



# **Recruiting and Retaining Referees**

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# Introduction

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Good referees are essential to the success of our AYSO soccer program. The most important thing that referees do is to ensure that AYSO games are FUN, SAFE and FAIR. That means referees should understand the spirit of the Laws of the Game and apply the Laws appropriately. Referees need to manage any unacceptable behavior or comments by players, coaches or spectators which spoil the enjoyment of everyone. Referees are expected to maintain their composure and set a good example as an authority for our impressionable young players. Recruiting and retaining volunteers to assume these responsibilities can be challenging. This booklet and the AYSO National Referee Program manual offer some suggestions which have proven successful in recruiting and retaining referees.

Nothing succeeds like success. Recruiting and retaining volunteers is much easier if you have a successful, well-organized program. The fewer problems you have, the more likely people are to volunteer to help. This is particularly true when recruiting referees.

Refereeing should be fun. However, if there are frequent problems during the games and referees are having difficulty conducting the games in an enjoyable atmosphere; it will be difficult to recruit new referees. If you are experiencing any of these problems, the first thing you should do is minimize the problems: make sure the regional board takes misbehavior seriously, have parent orientation meetings and work cooperatively with coaches, particularly the Regional Coach Administrator. Once everyone sees that bad behavior is dealt with firmly, you will eliminate the vast majority of it and the job of recruiting and retaining referees will be easier.

In developing an AYSO regional program, concepts of sportsmanship, fair play, and respect for the authority of the referee must be stressed. We provide better role models for young players to emulate, make refereeing more enjoyable, and make the prospect of becoming an AYSO referee more attractive.



# AYSO Vision & Mission

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The American Youth Soccer Organization, AYSO, was established in 1964 with nine teams and the dream to bring soccer to American children. Today, AYSO has tens of thousands of teams and over 550,000 players in nearly 1,000 Regions. Thanks to the efforts of over 200,000 volunteers and the vision of the founding members, AYSO continues to be a leader in providing quality youth soccer programs.

## **AYSO Vision**

To provide world class youth soccer programs that enrich children's lives.

## **AYSO Mission**

To develop and deliver quality youth soccer programs in a fun, family environment based on the AYSO philosophies:

### **Everyone Plays**

Our goal is for kids to play soccer—so we mandate that every player on every team must play at least half of every game.

### **Balanced Teams**

Each year we form new teams as evenly balanced as possible—because it is fair and more fun when teams of equal ability play.

### **Open Registration**

Our program is open to all children between 4 and 19 years of age who want to register and play soccer. Interest and enthusiasm are the only criteria for playing.

### **Positive Coaching**

Encouragement of player effort provides for greater enjoyment by the players and ultimately leads to better-skilled and better-motivated players.

### **Good Sportsmanship**

We strive to create a safe, fair, fun and positive environment based on mutual respect, rather than a win-at-all-costs attitude, and our program is designed to instill good sportsmanship in every facet of AYSO.

### **Player Development**

We believe that all players should be able to develop their soccer skills and knowledge to the best of their abilities, both individually and as members of a team, in order to maximize their enjoyment of the game.



# Recruiting Recruiters

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The job of recruiting referees is the responsibility of the Regional Referee Administrator and the regional referee staff. Whether one person or a recruiting staff does the recruiting, there are certain characteristics that would be desirable to have in a recruiter. Referee recruiters are somewhat like salespersons, they are trying to sell the idea that refereeing is an enjoyable and worthwhile volunteer activity. All it will cost is some of your free time. Recruiters need to be personable, reasonably articulate, and knowledgeable about AYSO National and local procedures and philosophies concerning officiating. Good recruiters understand that a little persistence can produce results, but they also need to understand the difference between being persistent and being pushy.

Recruiters should be willing to seek out and talk to prospective volunteers and to follow up on any interest expressed.

It is helpful to have some recruiters who are the same gender and general age of the people they will be trying to recruit. This is particularly true when recruiting youth and women. Although it is not absolutely necessary that recruiters be referees, it would greatly improve their credibility with potential referee recruits. Most of all, as good salespeople, the recruiters must believe in their product. That is, the recruiters should be referees and assistant referees who genuinely enjoy refereeing and who enthusiastically support the AYSO program. This enthusiasm will be obvious to any potential volunteers and can be the most convincing aspect of their recruiting efforts.

# Training Recruiters

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To prepare your recruiters you might suggest they become familiar with some basic recruiting techniques. Be ready with some good responses to the frequent concerns expressed in regard to becoming a referee. In the initial contact with a potential volunteer the precise manner in which people are asked to volunteer often determines whether they will be receptive to the idea. One can often put the volunteer in a negative and defensive frame of mind if the question is asked, "How would you like to be a referee?". A more receptive frame of mind and positive response is likely if you say something like, "Hi, I see you at a lot of games. It's nice to see a parent spend as much time as you do supporting the team. Would you be willing to help the referees while you're here?" There might, of course, be lots of questions in the mind of this potential volunteer but at least he or she may be willing to talk about it. It is important to take an interest in the potential volunteer as a person first. Developing relationships can turn a stranger into a member of the AYSO family.

Go slowly. Do not put the volunteer in a position where he or she is uncomfortable making a large time commitment. It is nice to be able to find individuals willing to be trained as referees, however, more often the response is that they would be willing to "help" some, but they do not think they would want to referee. The recruiter may now suggest that he or she could help the referee as an assistant referee or possibly starting off as a U8 Official. If the volunteer is reluctant to take the training necessary to become a qualified assistant referee or U8 Official, then the recruiter could suggest he or she could help the referee by being a club linesman for which you could provide immediate training. In a short time and with a little positive reinforcement, this volunteer may become interested in doing more.

Recruiters should understand that most AYSO referees do not start out with a burning desire to become referees and only begin to enjoy refereeing after officiating a few games. With good training from the beginning and positive support from fellow referees, the challenges and rewards of refereeing should be enough to motivate a reluctant volunteer to work at becoming a good referee.

In the Appendices you will find several tools and ideas to help with recruiting. Review them and use the ones you think will work best in your region.



# Common Excuses for Not Refereeing and Some Suggested Responses

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## **I don't know anything about the game.**

Many AYSO referees understood little about soccer when they first volunteered. All we ask of you is a little of your time and we will train you. The training can be done a little at a time or all at once, whatever is most convenient and available. AYSO has a referee training program which many consider to be the best you will find anywhere in the world and can be completed in short evening sessions over an extended time or all at once in a full-day training course. The more you take advantage of the available training, the better referee you will become. We will not ask you to do anything you do not feel ready to try. Even if you have never refereed a game in your life, with a few hours of training, you will know more about the game of soccer than most of the people you know. We believe that with training your appreciation and enjoyment of the game will increase. Look on the AYSO.org website for a list of referee training courses and the times allotted for each. Safe Haven is mandatory for any new referee.

## **I don't have the time.**

We do not ask our referees to obligate themselves to be constantly available to referee. What we need is a little help. Referees are free to choose the games they can do. They can be scheduled at their convenience, possibly just before or after the game their child is playing.

## **I don't think I could put up with the behavior of some coaches and spectators.**

It's good to hear you say that! We do not want our referees to put up with bad behavior. Regions have strict policies governing such behavior, and we are strongly committed to these policies. We actually have few problems. As a referee, we can teach you how to deal with situations in a dignified and appropriate manner. You can help maintain the AYSO philosophies of, Positive Coaching and Good Sportsmanship, while setting a good example for our impressionable young players.

## **I'm not the right kind of person to be a referee. I'd be embarrassed.**

To be the "right kind of person" to referee AYSO games all you need is to enjoy watching kids have fun playing soccer. We can teach you the rest. If you care about kids you will make a good AYSO referee. There is no need to feel embarrassed about making mistakes because we are all volunteers and even our most experienced referees were beginners at some point and they all grew from their mistakes.



**I'm a woman and women don't referee.**

Women certainly do referee, and make good ones, too. We would like to have more women involved as referees; women are natural referees and represent AYSO's greatest untapped resource. Many of our players are girls and they love having women referees. They are comfortable with them and look up to them as role models. If you are a mom, you are used to making quick decisions and multi-tasking. (If you are the mother of two or more children, you already know what it means to be a referee!) Don't worry. We will teach you and support you and start you with younger children. We will be there to mentor you until you feel comfortable and confident.

**I don't want to be the only woman out there.**

We don't want you to be either. The more women who referee the better it will be for all women. In some regions, women have joined together. They are then trained together and continue to team up for games. Most referees are happy to be mentors, to offer their knowledge and support to new referees whether they are men or women.

**I can't afford the equipment.**

Don't worry about the expense; the region will provide you with a uniform and most of the necessary equipment.

**I'm too old.**

As long as you can think and move around, you can do it. AYSO has referees of all ages. One of the reasons they keep doing it is because it keeps them young! You would start in our youngest divisions where the fields are smaller and the games are shorter. You can progress from there if you want. Potentially, every division needs referees.

**I'm too young.**

If you are 10 years old you are not too young to be a U8 official. Regional Referees and Assistant Referees only have to be 12 years old. There are thousands of boys and girls around the country who referee.

**I don't think I could keep up with the players. Some of them are pretty fast.**

Don't worry, most of us can't keep up with them either. We try to give the older age division games, with the faster players, to our fitter and more experienced referees. We still have plenty of younger division games on smaller fields where you would be able to keep up. Refereeing is a great way to get a little exercise and to have fun at the same time.

**I don't think I could handle the responsibilities of the referee.**

In time, we're sure you would develop the confidence to referee. You can also provide vital assistance to the referee by being an assistant referee. We have several qualified volunteers who only work as assistant referees. Every good referee will tell you that having good assistant referees makes all the difference in a game and we need twice as many of them.

# When and Where to Recruit

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Since it normally takes several seasons to develop an effective referee, recruiting must be ongoing and continuous. However, there are certain times when recruiting efforts should be intensified. Prior to registration consider sending a letter to the parents of all previously registered players to remind them of the need for volunteers and suggest that each family help in some way. You may want to include a list of the jobs for which you need help.

During registration it is worthwhile to have recruiters available to talk to the parents. If possible, have both adult and youth referee recruiters present, in uniform, and smiling. Use female referees if possible to recruit females. These recruiters can informally talk to potential volunteers in their own peer group. Anyone who indicates they would be willing to help should be considered a potential referee, even if they did not specifically volunteer to referee. The fact they are willing to help is half the battle. Do not fail to follow up with these volunteers.

Another good opportunity to recruit is during practices and games. Parents who are present to encourage and support their child's team are a good source of potential referees because they are already devoting the time and demonstrating an interest in the program. During games recruiters should also look for the spectator who is frequently concerned with the accuracy of the referee's decisions. These people have already demonstrated a willingness to express their opinion as to whether a foul was committed or not. The recruiter could suggest to them that if they would be willing to attend a training course they could become "real referees." If your recruiting efforts are unsuccessful at least the spectator may be a little less critical of the officiating in the future, particularly if you detail all of the training and experience necessary to become a referee.

