

Referee Article

ADVICE TO REFEREES - ABUSIVE COACHES AND PARENTS

By Charlie Dyson, Referee, Coach, Spectator and Administrator

By far, most coaches, parents and other spectators at youth soccer games are ladies and gentlemen who would never think of abusing players on their child's team, opponents, game officials or referees. However, as in every walk of life, there are a few bullies who see the game as an opportunity to vent their pent-up anger and hatred with no regard for the damage to all concerned. They shout insulting remarks at referees, players, coaches and other spectators using vulgarity that would be out of line even in the roughest environment not to mention a game where children are learning sportsmanship.

Referees must understand there is nothing they can or should try to do directly with the abusive spectator. There is no line of authority from the referee to the spectator. Trying to get his respect for the game would be like telling a raging bull to be nice. Any remark or gesture to get the spectator to cooperate will most likely cause more rage directed immediately at the referee and often results in assault and battery with no consideration for age or size of the referee. Remember that this person is out of control of his own faculties. But, if left unattended, the situation always gets worse and detracts from the enjoyment of the game for all.

Don't despair. There is a line of authority if the referee will use it. The rules of Illinois Youth Soccer Association in which all competitive youth soccer in Illinois is played make the coach responsible for his own actions as well as those of his players and spectators who reasonably appear to be associated with his team. At first sign of trouble with a spectator, the referee should tell the coach to control the spectator or the game will be terminated. If he/she says the spectator is not with his team, tell both coaches together that they must sort out who is responsible for the spectator and control him/her. Explain that control means he is quiet and remains in the area where the other spectators for that team are sitting or standing or he leaves the field area (out of sound and sight). Tell the coach that unless the spectator is controlled, the game will be terminated. If the necessary control is not forthcoming, the referee must terminate the game and the referee team must leave the area or be prepared to suffer the consequences.

Many referees hate to terminate a game because it means the players can't finish the game. Remember, it is not the referee's fault. By stopping one game, peer pressure might be enough to cure the problem for the future. The coach, parents and players faced with having every game terminated, will take steps to control the situation. The coach has tools at hand to stop the interference like turning off a light switch, if he wants to. He can contact the League or Illinois State Referee Committee for counseling if needed. How many spectators have you seen at games where a son, daughter or other relative is not playing.

By the way, the same goes for out-of-control coaches. Send him off!