



Recruiting and Retaining Referees

American Youth Soccer Organization

TEL: (800) 872-2976

FAX: (310) 525-1155

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AYSO Vision & Mission

Introduction

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, Fair, and Safe.

That means AYSO referees need to understand the spirit of the Laws of the Game, the intent of the Laws of the Game, and how to apply the Laws appropriately. Referees need to help manage the behavior of players, coaches, or spectators to ensure the enjoyment of everyone. Referees are expected to maintain their composure and set a good example as an authority for our impressionable young players and their families and friends.

Recruiting and retaining volunteers to assume these responsibilities can be challenging but rewarding. This booklet and the AYSO National Referee Program manual offer 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 issues you have, the more likely people are to volunteer to help. This can be particularly true when recruiting referees.

Refereeing should be fun. In developing an AYSO Regional program, concepts of sportsmanship, fair play, and respect for the authority of the referee must be stressed. Then AYSO provides good role models for players to emulate, making refereeing more enjoyable and the prospect of becoming an AYSO referee more attractive.

If there are frequent problems during the games and referees are having difficulty conducting games in an enjoyable atmosphere; it will be difficult to recruit new referees. If your Region is experiencing these types of problems, there are steps that a Region can take to minimize these issues.

Make sure the Regional board takes misbehavior seriously, holds parent orientation meetings, and works cooperatively with coaches, particularly the Regional Coach Administrator. Once everyone sees that bad behavior is dealt with quickly and firmly, you will eliminate the vast majority of it and the job of recruiting and retaining referees will be easier.

The American Youth Soccer Organization, AYSO, was established in 1964 with the dream to bring soccer to American children. 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 18 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, to maximize their enjoyment of the game.

Recruiting Recruiters

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, certain characteristics would be desirable to have in a recruiter. Referee recruiters are somewhat like salespeople, 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 as the people they will be trying to recruit. This can be particularly true when recruiting youth and women. Although recruiters do not need to 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

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 regarding 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 is nice to see a parent spend as much time as you do supporting their team. Would you be willing to help the referees while you are here?"

There might, of course, be lots of questions in the mind of this potential volunteer but at least they 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 they are 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 they could help the referee as an assistant referee or possibly start as an 8U Official. If the volunteer is reluctant to take the training necessary to become a qualified assistant referee or 8U Official, then the recruiter could suggest they could help by being a club linesperson 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 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.

Responses to Common Reasons for Not Refereeing

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 that many consider being 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.

We believe that, with training, your knowledge, appreciation, and enjoyment of the game will increase. Look in AYSOU for a list of referee training courses. Safe Haven is mandatory for any new volunteer. Depending on their state of residence Sudden Cardiac Arrest, Concussion Awareness, Safe Sport, and fingerprinting may also be required.

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 have very 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 can't afford the equipment.

Don't worry about the expense; most AYSO Regions will provide 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 an 8U 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, there are all levels of speed in soccer. The older age division games, with the faster players, are handled by fitter and more experienced referees. There are 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 have fun at the same time.

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

In time, you will develop the confidence to referee. You can also provide vital assistance to the referee by being an assistant referee. Several qualified volunteers only work as assistant referees. Every good referee will tell you that having good assistant referees makes all the difference in a game and twice as many of them are needed.

I'm a woman and I do not see women out refereeing.

Women certainly do referee and are good at it, too. They 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. AYSO will teach you and support you and as with all referees, start you with younger children. You will be mentored until you feel comfortable and confident.

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

AYSO wants you to be one of many. The more females who referee the better it will be for AYSO. In some Regions, female referees have joined together, trained together, and teamed up for games. Most referees are happy to be mentors, to offer their knowledge and support to new referees whether they are male or female.

When and Where to Recruit

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. Before 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 a registration event, it is worthwhile to have recruiters available to talk to the parents. If possible, have both adult and youth referee recruiters, both men and women present, in uniform and smiling. These recruiters can informally talk to potential volunteers in their 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 where to start! 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 their time and demonstrating an interest in the program.

During games, recruiters should also listen to spectators who are 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.
- 14U, 16U, and 19U 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 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 before 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

Certain people will be more likely to be recruited as referees and to remain active in the program. 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 on the parents of the 6U and 8U 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 8U 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 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. They make excellent referees and if you are only recruiting men, you are overlooking half of your potential 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, 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 their wing and personally support and encourage their development under the AYSO Mentor Program.

The goal of the experienced referee and their 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 that 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 the recruitment and retention of referees.