Another great source of referees is youth. Regions have found many sources for recruiting youth referees. Among these are:

- The children of referees and other AYSO volunteers.
- U14, U16, and U19 teams, especially if there is a close-knit team or group of players who would love more chances to be involved with soccer.
- High school and college coaches will sometimes reward players who get involved with refereeing because they know that experience as a referee will improve them as players.
- Scouts may be able to earn community service merit badges.
- Church groups often encourage public service.



- Schools in some areas require students to perform a minimum number of community service hours in order to graduate.
- Students with plans to attend college can add to their list of organizations and activities on their college admissions applications. Colleges want to see examples of leadership and responsibilities which volunteer refereeing provides with abundance.
- Students who want to apply for a job. Youth referees who can list soccer refereeing on a job application have a better chance of getting a job. Employers are impressed with a youth referee who has the courage, confidence and discipline to be a referee.

It pays to advertise! You might consider publicizing your need for referees in the local newspapers, on radio stations, or with flyers. This is particularly worthwhile prior to any referee clinics you will be having. The more people know of the need for referees, the more likely you are to get volunteers. Always include a statement about the need for referees in any of your regional publications such as newsletters, your region's website, parents' handbooks, etc.

# Who and How to Recruit

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There are certain people who will be more likely to be recruited as referees and to remain active in the program. Obviously, parents of players are the primary source of AYSO referees. Parents of younger players may be involved in the program longer than the parents of older players and you will generally find that the former attend more games as spectators. Therefore, you may want to concentrate your recruiting efforts among the parents of U6 and U8 teams. Often, you will find that the parents of the child who is particularly motivated to play soccer are usually supportive and make excellent volunteers. Of course, some of our best referees are those who referee because they enjoy it; it makes no difference whether they have children playing or not.

Another excellent source of referees is your players. You can begin with players as young as age ten and train them as U8 officials. Twelve-year-olds can become Regional Referees and Assistant Referees. If they become interested, they may even want to try refereeing younger age divisions. Players who are drawn as referees from the older divisions, such as high school and college, already have some of the qualities of a good referee. These players have a firsthand knowledge of the game and have an understanding of the meaning of such things as: the Spirit of the Laws, the flow of the game, trifling and doubtful, advantage and intentional vs. unintentional.

Be sure to include women in your list of referee recruits. Women make excellent referees and if you are only recruiting men, you are overlooking half of your potential new recruits. After determining those you want to recruit, you must determine how you should go about it. There are several general methods of recruiting and you must determine what works best for your region's particular circumstances. You can start by designating specific individuals as recruiters. This is often an effective method when there are a sufficient number of these recruiters available with the free time to spend soliciting volunteers and following up with the necessary arrangements for their training.

You can rely on the response to various kinds of publicity appeals. This method requires the least amount of work; however, you should not expect this method alone to be sufficient.

Some regions have adopted various kinds of "forced recruiting" policies. This technique may entail requiring every coach to referee at least one game a season, or requiring each team to send one person to a referee clinic, or requiring each team to provide an assistant referee for all of their games. This type of crisis management is not recommended and does not encourage the development of good referees who will continue their involvement with refereeing. It often meets with considerable resistance, is difficult to enforce, and may even lead to the loss of volunteers. Occasionally you will find a person through this method who loves being a referee but again, forced recruitment is usually unsuccessful in retaining referees for the long term.



One method which has proven to be very effective is to encourage a buddy system type of recruiting. The buddy system is simply encouraging the experienced referees to recruit and become their recruit's mentor. The experienced referee would, in effect, take this new volunteer under his/her wing and personally support and encourage his/her development under the AYSO Mentor Program.

The goal of the experienced referee and his/her buddy would be to recruit and train a third person to become a team. This team would be scheduled to work games together. One of the enjoyments of refereeing is the special kind of camaraderie which develops among good refereeing teams. The buddy system encourages the development of referee teams who work well together and take pride in their performance as a team.

The AYSO National Referee Program has special programs designed specifically to provide a means for qualified mentors to work with new referees to ease them into refereeing and support their development. Once in place in a region, these programs can be a powerful tool to aid in recruitment and retention of referees.

For more information regarding the Mentor program, please go to the [AYSOtraining.org](http://AYSOtraining.org) website and refer to the publication, Referee Mentor Handbook.

# Use of the Diagonal System in Recruiting and Training

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"We have difficulty getting one official on the field, how do you expect us to get three?" This is probably the most common response to requests for three officials per game instead of one or two. We do not intend to discuss the relative merits of the diagonal, dual, or single refereeing systems here. Suffice it to say that the diagonal system is the recommended system in AYSO and the only system recognized by FIFA.

One of the advantages of the diagonal system is that it lends itself nicely to recruiting and training potential new referees. If there is only one official available per game, the official should be encouraged to enlist the aid of two volunteers as club linesmen. This should be done prior to game time from among the spectators. If refereeing teams are allowed to develop, the experienced referee will probably want to find a couple of buddies to recruit and train to ensure that he/she will have a team of three officials for all of his/her games. If only two officials are available for games, the referees should still implement the diagonal system by using one of the officials as a qualified neutral assistant referee and recruiting a buddy, or getting a volunteer from among the spectators to serve as a club linesman.

When using club linesmen, an experienced referee will make them feel as comfortable with the job as possible and to express appreciation for assistance. As with any new job, there is a certain amount of apprehension about not doing well. If the referee can help these club linesmen overcome this feeling and make them understand that they were, in fact, helpful, this might make them feel more confident and willing to try it again. When only one or two referees are available for a game and they make no attempt to recruit a club linesman or two to help them, they are missing a very good opportunity to stimulate the interest of a potential new referee.

# Recruiting Women Referees

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Why should women become referees? Why is that important? When a woman joins the ranks of the referee team there are a number of benefits to the region and the players and to the woman herself.

## Benefits to the Region and the Players

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**Recruiting women expands the pool of potential referees.** Including women in the search for referees essentially doubles the possibilities.

**Women referees make positive role models for girl players.** Many girls play soccer in AYSO. Girls who see women refereeing are likely to view their own participation more positively and to continue to play as they get older. The benefits to girls who play sports include academic success and better long-term health. (See appendix 9). Girls should see their future as one of unlimited possibilities and having the experience of seeing women in non-traditional roles helps to provide them with tangible evidence of that. Furthermore, the more games they have that are managed by good women referees and the less remarkable that becomes, the better.

**Women referees make positive role models for boy players.** It is important for boys to view women as capable in many different roles and seeing women referees in authority helps to foster this understanding. What is essential to the development of male players is that they are exposed to and accept good referees who happen to be women. More and more good female referees dispel the myth that women are not as good as their male counterparts. This is especially important where culturally women are not viewed as equals.

**Women generally have good communication skills.** Women are willing to talk about things to make sure everyone understands. This is a valuable skill when working with coaches, players and other referees.

**Women make good team members.** Women tend to work cooperatively and support and protect their fellow teammates. As Anson Dorrance, the former coach of the United States women's national soccer team said, "You basically have to drive men but you can lead women. Women relate through an interconnected web of personal connections, as opposed to a more traditional male hierarchy."

**Women can be less intimidating to young players.** The reason for this is two-fold. First, women are usually smaller than men so their physical presence is less imposing. They simply don't tower over young players as much. Second, young children generally spend more time around women than men and an unfamiliar woman is less scary to them than an unfamiliar man. While roles are certainly changing, the primary





caregivers for most children are women. The vast majority of elementary school teachers are female as well.

## **Benefits to the Woman Referee**

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**She will share a positive experience with her child.** If she is a mom, being a referee allows her to participate with her child in a fun, family activity they can both enjoy. Even if she has no children of her own, her interaction with children will be an enriching experience for all of them.

**She will feel good about herself.** She will have the personal satisfaction of helping kids and her community. At the end of the day, knowing that she has made a contribution toward the healthy development of kids is an undeniably good feeling.

**Refereeing will help her maintain fitness.** Refereeing burns calories. She will be exercising without even thinking about it. This kind of weight-bearing activity strengthens bones and reduces the possibility of osteoporosis, which can be a problem for many women as they get older.

**She will earn respect.** Players and others will respect her knowledge of the game and appreciate her commitment to young people.

**She will enjoy the challenge each new game brings.** No two games are the same even when played by the same two teams. There is always something new. She will never be bored.

**She will learn more about the game of soccer and develop a deeper appreciation of the game.** She will learn the Laws of the Game and understand the calls other referees make. She will be better able to enjoy the “beautiful game”.

**She will meet new people and make new friends.** She will work with other people who care about kids and want to help them have a fun experience. She will join a family of referees. Referees love to talk about the game. They help and support one another.

**She will have fun.** Yes, refereeing can be fun.

## **Commitment**

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Women (and men) who volunteer to become referees make a remarkable commitment to the players and to their regions. Without these dedicated volunteers along with many others, players couldn't play. In AYSO, we realize that the most valuable thing a volunteer gives is her time. For our part we are mindful that we must not squander that time. We have an obligation to these volunteer referees. We are committed to support these referees by ensuring that we do the following:



**Make sure referees are well-trained.** If new volunteers are provided with adequate training, they will be better prepared and will have fewer problems with games. Knowing that you know what you should do gives you the confidence you need to referee a game. If games go well, referees will want to keep doing them.

**Eliminate bad behavior on the part spectators and coaches.** It isn't any fun to referee while under verbal attack. It's hard to do your best when you are constantly being criticized. Referees will quit. Every regional board must enforce a strict policy regarding referee abuse. When referees are having pleasant experiences they are more likely to continue.

**Assign mentors to support them.** New referees need extra support at the beginning. A mentor can answer questions, help with sideline control and offer suggestions. They can help the referee build confidence while they gain valuable experience. They can help the referee overcome a "bad game". For this reason, they really should be experienced referees themselves. As much as possible, we should have experienced women referees become mentors, not just to mentor new women referees but also as mentors for men. This will help by demonstrating that women referees are knowledgeable and competent. **Establish good communication.** Keeping referees informed and up to date is critical. Volunteers may become dissatisfied and disillusioned if they are not kept well-informed. We should not rely on word of mouth to convey important information; we should use more than one form of communication. Regular meetings are valuable as well. People do their best when they know what is expected of them.

**Supply women referee with uniforms that fit.** Appearance is the first thing we notice when we see a referee. A neat professional uniform helps to establish the credibility of a referee. We should provide to our women referees uniforms that fit women. Having to wear a man's shirt with the pockets in an awkward location or one that is way too long will turn some of them off. It's important to demonstrate we value participation by women enough to go to the trouble of purchasing shirts that were designed for women referees.

