

Advice to Referees A Youth Perspective

Navigating the referee world can be both a difficult and rewarding experience. Earning money, building relationships, and seeing soccer from a unique perspective are all equally fulfilling. However, all matches are full of potential situations that we may or may not be prepared for. Therefore, as the fall season is off and running, here are some tips to success:

Professionalism: Yes, every referee has heard this word before. However, defining “professionalism” in a referee’s world can be tough. The degree of professionalism varies depending on where you are. For instance, showing up in a USSF Polo might be over the top at a local summer tournament, but perfectly normal at State Cup or DA matches. Here are a couple tips that work for EVERY match you officiate:

1.) Be early, not on time. Arriving to the field 30 minutes before game time is a general rule of thumb but allowing an extra 15 minutes can’t hurt, especially with the never-ending traffic these days. No one will punish you for being early, but being late will upset your assigner, fellow referees, players, coaches, and parents. Don’t be late, it’s a bad idea. Always remember: if you’re on time, you’re late.

2.) Never show up in your referee jersey. Even if you are a brand-new referee and only own yellow, you should always show up wearing something other than what you will be wearing during the match. The same rule applies for after the game: take off your jersey before walking through the parking lot to your car (or parent’s car). You don’t want to run into an unsettled player, coach, or parent in the parking lot wearing a big, bright target literally on your body.

3.) Take in your appearance before starting pre-match activities, like talking with coaches and the coin toss. Are your socks pulled up? Is your jersey properly and completely tucked in? Are you wearing your badge and is it on straight? Do you have everything you will need for the duration of the match on your person (i.e. whistle, flag(s), coin, cards, etc.)? Checking your appearance before the match will not only gain the respect of those watching but will also boost your own confidence.

Confidence: Having confidence is an important quality to possess as a referee. Being the one managing the whistle and flags, we referees have the most authority on the pitch. Carrying ourselves with confidence will nonverbally communicate this with everyone on and off the field. In turn, this will lessen the chance of poor behavior and dissent from coaches and players. However, there is a difference between being confident and arrogant. The best referees learn

from the past and apply this knowledge to future matches. Stick to the strategies that work, while adapting when the game finds it necessary.

Have Some Humility: Most of the calls you will make as a referee are judgement calls, but that's our job. You will make mistakes so admit them. One of the actions that gains the most respect on the field is taking responsibility for what you may have done wrong and fixing it as the match continues. Appealing to coaches' ethos with a "plain folks" appeal will result in finding common ground. Just like coaches, we referees are humans who make mistakes. Sometimes they just need to be reminded of this parallel. All in all, the best thing to do is acknowledge the errors you make with yourself and others, and then learn from them.

Learn from Your Fellow Referees: Along with learning from one's own successes and failures, we must learn from the strengths and faults of others. Listen to stories from other referees' experiences on the field. How could certain situations, like misconduct and mass confrontations, be prevented? How should players and coaches be addressed when they begin travelling down the path of dissent? I've stolen most of my best one liners, comebacks, and tactics from the stories of other referees. Pay attention to how other referees balance the use of authority and personality to communicate verbally and nonverbally. Then employ these tactics into games of your own to see if they work for you as well. We all must remember that we can always learn and improve from watching and listening to our referee family.

Referee Family: This sounds cheesy, I know. However, throughout my years as I referee, I have really come to appreciate this second family. While some of those you will work with will stay strictly professional, most will adopt you into their circle. These people will become your mentors and friends as they work more games with you and share experiences. At the end of the day, all referees have each other's backs whether we like the person or not. If you ever need advice or need to talk post-match, call your fellow referees. Everyone truly wants to see you succeed, myself included.

Sincerely,



Caitlyn Olson

Grade 7 Referee

PCSRA Youth Representative

2018 WA State Young Referee of the Year Finalist