeper position.
- A goalkeeper substitution has occurred if the substitute entering the field is wearing an identifiable goalkeeper jersey and is wearing goalkeeper equipment. A goalkeeper substitute can only replace the goalkeeper. If a goalkeeper has been sent from the field and shown the red card, a goalkeeper substitute can become the goalkeeper but a field player must be removed.

- Regardless of how a substitute might be listed on the roster or designated, he will be considered a goalkeeper substitute if he replaces a goalkeeper.
- If a field player changes places with the goalkeeper, that is not counted as a goalkeeper substitution. No delay or time wasting is permitted during the exchange process. Each player must be properly equipped for the position that player is assuming.
- If a player already on the field of play replaces a goalkeeper who has been sent off, that is not counted as a goalkeeper substitution.
- Any number of permissible substitutions/exchanges at the goalkeeper position may be made.

Example A:

After all field player substitutions have been used, a field player is injured and becomes unable to play. However, the team still has a goalkeeper substitution remaining. In this case, the team may elect to have the current goalkeeper and the injured field player change places (an on-field replacement) and then to send in the remaining goalkeeper substitute to replace the injured goalkeeper. At a subsequent stoppage, of course, the new goalkeeper can change places with a teammate on the field (for example, the former goalkeeper). All these substitutions and on-field exchanges must have the permission of the referee.

Example B:

The goalkeeper has been sent off and his team must play short. Because Law 3 requires that a team have a goalkeeper, the coach decides to have a field player become the goalkeeper. That does not count as a goalkeeper substitution. The team retains the option of replacing the new goalkeeper later with a designated goalkeeper substitute. Until then, the team still has all remaining unused substitutions.

Example C:

The goalkeeper has been injured and must be replaced. The coach decides to move a field player into the goal. He replaces the field player with one of the substitutes. That does not count as a goalkeeper substitution, but does reduce the number of available substitutions by one.

Example D

The goalkeeper has been injured but is expected to be able to return to the field after treatment. The coach moves a field player to the goalkeeper position and plays short for a time. When the injured goalkeeper is able to return to play, the coach has two options. First, the former goalkeeper can return during play as a field player and then change places with the current goalkeeper at a stoppage. Second, the injured goalkeeper can return to the field at a stoppage and change places with the current goalkeeper. In either case, both the return and the exchange must receive the permission of the referee and no substitutions are charged against the team's limit.