**Work around their schedules.** Allowing referees to work around their other obligations will make it more convenient for them to help with games. We should be flexible and grateful for any game the referee can volunteer to do.

**Encourage continuing training.** Referees will gain confidence as they learn more about the games they officiate. Offer frequent opportunities for additional training and especially encourage women to attend. This training can range from complete courses to mini-sessions on a narrow topic.

**Make sure we have women at all levels of certification.** We should encourage our more experienced referees to upgrade. Entry level referees should see that women are as able as men to do upper level matches and that all referees can aspire to doing the most challenging matches.

**Make sure we don't push them into games they aren't ready for.** It's a delicate balance between encouraging women to take on more challenging matches and pushing them into games they aren't ready for. Doing a match that you simply can't handle is discouraging and many referees have let this end their careers. A good administrator observes his/her referees and knows when one is ready for the challenge and needs a gentle push and when the referee needs more experience or training. When she is ready, provide her with experienced assistant referees who can provide support as she takes on the new challenge of more difficult matches.

**Organize a women referee club.** Forming a club for women referees can provide women with the opportunity of sharing their perspective on the refereeing world. In this forum, women may feel more comfortable discussing challenges they have faced and learning how other women might have dealt with it.

**Reward and thank them.** We must thank our referees publicly, perhaps in the local newspaper or our region's website. We should certainly thank them at an end-of-the-season ceremony but they can be thanked throughout the season also. And we can reward them. There are many ways to reward unpaid volunteers. Volunteers appreciate sincere praise. An end-of-the-year party is a great way to reward volunteers. We can provide water and snacks. If we have a snack bar on game days, we can make sure referees can get drinks and food. We could give them uniforms and equipment. We could provide them with soccer videos and books or special flipping coins.

As a new referee or recruit, if the support for you is weak or lacking, talk to your Regional Referee Administrator (RRA). The RRA can enlist the help of the regional board and others within AYSO to improve the support provided to you and all other new volunteers.

## Differences

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### **Men and women referees are different.**

Men and women are not the same so it should not come as any surprise that men referees and women referees are different. That doesn't mean one group is better; it just means they are not the same. Remember, when we talk about men compared to women, these are generalities. **They will not apply to every woman and every man.**

However, some of the obvious differences between most men and women referees are:

- Height – In general, men are taller.
- Voice – In general, men's voices are deeper.
- Strength – In general, men are physically stronger.
- Size – In general, men are bigger.
- Speed – In general, men can run faster than women.

Of all of the qualities listed above, the only one that presents a challenge for women referees is speed. Later we will discuss what women referees can do to overcome this.

### **Making the most of what you have.**

Successful women referees have learned how to use their innate characteristics to become better referees. The tips listed below for taking full advantage of your inborn traits. These tips came from a forum of 70 women referees at all levels of certification, a wide range of ages and years of experience. Use the following to make your job easier:

**1. Women are usually shorter than men.**

This may make them less intimidating to very young players. You can take full advantage of this by remembering to get down to the players level when you speak to them. Try kneeling down for the coin toss or when you need to speak to a player.

**2. Women may be familiar to very young players.**

Because most young players are around women more frequently, the children may be more comfortable in their presence. Try to deal with the younger players in as friendly and pleasant a manner as possible. Remember unknown authority figures can be frightening to some small children and behave more like a guide than a policeman.

**3. Women referees can be positive role models for girl players.**

Many of our players are girls and they like having women referees. Girl players who see women referees are more likely to view their own participation positively. It is important for young girls to see women in positions of authority so that they can envision themselves taking responsible roles later in life. Be aware of the influence you have and try to make your interactions as positive as possible. When you give that early word of warning, try to eliminate negative words. For example, say "You're a better player than that" instead of "Don't do that anymore".

**4. Women referees can be positive role models for boy players.**

It is equally important for boys to see women in positions of authority in a discipline they perceive as male dominated. Seeing women in responsible positions will help to foster respect for women in young men. As the referee you can help develop this respect by respectful treatment of the players.

**5. Women (and parents in general) may already have experience "refereeing".**

If a woman has more than one child, she has probably had to settle disputes between children and correct bad behavior. By adding some training a woman can put those skills she already has to good use.

**6. Usually women are good verbal communicators.**

Most women are comfortable discussing things. Make sure you talk to other referees on your referee team to ensure there are no misunderstandings before you take the field. Talk to coaches and players to establish a rapport prior to the

match. During the match, talk to players. Often the quiet word will prevent more serious problems.

**7. Many women have good non-verbal communication skills.**

Mothers can sometimes give “The Look” that can stop their misbehaving children in their tracks. If you have mastered this technique, use it to quiet an unruly player or spectator or coach.

**8. Women are less likely to referee a game they aren’t prepared for.**

Don’t allow a ‘hole in the schedule’ to push you into a match you cannot handle. Listen to more experienced referees and to your mentor. If they feel you are ready and encourage you to referee a higher level match, do it.

**9. Women are not likely to have a physical confrontation with a player, coach or spectator.**

Most men will instinctively protect a woman under attack. If a man threatens a woman, he will look like a bully. For these reasons, women rarely come under attack. Stay away from physical confrontations with anyone. A calm demeanor will help defuse many negative situations.

**10. Women make good team members.**

Often women have had experience working together to accomplish some goal. Be a good team member. Support your teammates and always try to work cooperatively with others for the best outcome.

**11. Instructors find that women referee candidates make good students.**

Because society hasn’t expected them to be ‘sports experts’, they are usually willing to reveal they don’t know something or don’t understand something. Take as much training as you can. When you are unsure about some information, you should ask. Since most new women referees did not grow up with the sport of soccer, they usually have little misinformation to unlearn. When you hear something that doesn’t make sense or sounds wrong, make sure you clarify it.

**12. Women are likely to ask for help when they need it.**

Women may be more willing to admit they are ‘lost’ and need directions. Similarly, they are willing to ask for clarification or interpretation of something they are unsure of. When you need help, do not hesitate to go to a referee mentor and ask for it.

**13. Women usually don’t rely on their imposing presence.**

Since women are usually not large, they are not tempted to “tower over” a player or to “throw their weight around” to intimidate a coach. Approach players and coaches in a calm, non-threatening manner in order to gain their cooperation.

**14. Women usually are careful about their appearance.**

Because most women are careful about the way they appear, their uniforms usually look professional. Remember a referee who is wearing a proper uniform is more likely to be perceived as an authority.

**15. Older teenage boys don't view women as rivals.**

During their teenage years it becomes important for many young men to establish a "pecking order" or earn the position of the "alpha male". This sometimes effects their interactions with male referees. With female referees it is less true. Use that to your advantage. You will find that it is more effective to get their cooperation than it is to boss them at this age. If you are knowledgeable and fair and fun, you will gain their respect.

**16. Women referees are less likely to overprotect older girl players.**

Some male referees have a natural instinct to protect women and girls. This sense of gallantry may cause them to call more fouls in girls' games than they would in boys' games. Women are less likely to do this. Remember, if you wouldn't call it in a boys game, don't call it in a girls game.

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**SPEED**

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As we noted earlier, most men can run faster than most women, but speed is usually not a factor until the players reach their teenage years. Well over 80% of AYSO players are under 12. Refereeing the very youngest players does not require a lot of speed by the referee.

For those more advanced games where speed is needed when refereeing a game, what can women do to overcome this difference?

- **Train:** Practice running long and short distances trying to improve your time with each session.
- **Do interval training:** Alternate slow jogs with sprints.
- **Be decisive:** The sooner you decide to change position on the field the more time you will have to make the change.
- **Learn to read the game:** Knowing what the teams are trying to do will help you anticipate where the next challenge is likely to come and you can begin to move to your position earlier. Use restarts to get into position where the challenges will occur. Don't wait for play to begin, get there as fast as you can.

Remember that women referees bring different traits and skills to the game of soccer. By learning how to take advantage of these differences and overcome their challenges, they can improve the experience for the players and everyone else involved.

The AYSO National Soccer Program will be enhanced by increasing the number of women who referee. When the women who accept the challenge of becoming referees



are no longer the pioneers but are the soccer moms who want their kids to experience the fun of playing soccer, then we will begin to approach equity with men on the soccer field. If you are a woman who is a referee, your participation is appreciated. You are vitally important to the health of the program and most importantly to the players.

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# Provide Adequate Training

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Once you have recruited potential referees, the first step in retaining them is to provide them with adequate training. It is extremely important that new referees understand not only the “Letter of the Law” but also the “Spirit of the Law”. New referees should be made aware of the kind of authority they will have and the manner in which they should use it. Make sure all new referees are exposed to a presentation on the philosophy of refereeing and that they understand the important role they will play in your AYSO soccer program. Getting off to a good start is important in any new endeavor; this is particularly true with soccer refereeing. If you provide your new referees with good training, they will be better for it and have fewer problems with games. If games go well, referees will want to keep doing them. Also, you are more likely to retain them because they will be enjoying themselves.

Regions often provide excellent training for the beginner, but tend to forget about providing training for the more experienced referees. Refereeing a considerable number of younger division games is not the only requirement needed to begin refereeing in the older divisions; experience is the best teacher, but do not make your referees learn the hard way. If referees are given games for which they are not well trained, they will not have a lot of fun and it may result in the loss of a volunteer.

The National Referee Program has comprehensive referee training programs and materials, for all levels. Further information is available from the National Support and Training Center at (800) 872-2976 and at [www.ayso.org](http://www.ayso.org).



# Establish Good Communication

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Make sure "the left hand knows what the right hand is doing." Keeping your referees informed and up-to-date is important. Volunteers may become dissatisfied and disillusioned if they feel they are not well-informed. There should be timely and reliable communication with all of the referees in your region. Do not rely on word-of-mouth to convey important information. This communication should be conveyed in writing. While it may seem like unnecessary paperwork to some, it will prevent undue confusion, avoid the misinterpretation sometimes common with verbal communication, and will help avoid the need for numerous last-minute phone calls.

All referees should have the following:

- The current AYSO edition of the FIFA Laws of The Game (with AYSO modifications)
- AYSO National Referee Program Manual
- AYSO Guidance for Referees and Coaches
- USSF Advice to Referees on the Laws of the Game
- USSF Guide to Procedures for Referees, Assistant Referees and Fourth Officials
- Any local regional or inter-regional guidelines governing play
- Names, email addresses and phone numbers of the volunteers to notify for changes and game misconduct reports

The referees should receive copies of the game schedule and assignments as far in advance as possible. Whenever there are changes, they should be notified in writing, if possible.

Make sure all of your new referees have completed the Safe Haven Referee Certification course and all referees are registered as volunteers with AYSO.

