

Caution: Youth Referees In Training

Coaches and parents should note that the youth referees that you see on the field are in training. Some might be ref'ing their first games while others may be in their 2nd or 3rd year. Even if they are 'experienced', they still have much to learn. This learning process takes many games (50-200) and many types of games before a referee has enough experience to deal with issues appropriately. And that's just for the average new ref. For our youth refs, it's doubly hard as they have to learn how to be responsible for the players on the field that are younger than they but also the parents and coaches who are much older and in theory much wiser.

And this is where our coaches and parents can help. As adults, you understand the years of practice and positive reinforcement it took to get your child to where they are today as a soccer player. And you should appreciate what's going to get them to the point where they can be self-sufficient. It takes training, care, nurturing, a little hard enforcement of rules but overall, a positive environment to learn and grow. So as parents, we hope that you would treat our youth referees in much the same way you would treat your child or your next-door neighbor's child. As a parent, you have already learned a lot from life's challenges and are using that wisdom, to teach your own children life's little lessons. But could you do that for a youth referee? Do you have 200 games worth of experience to offer the youth referee when watching from the side of the field?

Let us help by offering the typical growth path for a youth referee (and our adult referees as well).

- 1) Go to 20 hours of class, take a test, get a passing grade and then register to be a referee.
- 2) Learn all of the rules variations of games for the different youth ages of the local association
- 3) Most start as an assistant referee to get some real game experience. After a while, they get a chance to center their first game.
- 4) For their first games, most don't blow the whistle as they think they'll blow the call and look stupid.
- 5) Once they gain a little confidence, many blow the whistle for everything that looks like a foul - even the trifling stuff and possibly because the spectators pushed you to
- 6) Then figure out what Asst Refs are for - after ignoring them for 1-2 months
- 7) The HS age refs often begin to call the game like they are playing their own game - loose as compared to what is need for a younger player. (the U9 player can't take the same challenge as a U15)
- 8) Quit. As a youth ref in training, they will have made a number of mistakes to get this far. Instead of encouraging them to continue, many are complaining and screaming at them. For the youth ref, this often becomes the point where they ask themselves - Is it worth it? Or should thy go play video games or walk the mall.
- 9) Develop a thick skin to ignore coaches and parents - which leads to
- 10) Either 'shutting down' and not paying attention to the actions on the field or stepping up to the challenge and trying to take control (sometimes a little too much)
- 11) Learn how to move all over the field
- 12) Learn how to give feedback to the Asst Refs
- 13) Learn how to shift the game calling from tight to loose
- 14) Lean when to apply advantage
- 15) Learn how to get to the right place before the ball gets there (i.e. read the play)
- 16) Work club/select games
- 17) Work some nasty games (actually, most of your youth refs get their first nasty game when doing U9 or U10's - because of the loud complaints by parents or refs)
- 17) Finally actual call advantage in your first game
- 18) Learn when to talk to the players
- 19) Finally learning when not to talk to the players as it offers them a chance to complain - thus getting a card for dissent - i.e. don't bait them
- 20) Learn to watch behind the play to catch late tackles, hits, punches etc

The key here is that it takes a lot of games to learn all of the tools needed to officiate at all levels of the game. Some of the refs bring maturity and personal game playing experience that enable them to move a little quicker through the levels than others. Some will never make it past middle levels (including many adults). By the time they move through the upper levels, they get pulled to do the older games. This leaves our youth parents to be constantly exposed to our Youth Refs - In Training. (There just aren't enough refs to go around)

But let's offer some food for thought:

- a) Refs take tests. With a passing grade of 75 - that implies that for many they will make 1 out of 4 calls wrong. It might take them 2 years before they get the recertification grade up to a 90+ and their foul recognition and proper response as well.
- b) Refs will call the perfect game - when all the players are able to score on every shot they take. People make mistakes. If coaches and parents encourage their players to try again, then shouldn't they allow the youth ref some latitude as well?
- c) As an adult, you have experienced the pressure of dealing with people who are more knowledgeable than you in work or other scenarios. Can you imagine what it's like for a youth who is trying to control a game?
- d) You wouldn't accept whining, back-talk, foul mouth from your own children, why should a young ref have to listen to it from an adult? Since they aren't adults, they don't know the best way to deal with a kid that's whining to them - much less an adult.

Let's face it, they're kids and they're learning. Let's encourage and teach - not whine and complain.

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Player: 1968 to current (Currently playing on 4 mens teams)

Coaching: Asst coach as a high school student for 4 years and then as a parent for the past 6.

Ages coached: U5-U15. Lics:E

Referee: 6 years USSF - Grade 8, 4 years NFHS

Parent: 3 sons all playing soccer and/or ref'ing U9-U15

Soccer Association: Grapevine Southlake Soccer Association / North Texas