

# Referee Abuse

How to prepare for and handle referee (Center, Linesman, and 4<sup>th</sup> official) abuse  
By benches, coaches, and spectators

## A. Basics

1. The referee team (whether 3 or 4 members) must operate as a unit, always being aware of the other members and supporting them appropriately.
2. The center referee is the team leader, responsible, in addition to all else, for protecting the Linesmen and the 4th official.
3. All must be especially aware that young Linesmen are more often targeted for abuse, ridicule, and intimidation, usually by "fans" (and sometimes coaches) who are not as well-versed as the "badged" (registered) Linesmen on the Laws of the Game and their judicious application. Apparently, such fans usually think that because they are older or bigger than the young referees (center and Linesmen) that they must have more intelligence and wisdom, and thus, should be able to dictate the way the refereeing is done.

Of course, in addition to lack of knowledge and understanding of the game and its laws, such fans are often egotistical, obnoxious, and grossly prejudiced in favor of "their" team. Such displays and distractions usually incite the players also, to the detriment of the match and all of the players. And we must remember that the game is for the players, not the coaches, referees, or fans!

The referee team thus does a disservice to all if they allow unsporting, boorish, ignorant, and sometimes even violent words or actions to be inflicted upon any member of the referee team or either player team. Handle it quickly, smoothly, and decisively, but without making it personal.

Next, make a full report to the YSRA, the League President, League Assignor, and the IYSA. The report must be phoned in the day of the match, and followed by a written report, using standard USSF, IYSA, and/or League forms within 48 hours or less.

## B. Mechanics

1. "Centers" must make constant repetitive eye contact with Linesman. Do not ball watch (sometimes called spectating). Rather, be aware of the entire game and its tensions as they build.
2. Linesman must reflect each other's signals in all instances where it will assist in communicating information to the referee in a timely manner, that is, before it is too late for him to lose it.
3. (a) If the Linesman has to report some problem to the "Center", including problems with unruly fans, the signal should be flag straight up, with the other arm bent at the elbow, with clenched fist held on the opposite chest. The referee will backpedal over and ask the Linesman what information they have.  
  
(b) Report the simplest of facts, such as "the coach is harassing me by shouting dissent of my signals", or "the fan in the orange shirt is shouting obscenities at me".

(c) The referee must immediately handle the problem. If he (or she) does not, report the entire situation to your assignor when you get home.

### **C. Handling Problems**

#### **1. How should the referee handle a problem caused by a coach?**

Either a simple admonishment such as "that's enough coach" or a hand signal indicating he (or she) must stop such actions, or an immediate caution if his (or her) actions or words merit it. If it reoccurs, and thus a second cautionable offense occurs, the coach must be sent off. If, for example, the initial offense by the coach was swearing at the Linesman, the coach must immediately be sent off. This is not simply a cautionable offense.

While USSF, in following of FIFA practices, allows the showing of cards only to players to indicate a caution or send off has been issued, they allow Leagues to add that requirement. Most youth Leagues thus have added the requirement for cards to be shown for cautions or sendoffs issued to coaches.

In admonishing, cautioning, or sending off a coach (as with players), be fair, decisive, firm, polite, and non-confrontational. Once you know you must take any one of these 3 actions, do it quickly and get the game restarted as quickly as possible. However, recall that if you must send the coach off, you cannot restart the game until he or she is "out of sight and out of sound".

So what do you do when the coach refuses to leave the field? Do not be upset. Although the coach may intend or imply something personal, recall that you are simply there to judiciously apply the Laws of the Game. If the coach wishes to continue the confrontation by refusing to leave, simply indicate to him or her that they have 2 minutes to be "out of sight and sound". You will find it most effective to do this from 30 or 40 feet away so that your voice will be heard by many, and the coach will realize this, and will know that he really has no excuse for not leaving, and that others also realize it. If the coach refuses, simply terminate the game, exit the field with the rest of the referee team, leave the area immediately, and submit your reports. The reason for the termination will be "game out of control" because of the actions of the coach. An addendum to your report could list the actual actions the coach took, and refusal to leave when sent off.

The IYSA and League and his club will deal with the coach based upon your report.

#### **2. How should the referee handle problems caused by a "fan"?**

Call the two head coaches to the intersection of the center line and the touchline on the bench side of the field (the technical area). Instruct them to immediately control the fan. If both claim not to know the fan, tell them to figure it out and take action to prevent your having to terminate the game because of lack of fan control. Give them a specific amount of time to control or get rid of the fan (to the parking lot or home), say 2 minutes. If they refuse or cannot control the fan, at the end of the 2 minutes motion your Linesmen to you, blow your whistle and signal the game over, collect your gear, and depart the field together, stopping to talk to no one, and quickly leave the area.

By no means ever attempt to control a fan yourself once they dispute your decisions and become confrontational. The Laws of the Game give referees control over players, coaches, and bench personnel. We do not have game or civil authority over fans. Once a problem has occurred, simply do not deal with them directly. Should you do so it might aggravate the

situation to the point where you could possibly be charged with assault (verbal) or battery (physical attack — if you touch or hold or strike, even defensively, a spectator to the match).

Our job as referees is simple - applying the Laws judiciously to ensure to the players an atmosphere of safety, equality, and enjoyment! The unruly fan is not our problem. At your direction, the coach(es) must handle that problem to your satisfaction.

Have fun on the field. Let the problems fall on the shoulders of those that are creating them, whether they are fans or coaches or players. Don't take such problems personally. Remember, we don't commit the fouls and misconduct, we simply identify and sanction them!

Knowledgeable, well-positioned, empathetic, active (do what you must), and communicative refereeing will reduce referee team abuse.

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