The distribution of certain kinds of information to everyone in your region can help eliminate problems for your referees during games by having knowledgeable players, coaches, and spectators. This kind of information can be compiled into a regional handbook which can be routinely distributed to all new members. The specific information needed by referees and coaches could be compiled into separate handbooks for each. Once these handbooks are completed, they can be reproduced and stocked for distribution as needed which eliminates the need to repeat the effort each season. If everyone knows what to expect and what is expected of them, you will encounter a smoother running program with fewer problems and increase your ability to recruit and retain volunteers.

# Form a Referee Club

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Most referees enjoy having the opportunity to exchange "war stories," discuss various ways to deal with problem situations, and, in general, enjoy the fellowship and support of fellow referees. Referees are often under considerable pressure during games and tend to be criticized more than praised. It is beneficial for the referees to be reassured by respected and knowledgeable sources (other referees) when they have made correct, albeit controversial decisions, or to be offered constructive suggestions for alternative ways to handle difficult situations. Referee clubs can offer these opportunities and they are fun.

Referee clubs are structured in various ways depending upon the number of referees in the region and their general interests. If only a few referees are involved, meetings could be scheduled at the homes of the referees or at a suitable local restaurant or meeting location. The meetings should have some organized format but still allow plenty of time for social interaction and idea exchange. A member may be selected to present a particular aspect of refereeing, such as dissent, alternative positioning for restarts, pregame instruction, etc., and possibly formulate a few interesting questions for discussion. There should be time allotted for "war stories" and perhaps ask volunteer referees to discuss his/her worst refereeing challenge since the last meeting (it's therapeutic). An effort should be made to give ample opportunity for everyone to be involved. Perhaps all the referees could meet jointly for a presentation by one of the members or a guest speaker and then break into smaller groups for discussion and social interaction. Regardless of the size or format of the meetings, try to have them regularly. A referee club will encourage the development of mutual support and fellowship among referees, aid in developing uniformity of refereeing, and help retain interest.

Women referees may also want to form their own group where they can meet with other women referees and share experiences. Women find that what works for them on the field may not work for men and vice versa. Another woman may offer insights no one else has.

# Offer Motivational Incentives

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Don't make refereeing a thankless job. You could begin expressing your thanks and appreciation to your referees by providing them with a uniform. Referees should always wear the proper attire when they are refereeing to be readily visible as a trained official. Referees should receive a certain amount of respect from players and coaches. By being properly dressed, referees show respect for themselves, the game, the players, the coaches and the spectators. They look the part, they are taking the job seriously and they should be respected in return. Additionally, giving your referees uniforms is a way of demonstrating that you appreciate their efforts. At the same time, it ensures that all of your referees will be in uniform for your games.

Everyone likes to be appreciated, so encourage the players and coaches to express gratitude to the referees after the games. Too often, we forget that referees are volunteers just like the rest of us and are contributing their time and energy free of charge. A simple "thanks for reffing" from the players or coaches, regardless of the outcome of the game can go a long way toward keeping a referee motivated. It is customary for players and coaches to shake hands and to display good sportsmanship towards one another after the game. This custom should always include the referees.

If you give awards or recognition to players and coaches each season, include the referees as well. Public recognition of referees in your program is a way to express appreciation and also to motivate others. The exact manner in which you try to offer incentives to your referees can take many forms, as people respond in different ways. What may work for some may not work for others, but in general, most people will continue to volunteer to help if they know their efforts are genuinely appreciated.

# Abuse of Referees

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Abuse of referees and assistant referees, whether verbal or physical, has absolutely no place in AYSO. Any offending actions against match officials must not be tolerated under any circumstances. Regions must be proactive in preventing this through the education of coaches and spectators in the AYSO philosophy of Good Sportsmanship. Regions must also set an example by dealing immediately and firmly with all such incidents.

Coaches and spectators acting in an abusive, offensive or insulting way is a particular obstacle to the recruiting and retaining of women and youth referees. Every region should have a zero tolerance policy for all referees but particularly those regarding abuse of youth referees. Coaches should be reminded that these referees are kids too and the most positive thing they can say to them is, "thank you."

A region that doesn't deal effectively with this problem will fail to recruit and retain any but the most strong-minded and self assured.

Regions should have a special task force to focus on the coaches and parents who cause problems for referees. The regional board needs to back this group by removing from the program anyone whose negative behavior towards referees does not change.

The region's Coach Administrator needs to be convinced that a negative coach is worse than no coach. Referee input should be elicited when deciding which coaches will represent AYSO. This does not necessarily mean that a first-year coach who had problems should not be asked to coach a second year. The coach would get more guidance and training before beginning the next season.

# Shaping the Referee's Image

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Regions that want a wide variety of volunteers to join their referee staff should first look at their current program. Does the region's recruitment program communicate to the potential volunteers that anyone can become a good referee, or does it give the impression that only adult men who know a lot about soccer need apply? Is the region's referee retention program directed at the needs of all types of referees, or does it also subtly say that only adult men really belong?

The general soccer public's perception of who is a good referee has a great effect on both recruitment and retention of referees. Many coaches and parents see good referees as being strong men with plenty of soccer experience. This image becomes self-fulfilling as parents and coaches question, and don't trust, any referee who doesn't fit their image of a good referee. This perception affects recruitment, as potential volunteers avoid involvement because they don't fit their own idea of a good referee. Retention is affected when excellent referees are frequently questioned and not trusted simply because they don't look the part (women and youth referees frequently fall into this category).

- The region can and must change this perception.
- All referees should be recognized publicly at AYSO meetings and gatherings.
- Newsletters and other AYSO communications should be used to tell parents and coaches about the training that referees must complete.
- Newsletters can make an extra effort to highlight the accomplishments of women and youth referees.
- The Regional Referee Administrator must look for opportunities to put women and youth referees in positions of high visibility.
- Parents and coaches should be shown at every opportunity that all referees, regardless of gender or age, are knowledgeable and competently trained officials.



# Referee Mentor

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The AYSO National Referee Program offers a full range of referee services. One of the more important aspects to improve performance and ready referees for badge upgrades is referee assessment. The Regional Referee Program's component is a very different type of service. The Regional Referee Administrator, or his or her delegate, is responsible for developing Referee Mentor. The Referee Mentor Handbook can be downloaded from website [AYSOtraining.org](http://AYSOtraining.org) or obtained from the AYSO Supply Center (888-243-2976).

The Mentor program is designed for new and developing officials with guidance from experienced referees to provide support and encouragement. Regions can use current, injured or retired referees to implement this important program which fosters improvement, upgrading and recruiting.



# Appendices

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# Appendix 1: Why I Can't Be a Referee

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We have listed the most of the common excuses for non-participation in this critical function in the AYSO program.

## **I Don't Know Anything (Enough) About the Game**

Most of us knew little, or less than you, about soccer when we became referees. Don't worry, for the investment of a day (8 hours) we will train you with more knowledge of the Laws of the Game than most Americans ever possess.

## **I Don't Have Time**

Becoming a referee is the perfect slot for those AYSO parents who have crowded schedules. Your commitment consists of eight hours of class and, when the season begins, games scheduled around your child's games (when you would be at the fields anyway). You may do as many or as few games as you choose.

## **I'm Not the Right Kind of Person**

Yes you are. You obviously care about your child. This is a youth development program run by volunteers. Would you want your child involved with someone who is not as good as you? Who would be better than a concerned parent like you?

## **I'm in too High a Tax Bracket to be Able to Handle the Extra Income**

Not to worry. When we last heard, satisfaction and enjoyment were not yet taxable. Since that will be your only compensation (AYSO is a volunteer organization) we suggest you collect as much compensation as you can.

## **I'd Look Silly in That Uniform**

There is a certain amount of pride that happens to one when they officially put on that uniform. It represents training, knowledge, and professionalism.

## **I'd Be Embarrassed**

Everyone makes mistakes (even those of us who have been officiating for years). The important thing is to approach the job with enthusiasm and enjoyment, because that will be passed on to the players and coaches (and we can team you up with an experienced referee to help you through the initial learning process).

## **I'm A Woman – I Never See Them Referee**

Wrong! We have quite a few qualified women referees – AND THEY ARE GREAT! We could use many more. Besides, lots of players are girls and they look up to women referees. You would be a role model to both genders.





### **I'm Too Old/Too Young**

As long as you can move and think, you are never too old. Lots of people your age are referees. As long as you are 10 years old, you are not too young. There are thousands of boys and girls across the country who referee.

### **I Don't Care**

Well here it is...if in fact you are signing up your child to play AYSO soccer and you honestly don't care about the quality, safety or enjoyment involved in this program...then you have come up with the correct excuse and we no longer have to ask why. If you really don't care, YOU CAN'T BE A REFEREE for AYSO.

However, if this last excuse does not apply to you (and we hope it doesn't), then the players need you badly.

In return, we promise you:

- Enjoyment
- Exercise
- Commitment
- Support
- Appreciation
- A free uniform
- AND, ON TOP OF THAT...the kids will be glad you were there for them.

# Appendix 2: Motivating Factors

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## **Some Reasons Why People Volunteer to Referee:**

- Help out
- Benefit kids
- Want to fill a program need of not enough referees
- People who have been involved in soccer, e.g., former players, who "want to give something back to the game"
- Feel they have something to offer
- Talked into it
- Fun
- Physical and mental challenge
- To be part of the game or of own kids' activity
- Want to be in charge of important kid activity. (This could be positive or negative)
- To get exercise
- Spouse signed you up

## **Some Reasons Why People Do Not Volunteer to Become Referees:**

- Don't know Laws of the Game
- Don't know soccer
- Lack of self-confidence
- Don't want to be yelled at (scared of possibility of abuse)
- New to AYSO
- Don't know what is required of a volunteer
- Want to get paid for refereeing
- No time for refereeing or to go to a training clinic

- Not willing or scared to be "Out there on the field," i.e., alone and in charge.
- Spouse signed you up
- Anything else they can think of

**Some Ideas of What to Tell Potential Referees:**

- "We need your help in order to give all kids the opportunity to play."
- "Your child is in the program and we need your help." (This can be a simple statement or a virtual demand for help.)
- "We'll train and support you, but you need to give us time to do the job properly." (That is, you'll be there for them, but they need to take the time to be trained, and to continue improving through additional training.)
- Tell them how they will be supported: training, mentoring, equipment, not allowing abuse, dealing with problem coaches, etc.
- Tell them how they can help make games more fun for the kids by keeping games fair and safe.
- Explain the AYSO Team concept.
- Talk about the philosophy and goals of the program.
- Emphasize things that make refereeing enjoyable: fellowship, challenge, interaction with players, enjoyable physical activity, respect and appreciation, feeling good that you help kids to have a fun and positive experience.
- Anything else you can think of.

# Appendix 3: Some Considerations When Interacting with Potential Volunteers

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Develop an approach to counter negatives that people present while you are trying to recruit them or to counter any resistance you might run into.

Be patient, chose your words carefully, try to employ positive body language, show understanding toward the resistance, listen to the person, and be friendly.

Know the common, "Why I Can't Be a Referee" excuses and be ready to talk to them about them.

At registration, either show "Ready, Set, Ref!" or have someone give a, "we need volunteers" pitch to people standing in line at registration. Then present the, "Give it a Try," scenario (Appendix 4.)

At registration, require every parent to stop by the volunteers' station. Remind them that in AYSO there is one volunteer for every 2.5 players. Tell them that if the person in front of them didn't volunteer, it's now up to them. Don't forget to follow up! Not contacting a volunteer is an insult. That person will not step forward to help again.

At parents meeting - give the "Referee Fun Test." (Appendix 5.)

## **More Ideas:**

- Have recruiters in uniform (and smiling)
- Use female referees to recruit females
- Use youth referees to recruit potential youth referees
- Post biographies of some of your referees
- Show a video of a local referee having fun
- Have a picture display of referees in action



### **Around Town:**

- Put brochures in medical offices
- Set up a display in a local store
- Put a kiosk or stand in a mall
- Visit sports medicine clinics to inform therapists and staff
- Get a referee announcement or article in the local paper or on public TV
- Post information in fire, police and civic offices

### **For The Kids:**

- Recruit at Boy Scout and Girl Scout meetings, high schools, etc. Refereeing may fulfill merit badge or community service requirements
- Start a PRO (Player Referee Organization) club for referees under eighteen

### **In The Beginning:**

- Have every new referee assigned a mentor
- Create a referee organization that meets regularly

### **During The Year:**

- Feature a referee in the local newsletter
- Create a special patch for referees' jackets
- Treat referees and spouses to a special night
- Send thank-you notes to the spouses
- Provide quality equipment and up-to-date books
- Have a visible referee center on game days
- Send dedicated referees to camp

# Appendix 4: Give-it-a-Try Scenarios

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**Instructions:**

Tell the participants to listen carefully as you present each scenario. If they feel the referee should stop play, they should activate their noisemaker to stop play as soon as they think there's a problem. If they don't see a problem, they do nothing. You or an assistant should keep track of the participant's scores on the score sheets to hand to them after the five scenarios are done. Three or more correct means they're referee material.

**Scenario #1:**

The red player and the blue player are running after the ball, which is rolling toward the touchline nearest the referee. The red player is faster and the blue player holds onto the red player's arm to keep up. The red player still reaches the ball first.

If the referee stops play, he or she has correctly identified the foul, holding.

**Scenario #2:**

The red player is dribbling the ball across the halfway line. The blue player intercepts him and, in trying to get the ball, misses and snags the ankle of the red player, who falls down. The blue player gathers the ball and heads up field.

If the referee stops play, he or she has correctly identified a careless trip.

**Scenario #3:**

The red player is dribbling the ball across the halfway line. The blue player intercepts him and puts his foot on the opposite side of the ball. The red player trips over the ball and falls down. The blue player keeps the ball and moves in the opposite direction.

If the referee does not stop play, he or she has allowed a fair tackle of the ball.

**Scenario #4:**

The red player dribbles the ball down the touchline, then shoots at blue's goal. A blue player is standing on the goal line inside the goal mouth and stops the ball right on the line. The blue player then kicks the ball up field.

If the referee does not stop play, he or she recognizes the ball is still in play when any portion of it is over the line. The entire ball must cross this line to be out of play or to score.



**Scenario #5:**

The red player is trying to control a bouncing ball. The blue player tries to kick the ball by raising his foot head high. The red player backs away, and the ball falls to the feet of the blue player.

If the referee stops play, he or she recognizes dangerous play.

# Appendix 5: Referee Fun Test

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If you had the chance to referee five or six year old players, could you do it? Read and answer these questions to find out. No prior experience necessary.

1. During a game, a red-shirted player trips a blue-shirted player.

You would:

- a. Blow your whistle and give a free kick to the blue team.
- b. Blow your whistle and tell the red player he's a very bad boy.
- c. Tell the blue player to stop falling down like a baby.
- d. Tell the red player it was a great trip.

2. During a game, a red-shirted player punches a blue-shirted player.

You would:

- a. Blow your whistle and tell the blue player to hit the red player back.
- b. Blow your whistle, tell the red player that you will not let her play if she continues to hit, and give a free kick to the other team
- c. Tell the red player she hits like a girl.

3. During a game, a red-shirted player kicks the ball over the touchline (sideline).

You would:

- a. Tell the red player to leave the field and never come back.
- b. Tell the red player to apologize for kicking the ball out.
- c. Give the ball to the blue team for a throw-in.

4. During a game, a red-shirted player seems afraid of the ball. She finally kicks it very cautiously, but doesn't follow up. The blue team gets the ball.

You would:

- a. Tell her it was a nice try and to keep it up.





- b. Tell her she just lost the ball and she'd better wake up.
  - c. Keep quiet and hope that she drops out as soon as possible.
5. During a game, a red-shirted player is continually yelled at by her mother.

You would:

- a. Think her mother is only trying to make her a better person.
  - b. Think that someone should tell the mother about AYSO's positive coaching philosophy - it's not just for coaches.
  - c. Think you'd like to run over to the mother and call her names to see how she likes it.
6. During a game, a red-shirted player is called names by players from the blue team.

You would:

- a. Yell very loudly, "Knock it off, you brats."
  - b. Blow your whistle, then make all the blue players run five laps around the field.
  - c. Tell them sternly to "stop calling names," then when the ball goes out of play, bring them together and tell them that name calling is wrong and anyone who does it again will have to leave the game.
7. During a game, a red-shirted player spits on another red-shirted player.

You would:

- a. Take him over to his coach and tell the coach that this player can't play anymore today and why.
  - b. Have all the other red players stand around and spit on him.
  - c. Make him apologize, then let him have a free kick to show you're not angry with him.
  - d. Tell his mother she has a very bad child and she'd better punish him.
8. During a game, a red-shirted player gets hit by a ball kicked by a blue-shirted player. He falls to the ground crying.

You would:

- a. Tell him to stop being a baby and get up.
- b. Blow your whistle and have the coach look at him (and probably his mom and dad too).



- c. Yell "keep playing" and order the coach and parents to stay off the field until you give them permission to come on.
  - d. Blow your whistle and yell at the blue-shirted player for kicking the ball.
9. During a game, a red-shirted player scores a goal against the blue team.

You would:

- a. Award the goal and allow the red team to kick-off.
  - b. Award the goal and allow the blue team to kick-off.
  - c. Disallow the goal because the blue goalkeeper is crying.
  - d. Give the red player a high five and congratulate her on smoking the goalkeeper,
10. After the game, several players from both teams run up to you and say, "thank you for reffing our game."

You would:

- a. Tell them not to talk to the referee.
- b. Hold a grudge against those who didn't say thanks.
- c. Feel pretty good about yourself.

### **ANSWERS:**

1. a   2. b   3. c   4. a   5. b   6. c   7. a   8. b   9. b   10. c

If you scored six or more right, with a little training you can be a first class referee! Don't dodge destiny. Enroll now!

# Appendix 6: Methods for Retaining Referees

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**Mentoring:** New referees who have been assigned a mentor are generally more successful. Referees who have a high level of support are more likely to stay in the program.

**Training:** Well-trained referees are more likely to feel comfortable on the field. Referees do their best jobs when they are confident that they know what to do and how to do it.

**Uniforms and equipment:** Providing referees with uniforms and equipment demonstrates that the region values their contributions.

**Meetings:** In-service, regular (monthly?) meetings, guest speakers, specific topics and social events all provide opportunities to exchange ideas and gain support. Keeping in touch with other referees will prevent referees from becoming isolated and frustrated.

**Encourage further training** and explain how it helps the referee and the program. Taking additional training helps volunteers become better referees.

**Encourage further opportunities** (mentor, assessor, instructor, administrator, etc.). There are a many additional opportunities to contribute to the program. Volunteers who are fully committed to the program are most likely to continue to participate as referees.

**Show appreciation for Regional Referees.** Emphasize their importance. The largest percentage of games is in the younger age divisions where the need is greatest (although taking intermediate training helps volunteers become better referees).

**Provide referees with water/drinks.** If your region has a snack bar, make sure water or drinks are provided free of charge to referees throughout the day. One drink and item from the snack bar for a day's work is another small way to show appreciation for the referees.

Any other ways of saying, "thank you."

# Appendix 7: Grow Some Volunteers

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(Reprinted from InPlay)

We need to reach out to women and men who fear involvement in what they perceive as a macho-dominated environment.

We need to persuade reluctant volunteers that they will grow and have fun as they learn to help children grow and have fun.

We need to target and solicit volunteers for whom nurturing children is their primary motive. Thus, we increase the number of women and men who understand and facilitate the AYSO mission.

Of course, the people best equipped to do this are those of you who already coach and referee in AYSO. You are the front line of volunteer recruitment. To help your regions and yourselves, consider sponsoring a volunteer event.

## **Have a Party!**

At player registration, find women and men who are interested in learning how AYSO helps their children grow and develop through soccer. (That should be just about every parent.) Invite them to an evening or weekend session of two hours or less, in which they will learn how the program works and how they can have an impact on its quality and effectiveness. As an incentive, perhaps everyone who attends, whether they sign up as a volunteer or not, receives a pair of shin guards, or a practice ball, or a clipboard, or some other token of appreciation. (Note: Free food is always a big draw too. If you feed them, they will come.)

## **What To Say: Divide the time among these topics:**

- AYSO Philosophies
- Coaching skills demonstration and "hands on" participation (Keep it simple. Focus on the kids more than the game)
- Officiating skills demonstration and "hands on" participation (Keep it simple. Focus on the kids more than the game)
- Board and staff skills demonstration and "hands on" participation (Keep it simple)
- Volunteer discovery time to discuss questions/concerns



- AYSO Team Training (set aside time to divide the group by gender to offer the opportunity to discuss gender fears, concerns, and other issues regarding coaching, refereeing, and being an AYSO volunteer)
- Of course, be sure to have volunteer registration forms on hand and a list of the positions in the region that need filling

# Appendix 8: AYSO Team Opening Game Scenario

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**Objectives:**

Reinforce the importance of the AYSO team, made up of the volunteer coaches, referees, and parents/supporters.

Remind all members of the AYSO Team (coaches, referees, and parents/supporters) that the performance of the AYSO team is critical to the success of AYSO.

Show that the game is played in a positive environment, with all members of the AYSO team working together to the best of their abilities.

Positioning on the field: two circles of people, made up of:

- Outer circle: The coaches, referees, and team parents/supporters.
- Inner circle: The players

The Trainer states the following:

Welcome to AYSO; the American Youth Soccer Organization. AYSO is the premier Youth Development Organization in the world. AYSO trains our volunteers, coaches, and referees to create a safe, fair, fun, and positive environment for our children. All the volunteer coaches and referees work very hard for our kids so they can have fun and develop a healthy, positive self-image.

All soccer games have three teams: two teams of soccer players, and the AYSO team.

The AYSO team is made up of the trained volunteer coaches and referees, and the parents, grandparents, and others who care about the kids (point around at the players).

Every volunteer on the AYSO team has a job:

- Parents/supporters: to encourage and support all the players.
- Coaches: to give positive instruction and encouragement to the players.
- Referees: to control the game; to make it safe, fair, and fun.

All members of the AYSO team need to work together and support each other so the team is successful in helping the kids develop a positive self-image.

**Demonstration:**

Have the volunteers (coaches, referees, and team parents/supporters) in the outer circle form a circle and hold hands. Tell them to hold tight and then lean back. State "the only way they can keep from falling is to hold on and support each other. This is the essence of the AYSO team; working together and supporting each other to help the kids succeed." Have them return to a normal position.

**Trainer:**

All of the members of the AYSO team: coaches, referees, and parents need to work together, support each other, and never forget, "It's for the kids."

While the players are displaying their soccer skills, the members of the AYSO team need to display their skills as:

- Positive, encouraging, supportive parents
- Positive, instructive coaches
- Positive and caring referees.

If all the members of the AYSO team concentrate on doing their job the best way they can, then AYSO will work as a soccer program, and more importantly, as a youth development program; the biggest winners of all will be the kids.

Thank you all for being here and for caring about the kids. Have a good game and a wonderful season!!

# Appendix 9: Recruiting Youth Referees

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## History of the Youth Referee Program

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The first youth referee program was started in Sunnyvale, California in the early 1970s. It was directed by Dick Servaes and Nick Mastrella.

In conjunction with that first group of young referees, they created the “Player Referee Organization of Sunnyvale (PROS).” In many parts of the country, youth referee programs are still called “PRO” programs.

Since that time, many regions have followed in their footsteps, some with more success than others, but all the while increasing the number of young men and women who give of themselves in order to help the players in the American Youth Soccer Organization.

In the spring of 1998, former AYSO National Referee Administrator Brian Davies created a Task Force under the chairmanship of Tony Gilbert, former Section 11 Referee Administrator. The assigned task was to find ways to promote the growth of youth referee programs throughout AYSO. One of the first accomplishments of the group was the editing and expanding of this handbook to reflect current practices and to offer additional suggestions.

Our appreciation is extended to the following contributors to this handbook:

**Brian Davies**, former National Referee Administrator

**Tony Gilbert**, former Section 11 Referee Administrator

**Jo Ann Bob**, former Section 7 Director of Referee Instruction

**Daniel Barrett**, former Section 6 Referee Administrator

**Jason Hintz**, former Section 1 PRO Director

In 2004 Jane Vanderhook was appointed as the National Director for Youth and Women Referee Development on the National Referee Technical Committee (later named the National Referee Council). Jane continued refining the Youth Referee Program and added the Youth Referee Manual as an additional resource for youth referees. In 2008 Patrick Streeter was appointed as a member of the newly formed National Referee Advisory commission and became the Point of Contact (POC) for youth referees and currently coordinates the AYSO National Youth Referee Program. Patrick is an





excellent resource and welcomes suggestions for program improvement. Patrick can be reached by email at [NRP.youth@ayso.org](mailto:NRP.youth@ayso.org)

## **Establishing a Youth Referee Program**

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When establish a youth referee program, the first priority for your region is to recruit a Youth Referee Coordinator. The coordinator should be an adult who has demonstrated the ability to relate positively to youths on their own terms. Most regions have that one individual who the kids all flock to or go out of their way to speak to. That individual is one of the adults on the field each weekend having as much fun as the kids. You'll know that person when you see him/her.

Once you have found a Youth Referee Coordinator, there is a sequence of events which you should follow in order to ensure the maximum opportunity for success. That sequence will be dealt with in the following sections.

## **Preparation and Presentation of a Youth Referee Proposal for Regional Approval**

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As you plan to start a Youth Referee Program, or even if a program already exists, it is a good idea to make a formal presentation to the Regional Board of Directors. The purpose of the presentation is to gain support for the way in which you propose to recruit, train and generally manage the program.

The formal presentation should be made at least two months before you expect to have the youths ready to referee. This will give you time to properly prepare for the start of the season.

The presentation should be fairly brief but must cover the basic expectations, both of what the program expects from the region and what the region can expect in return.

The Board needs to understand what the program is about and how much it will cost. Specifically, you should discuss:

- Target ages and expected size of group
- Proposed method of recruiting and training
- Uniform and equipment requirements
- Budget requirements
- Proposed method of organizing the program
- Expected coach and adult support at games
- Proposed method of assigning youth referees
- Board responsibility for support of youth referees

As previously stated, the presentation should be fairly brief (about 15 minutes) and the more organized you are the better result you are likely to get. You should also be prepared to respond to questions during and after the presentation.

Remember: If you fail to prepare, prepare to fail.

### **Communication to Region about the program**

Once you have received approval from the board, communication to the region about the program is vital. The adult coordinators of the Youth Referee Program will be well advised, with the agreement and support of the regional commissioner, regional referee administrator and regional coach administrator, to meet with the coaches in the divisions in which the youth referees will work. During the meeting, the program goals should be discussed with the coaches and their support requested. In most cases, you will then find that problems will be minimized.

Attendance at divisional meetings and communicating with the coaches of the teams will ensure a higher level of cooperation among all members of the AYSO family.

### **Recruitment of Potential Youth Referees**

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Although every facet of a successful Youth Referee Program is important, you could justifiably say that recruitment is the most important element. Without the youth who will make up the program, there is no program.

With this in mind, you must find ways to recruit the youth who will eventually make your program successful.

How do you do it? We suggest you start by reading all you can on the subject of recruiting.

There is a lot of helpful information in the National Referee Program Manual booklet available on the [AYSOtraining.org](http://AYSOtraining.org) website and from the AYSO Supply Center (888 243 2976).

Most programs start with just a few youth referees. They are usually the sons or daughters of adult referees who have seen their mothers or fathers referee games. Do not worry if you don't have a large number sign up at first.

Once the youth start to referee, other players in the region will see them and become interested themselves. They will ask the youth referees if they are having fun doing it and the answer will almost every time be "you bet!" Then other youths will sign up and your youth referee program will begin to grow.

Form an active group of recruiters who, much like salespeople, are able to approach prospects and sell them on the benefits of becoming a referee. Some of the benefits of a youth referee program to both the youth and to the regions which might be cited are listed below:

#### **Benefits to Youth**

- Increase fun and make new friends
- Be a role model
- Earn respect
- Earn Community Service hours (possible credit for High School and College)
- Learn decision making skills
- Increase pride and self confidence

- Get an early start on refereeing career
- Develop leadership and critical thinking skills
- Learn the Laws of the Game and become better players
- Be part of an exclusive club

**Benefits to the Region**

- Increase the referee pool
- Gain more knowledgeable referees
- Require less training in the basics
- Gain potential long term commitment (youth through adult)
- Increase retention of players
- Present good role models for others
- Increase the quality of referees (players make good referees when well trained)

Those who took up the challenge to become recruiters will now ask “Where do I find these young people I’m supposed to sell the Youth Referee Program to?” Here are some ideas which might help.

Attend the Regional Registration -- you might not find too many of the right age group attending but you will find parents.

While at registration, have referee equipment available for a “show and tell.” Ask any existing youth referees to be at the registration dressed in uniform, preferably someone who is able to relate positive experiences. They might talk about the increase in self confidence, the feeling of accomplishment, the improved team play, etc. Young referees who give an impression of having enjoyed the experience can be a very strong selling point.

Another opportunity for recruitment is to meet with the coaches of the teams within the correct age range and ask for a chance to speak to their players about becoming PRO referees. You will often have to “sell” the coaches on the program first. Use the same technique you will later use on their players by explaining the benefits. If some of the players are already active in the program, ask for their help in recruiting their friends and teammates.

Ask to speak at scout meetings, boys and girls clubs, youth groups, etc.

Another possibility is to visit your local high schools and ask to be allowed to speak to the students, or at the very least, pass out information on the program.

Whenever you meet with people, always be prepared to explain the program. Have specific information on how and when the training will be done, how long it will take, what level match the new referee will be expected to officiate and what equipment and uniform the region will be providing.

**Last, but not least:**

Always be ready to listen to (and hear) any ideas for recruiting which might be offered, especially if those ideas are offered by the youngsters themselves. Who knows better than they what attracted them to refereeing.



Be prepared to sell the program at every opportunity; project a positive, upbeat image and good things will happen.

## **Orientation of Youth Referees and Program Organization**

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Once you have completed your recruiting efforts and you have a list of potential player referees, it is essential that you bring them together for an orientation and organization meeting. This meeting should be held prior to the first scheduled training session, and parents as well as the player referees themselves should be encouraged to attend.

The purpose of the meeting is to introduce everyone and to explain what is expected from each of the participants in the program and what they can expect in return.

### **Expectations**

What is expected of the youth referee might vary from region to region but will certainly include a commitment to complete the scheduled training, to make themselves available for some minimum number of games during the season, and to be reliable in completing their assignments. The region will also expect each youth referee to conduct themselves in a professional manner at all times, to be a good example to players, coaches, spectators and other referees.

In return, the region will expect to provide training opportunities, uniforms and equipment and most importantly, moral and physical support.

It is imperative that the region makes a commitment to support the player referees by not allowing players, coaches or spectators to intimidate or bully youth referees. Any form of abuse must not be tolerated and if it occurs must be dealt with firmly and immediately. Vigorously support the principles and procedures of the Kid Zone program. This should be true for any referee program but is a must if the youth referee program is to be a success.

Ensure a responsible adult mentor is readily available at games being officiated by youth referees, in the event adult assistance is needed. These mentors also need to be well trained and understand the importance of allowing the youth referees to manage the match independently. Mentors should not intervene on behalf of the youth referees unless absolutely necessary.

## **Initial Training and Certification Of Youth Referees**

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While the teaching of young referees need not differ greatly from the teaching of adults, it is important to be aware that the vocabulary of young people is not as extensive as adults. Always try to use language they will understand. Both do, indeed, have the same basic understanding of safety and fairness. There are some areas of discussion, however, where instructors probably could spend slightly more or less time when teaching young referees:

Adult referees are shown the structure of AYSO and the structure of AYSO's referee program.

They can then see the support AYSO gives its referees and the many opportunities available.

Young referees would be better served with specific information about those people who will support them and specific additional programs available in which they can participate.

Adult referees can understand what we mean when we say to “act like a concerned parent on the field.” Young referees can instead be encouraged to act on behalf of the worried moms and dads on the sidelines. They need specific instructions about stopping the game every time a player thinks he/she is injured. They need to be told that the frequent stops and calling the coach on the field (even though the player isn’t really injured) is just part of the game for little kids.

Young referees have often seen referees call trifling and doubtful offenses. We can explain this as adult error due to having never played the game. (Since many of these young referees are also players we should be careful not to undermine this young person’s respect for the authority of the referee who does his/her games.) Instead, we can compliment young referees and say that they have a much better idea of when play should be stopped to restore fairness or safety. Kids have a very strong sense of fairness. We simply need to point to the places where it is appropriate for referees to teach players instead of applying the letter of the Law.

Young referees are very curious about offside and appreciate it being included in their training even though they might not need it. Likewise they ask questions about high school type fouls that we would rather not spend time discussing. The instructor may want to promise to teach the players about the more exciting foul calls at the end of the clinic. In that way a clear focus can be maintained on how to referee a game of six year olds and still give the players a chance to discuss calls and problems they have seen in their own high school level games.

## **Certification**

There are three certification entry levels in AYSO: Assistant Referee, U-8 Official, and Regional Referee. The Assistant Referee is trained to assist in any age division in AYSO; the U-8 Official is authorized to officiate short-sided matches in the Under 8 Divisions only while the Regional Referee is authorized to officiate all AYSO short-sided or eleven-a-side matches. Generally it is advisable not to schedule youth referees to officiate matches with players who are older than the youth referee. Some experience as an Assistant Referee is wise before assignment to a U-8 match which may lead to more challenging assignments in Under 10 age divisions and above as appropriate.

The AYSO Referee Certification and Training Program levels and the requirements for reaching these levels are defined in the AYSO Referee Certification and Training chart. Consult your region, area or section referee staff for more information.

Training requirement for youth referees is the same as for any other referee. Initially, the youth referee program must concentrate on the entry level certification courses where the youth referees learn the must knows of the Law and then enough of the techniques and mechanics of refereeing and running the line so that they may be assigned to their on the job training.

Youth referees generally do not want to be treated differently than adult referees. However, you should consider the following when planning your training program:

1. To be certified at any level they must complete the National Referee Program training requirements for that level.
2. Most of those who join a youth referee program have already had several years of soccer experience. This gives them a great start as they have developed a “feel” for the game which is difficult to acquire without actually playing.
3. Young people have an inborn sense of fair play which is sometimes lost by the time we become adults. Nurture this. It is an essential ingredient for a referee.
4. It is quite likely that young men and women will suffer from a lack of confidence and might be intimidated when they are expected to be in control of the players and coaches, not to mention the spectators, in a particular game.
5. Keeping these things in mind, the training program should recognize their “feel” for and knowledge of the game while being designed to improve their self-esteem and confidence.
6. Mix the sessions between classroom and field. If possible, follow up any classroom training with a field session dealing with the same subject. Get the students involved and participating as soon as possible; they learn more by doing than by watching. As a relief from these structured sessions show them a soccer-related movie or video.
7. Don’t try to teach too much at once. It is not necessary for new referees to know everything about the misconduct side of Law 12, for instance, when they will be dealing with six and seven year old players. Concentrate on the ‘must knows’ of the Law at first.
8. Teach the basic fundamentals of the Diagonal System of Control, especially Assistant Referee signaling and positioning. Let the new youth referees practice as much as possible before being assigned to “real” matches.
9. Ask questions while instructing. Let the students show what they have learned from playing the game. It is surprising how much they already know and this knowledge will be understood and retained more successfully once it is realized that they already knew it.
10. Teach “The Field of Play,” for instance, by leading them through it with questions and answers and other little bits of information thrown in. Sometimes the class will surprise you with what they already know.
11. Teach from the beginning how important it is to understand the spirit and intent of the Law. The letter of the Law, although meant to convey the intent, can be confusing.

As a master of referee instruction, Ken Aston, told us:

The Laws embody three important tenets of the game which referees must uphold:

- Enjoyment: Soccer is, after all, a game and as such should provide a pleasant experience for the participants. (FUN)
- Equality: All players regardless of size should have an equal opportunity to contribute to the efforts of their teams. (FAIR)
- Safety: The players must be protected from injury. (SAFE)
- If you are able to convey this concept to the students and they truly understand, then they are well on their way to becoming effective referees.

## **Practice Sessions for Youth Referees**

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There should be as much opportunity as possible given for practice in non-threatening situations. One way is to include refereeing practice sessions in your training program.

1. The following are guidelines for conducting the practice session:
2. Set up your playing teams ahead of time and explain what is expected of them. If there are enough youth referees in your program the teams could be made up from them. If not, ask some lower division teams to help. Select a coordinator for each team to help keep them organized during the practice.
3. Select your referee teams ahead of time and make sure they know what is expected of them. Use different referee teams for each mini-game to ensure all your trainees are given an opportunity to learn.
4. Mini-games should be 10 minutes long with 10 minutes between for an evaluation period.
5. During the game, one staff member should help each of the assistant referees while the others should keep the non-playing youth referees under control and focused on what is happening on the field. This is meant to be a learning experience for them also. If the next refereeing team is not playing they should be helped to prepare for their game. Staff should rotate their assignments periodically.
6. During the evaluation period all youth referees on the field must be brought together to participate. Keep the evaluation within the allowed time limit.
7. The actual evaluation period should be conducted in the following sequence:
  - a. Select a group leader from the staff to control the evaluation, rotate this assignment.
  - b. Ask the referee team for their impressions of how the game was controlled.

- c. Ask for comments from the players (if they are youth referees) and those who were watching, require that criticism be constructive and positive with the intention of helping the referee team to improve their performance.
- d. Group leader summarizes the evaluation and includes any additional suggestions. Remember the time limits.
- e. Close with applause for the referee team for a job well done.
- f. Begin next mini-game or close session as applicable.

## **Scheduling and Assigning Youth Referees**

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If you asked ten referee administrators how they schedule their region's referee assignments, you would probably get ten different answers. These would very likely range from "manually, day by day" to "by computer, for the full season." You would probably get the same sort of answer if you asked about how the referees were notified of their assignments.

The important thing for you to remember is that no matter what method is used, it is only effective if the proper level referee is at the proper field at the proper time.

If you want to achieve all these proper results, you must now create a system which will give you the best opportunity to do so. The following are some "rules of thumb" which you might find useful as you make your plans:

### **Agree on divisions the Youth Referee Program will cover**

This should be done in consultation and with the agreement of the regional commissioner, the coach administrator and the referee administrator. When you have their support especially that of the coach administrator, the coaches, players and parents in that division are more likely to cooperate.

### **Form a Scheduling Team**

You might feel that you should do all the scheduling yourself and in some ways, especially when there are not many games, you might be right. However, if you do you will be denying others the chance to become involved and to gain experience. You might also be speeding up your own "burnout."

The scheduling team could be composed of a mix of adults and youth referees and might or might not include you. Around four to six people would be adequate, with the scheduling, telephoning and other duties shared by the team members. One person should be designated to act as a "team leader" and decisions should be reached by consensus.

### **Make an Availability Chart for the season**

Most of the young men and women in your Youth Referee Program will be playing as well as refereeing so you must schedule them around their games. They will also have other commitments, and if you are able to define what these are right from the start, your job will be much easier.



### **Schedule in advance based on the Availability Chart**

Some referee administrators are able to schedule assignments for the whole season. However you do the scheduling, remember to rotate assignments as referees and assistant referees. Verify each week that the availability commitments of the youth referees have not changed.

### **Plan for last minute changes**

No matter how carefully we schedule there will always be last minute cancellations. The important thing is to have an agreed upon procedure for handling this problem which everyone understands. It is recommended that you require those who are forced to cancel to let a designated member of the scheduling team know as soon as possible and let the team make the necessary changes.

### **Assigning**

- **Mail assignments in advance**

Sending a pre-printed postcard with the assignments written in will be well worth the effort, as it gives the youth referees advance notice and more time to reschedule if there is some unforeseen conflict.

- **Post assignments at an agreed location**

Posting the current and advance assignments at one of the most appropriate fields or some other good location is another way to get the word out. This should be used to supplement the postcards, not as an alternative.

- **Meet once a week to confirm assignments**

This might seem like overkill, but holding a short meeting at a regularly scheduled time and place gives everyone an opportunity to cover many other subjects in addition to the assignments.

- **Telephone to confirm**

This could take the place of the regular meeting but will probably be necessary in some cases even if you hold the meeting. It is always good practice to talk to your youth referees every week to find out if they have any problems and to confirm their assignments. Otherwise, you will probably have some unexpected no shows.

What you are saying right now is, "How am I going to do all these things?" Well, the secret is good organization and lots of help. Don't try to do the job alone. Keep control of things, but allow others to take responsibility.

Note: One of the most common reasons that youth referees fail to meet their commitments is that they do not have their own transportation. It is essential that this be considered when making and confirming assignments.

### **Follow-up Training and Advancement for Youth Referees**

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In addition to the suggestions given above, you should continue the training process at your regular meetings. Set aside about 30 minutes at each meeting and use it for follow-up training. You might want to have a discussion of problems or hold an open forum or

maybe even a Law quiz. You could also invite a guest speaker occasionally. There are many good speakers available. There are experienced coaches, players or referees who will be glad to speak about soccer from their own perspective. Understanding the other person's point of view is always an advantage when dealing with the situations likely to be encountered in a refereeing career.

Most importantly, properly plan, organize and communicate your follow-up training opportunities and make sure your instructors and speakers understand what your expectations are and all should go well.

The lesson plans for all of the AYSO referee courses and individual modules are available on the [aysohelp.org](http://aysohelp.org) web site. The curriculum in these lesson plans should be followed for training both youth and adult referees.

### **Advancement**

One of the most important reasons for providing referees with follow-up training is to help them improve and become more effective. However, from their point of view another reason is to prepare them for higher level grades. Training, evaluations and examinations make youth referees ready for greater challenges. Each child grows at his or her own pace and it is important to manage each individually as much as possible. Have guidelines that are clear and meet AYSO's requirements for advancement as a referee.

The AYSO Referee Certification and Training chart defines the requirements for higher grade levels in detail. Consult with your area or section referee staff for additional information. Each time they move up, have a mentor help them with their first couple of games. The following is a pattern that has been used successfully for the gradual advancement of youth referees:

### **U-8 Official**

U-8 is a good age group to start in because it is played on a small field and only limited aspects of the Laws are enforced.

Look for: ability to show up at a field on time and take charge of starting a game (inspect players, do coin toss, get a ball, etc.), ability to start and restart a game correctly and confidence that they know they are making the right decision; ability to use a strong whistle; and some demonstration of their foul recognition abilities.

### **Assistant Referee**

Regional Referees can start as an Assistant Referee (AR) until they think they are ready to be the center referee.

Look for: getting throw-in signals correct and consistently staying with the second to last defender.

### **Referee in Under 10 Girls Matches**

This level has more challenges: Keeping score, marking up game cards with substitutions, calling offside, working with Assistant Referees or club linesmen and running a larger field.

Look for: complete confidence in running a game, including things like “overruling throw-ins” (the Assistant Referee points one way, but the referee feels it’s the other way and sticks with the call); a moderate level of foul recognition -- calls the obvious fouls correctly though may miss the subtle fouls; and clear signaling and “selling” of the call with clear arm motions and a strong whistle.

### **Referee in U-12 Girls Matches**

Look for: confidence to “stand up to” a dissenting coach or parent; effective calling of offside; and the ability to start calling less obvious fouls.

### **Referee in U-10 Boys Matches**

The “aura” of having a youth referee do a game begins to wear out at the Under 10 Boys level. The parents and coaches expect good refereeing and they may question the assignment of a youth referee to their game. So the youth referee starts at a disadvantage and really needs to be effective to gain the confidence of the sidelines. Problems outside the touchlines can overwhelm a youth referee if he/she is not ready, and it can hurt the youth referee and tarnish the PRO program, if not handled correctly. This reinforces the need to strictly enforce a zero tolerance for abuse of our youth referees. The good news is that once the parents and coaches see how well the youth referee is doing, they will be accepting and supportive.

Look for: At this level it is important to get most of the foul calls correct; to know most of the DFKs and IFK fouls; to properly administer Penalty Kicks; to have high confidence in dealing with dissenting coaches; to be able to handle the “hot” game where the sidelines and players get really excited, and to start talking to the kids who foul aggressively.

### **Referee in U-12 Boys Matches**

Look for: Understanding of the diagonal system and correct use, ability to work with certified Assistant Referees, proper positioning on restarts, use the voice to control players (comments like “#2, watch your pushing” and “play on”) confidently controlling dissent by players or the sideline through warnings, cautions and send offs, knowing the “advanced” parts of offside, parrying by goalkeeper and having good foul recognition.

## **Mentoring Youth Referees and Dealing with Difficult Adults**

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### **Mentoring**

Identify a list of potential referee mentors and invite them to help the youth referee program. If a good number have not attended an assessor course, you may want to consider holding a special youth mentor training session to discuss the unique features of mentoring a youth referee.

It’s a good idea to have a mentor at every game a youth referee is assigned to whether the youth is centering or assisting. The mentor can ensure there is a liaison between the youth and the adults on the field as well as provide encouragement and feedback about performance after the game. A word or two from the mentor to coaches and even spectators prior to (or during) the game about the need to respect the “fully qualified”

youth referee(s) who have been assigned to the game may encourage more thoughtful consideration and support for the efforts of the young official(s).

Feedback is probably the most important type of follow-up that can be provided. If handled correctly, a positive review of a referee's performance immediately following a match can go a long way toward creating the feeling that refereeing is worthwhile and more importantly, can instill pride and improve effectiveness.

The Referee Mentor Program is an AYSO program designed to offer a helping hand to new and developing referees of all ages. A copy of the Referee Mentor booklet can be obtained online at [AYSOtraining.org](http://AYSOtraining.org).

### **Dealing with difficult adults**

Unfortunately, some regions have a number of incidents where adults abuse youth referees. This can also happen where no score or standings are kept! Here are a number of suggestions that may help counter the problem:

- Make it clear at coaches meetings that youth referees are off limits and that the region will not tolerate any abuse of youth referees. Enlist the aid of the coaches to help educate parents and spectators about what is expected of them.
- Have adult mentors at every game
- It is imperative that the Youth Referee Program demands from the region and its leadership a commitment to support the player referees by not allowing players, coaches or spectators to intimidate or bully the young referees. Any form of abuse must not be tolerated and if it occurs, must be dealt with firmly and immediately. This should be true for any referee program but is a must if the youth referee program is to be a success.
- Support the Kid Zone program and utilize the materials available from AYSO such as pamphlets, pins, banners, pledges, etc.

Usually, preventative measures will avoid extreme situations. Division commissioners and referee mentors can step in if they are around to avoid something getting out of hand. Most problems occur with new youth referees who happen to run into a hyperactive coach. Often the youth referee will take care of the situation. Some youths can calmly and firmly "go to the sideline" and talk with the coach. When the youth referee has the confidence to do this, it works and the coach calms down.

## **Youth Referee Camps and Competitions**

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### **Youth Referee Camps**

If it were possible for all youth referees to attend a Youth Referee Camp, it would greatly benefit AYSO refereeing as a whole. You might consider sending some of your most promising and reliable youth referees to a camp each year as a reward for them and as an incentive to others or you may want to start your own youth referee camp and invite youth referees from outside your region. Contact your area, section or national referee staff for more information about youth referee camps.

## **Youth Referee Competitions**

In addition to the camps, some sections are now sponsoring youth referee competitions. These competitions are modeled after the Ken Aston Cup where teams of referees competed against one another to determine which team best represented AYSO refereeing. The teams were assessed and allocated points based upon established criteria. The team with the most points was then awarded the Aston Cup. The most important part of these competitions was that each team was assessed at every match they officiated and were given positive and helpful feedback. The National Referee Program encouraged and supported sections which sponsored these programs.

A youth referee competition is valuable and an exciting way of stimulating the interest and improving the performance of young referees.

The following suggested recommendations should be considered when putting together a youth referee competition. Each competition will be working under different circumstances and must therefore adjust their rules accordingly.

The bulleted items could be included in a competition flier/handout. This would make it much easier for the competitors and their parents to understand how the competition works.

### **Referee Teams**

Each referee team must have an adult contact. Competition staff should communicate through the contact to make all arrangements and set up schedules, etc.

- All teams **MUST** have an adult contact who will act as the liaison between the team and the competition.
- Three person teams are preferable, but individual referees may apply. They will be teamed with referees from other regions.

Decide on the age group of the competing referees, it may be unfair to have 17 or 18-year-olds competing with 12-year-olds:

- Competing referees must be between the ages of 12 and 16. Applicants aged 17 and 18 will be accepted but cannot win the Competition. The older applicants will receive the benefit of assessments from trained assessors and the participation awards.

### **Awards**

Have participation awards for all the participants and plaques for the finalists.

### **Pre-Competition Meeting**

All the referees and their parents/adult contacts will want to know in detail what's in store for them over the weekend. Provide them with complete information on the competition.

A good time to present gifts to the youth referees in recognition of their participation, especially if they are referee uniforms or equipment, is at a pre-competition meeting.

## **Level of Play**

Consider the level of play you expect from the playing teams in the competition and ensure that all referees are AYSO certified and capable of running a center on a U-12 game. The competition will be a great experience and an excellent opportunity for experienced youth referees to improve their skills, BUT, the competition is NOT an occasion to train new referees!

The age group of the playing teams used in the competition will depend on the experience of the referees. Unless there is a large percentage of older children in the referee group, U-12 division should be the oldest the referees should handle.

## **Assigning of Games**

To make the scoring as equitable as possible, each team should referee the same division(s). If they are to cover three games in the first round, each team could cover, for example, one Boys U- 10, one Girls U-12 and one Boys U-12.

Varying the ages of the playing teams also allows for the possibility that different members of a referee team may have varying levels of experience.

Referee teams should officiate in at least three games and each member of the team must do one center. Each team will referee two games on Saturday and one on Sunday morning.

## **Final Round**

After the points have been counted at the end of the first three rounds, call the referees together for a meeting and then announce which team made it to the final round.

This meeting should be made as ceremonial as possible with short speeches from visiting “experts,” national or section staff, etc. Be sure to acknowledge the performance of all the referees, not just the top three teams. Individual referees whose teams did not make the final round can be singled out for special recognition.

The three teams receiving the most points will be asked to referee a final game on Sunday afternoon to determine the winner.

## **Assessors**

Choose only the most experienced assessors, preferably those with experience in dealing with young people. There should be at least 2 assessors (three is preferable) for each game, as all three team members are to be evaluated.

Have an assessor meeting chaired by the “Chief Assessor” prior to the competition. The logic of how he/she wants the assessments handled must be fully explained to keep the general level of assessing and scoring as uniform as possible.

## **Scoring**

This is the most difficult aspect of the competition. Here are the most obvious problems:

- Different ages and experience of the referees
- Different levels of quality and challenge in the games covered

- If a sufficient number of games are not available to allow each referee team to handle the same number of games in each division, assessing will be made even more difficult.
- Different opinions of the assessors
- Weighting each aspect of the referees' duties:
  - Appearance
  - Mechanics
  - Teamwork
  - Foul Recognition
  - Courage, etc.

## **Recognition and Review**

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When all of the things we have previously discussed have been done and a season of youth refereeing is complete, you can relax, right? Wrong! You must still put the finishing touch on the season and start preparing for the next season.

Start by recognizing those who participated. Many volunteers will have worked hard to make the program a success. Find some way to recognize and reward this effort, if only with a letter of thanks.

As for the youth referees themselves, it is said that virtue is its own reward, but it will not hurt to be a little materialistic. While in AYSO it is not permissible to pay referees, you may reward the referees in other ways. For example, you can have a post season pizza party or give away referee shirts or soccer bags or tickets to the movies.

Give it some thought before the season begins and I am sure you will find something right and proper for your region's program.

### **Program Review**

Finally, you need to evaluate the program: What went right, what went wrong. Prepare a short questionnaire and use it to survey your youth referees, coaches, regional officers, etc. Once you have the responses, spend some time understanding and evaluating them and, using your own experience and thoughts, decide what, if anything, should be done differently. In this way you can begin to prepare for an even more successful Youth Referee Program next season.

While the old saying "If it ain't broke, don't fix it" might be a little out of date, it does have some truth to it. However, it should not be used as an excuse for not changing those things which need to be changed.



We hope this booklet will help get you started on a journey which will enrich your life as well as the lives of the young participating referees. Increasing the number of competent, qualified officials in the regions will also be appreciated.

If you have questions or you need further information, feel free to contact your area or section referee administrator or Patrick Streeter, National Referee Advisory Commission Member, Point of Contact for Youth referees at: [NRP.youth@ayso.org](mailto:NRP.youth@ayso.org)

***Good luck, enjoy the experience and... Play On!***