For more information regarding the Mentor program, please go to [AYSOU](#) (click on Volunteer then the AYSOU button after login), and under the Document Library, reference the Referee Mentor Handbook.

Considerations When Interacting with Potential Volunteers

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, choose 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, someone give a "We need volunteers!" pitch to people standing in line at registration.

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 did not volunteer, it is now up to them to come join the team with the best seat in the house. On the field!

Do not forget to follow up! Not contacting a volunteer is a lost opportunity. That person will not step forward to help again.

More Ideas:

- Have recruiters in uniform (and smiling)
- Use women referees to recruit women
- 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 Youth Program for referees under eighteen

In The Beginning:

- Assign a mentor to every new referee before the first game
- Schedule a referee meeting in the first month of the season: 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 and families
- Provide quality equipment and up-to-date books
- Have a visible referee center or tent or table on game days
- Send dedicated referees to further their education at an AYSO referee camp

Use of the Diagonal System in Recruiting and Training

***“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 linespersons. This should be done before 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 will have a team of three officials for all of their 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 linesperson.

When using a club linesperson, an experienced referee will make them feel as comfortable with the job as possible and 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 linespersons 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

Why should girls and women become referees?

Women referees bring unique traits and skills to the game of soccer. By learning how to take advantage of these, they can improve the experience for the players and everyone else involved. When a woman joins the ranks of the AYSO referee team there are several benefits to the Region, to the players, to the other Referees, to the referee herself, and AYSO.

Benefits to the Region and the Players

Recruiting women expands the pool of potential referees

Including women (players and mothers) in the search for referees essentially doubles the possibilities.

Women referees make positive role models for young women players

Many girls play soccer in AYSO. Girls who experience women refereeing are likely to view their participation more positively and to continue to play as they get older. The benefits to girls who play sports have been shown to include academic success and better long-term health. Girls should see their future as one of unlimited possibilities and seeing women in non-traditional roles helps to provide them with tangible evidence of that. 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 young male players

Boys need to view women as capable in many different roles and seeing women as 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.

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, former coach of the United States Women's National Soccer Team said, "You 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

Young children generally spend more time around women than men. While roles are certainly changing, the primary caregivers for most children are women and the vast majority of elementary school teachers are women.

Benefits to the Woman Referee

Earning respect

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

Enjoying the challenge each new game brings

No two games are the same even when played by the same two teams. And no two games are the same when officiated by two different referees. There is always something new and it is seldom boring.

Learning more about the game of soccer and developing a deeper appreciation of the game

By becoming a referee and learning the Laws of the Game, she will understand the calls fellow referees make and be better able to enjoy the “beautiful game”.

Meeting new people and making 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.

Sharing a positive experience with her child

For mothers, being a referee allows them to participate with their children 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.

Feeling 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 contributed to the healthy development of kids is an undeniably good feeling.

Exercising without even thinking about it

Refereeing burns calories and getting one outside in an activity promotes a healthier lifestyle.

Having fun

Yes, refereeing can be fun.

Benefits to the AYSO Organization

The AYSO national organization is enhanced by increasing the number of women referees. Women who accept the challenge of becoming referees should no longer be considered pioneers but should be soccer moms and soccer players who want more kids to experience the fun of playing soccer. Women's participation is appreciated, and all referees are vitally important to the health of AYSO.

Recruiting Youth Referees

Establishing a Youth Referee Program

When establishing a youth referee program, the 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 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 them.

Once you have found a Youth Referee Coordinator, there is a sequence of events that you should follow to ensure the maximum opportunity for success. The sequence will be detailed in the following sections.

Preparation and Presentation of a Youth Referee Proposal for Regional Approval

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 how 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 brief but must cover the basic expectations, both what the program expects from the Region and what the Region can expect in return.

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

- Target ages and expected size of the group
- The proposed method of recruiting and training
- The uniform and other equipment including the Green Youth Regional badge
- Budget requirements
- The proposed method of organizing the program
- Expected coach and adult support at games
- The proposed method of assigning youth referees
- Board responsibility for support of youth referees

As previously stated, the presentation should be 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.

Provide Adequate Training

Once you have recruited potential referees, the first step in retaining them is to provide them with adequate training. New referees must 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 how 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 at AYSOU.

Establish Good Communication

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 IFAB Laws of The Game in print or the phone app
- AYSO National Referee Program Manual
- AYSO Referee Guideline (includes AYSO modifications allowed to the IFAB Laws of the Game)
- AYSO National Rules & Regulations (see AYSO Reference Book)
- 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 registered with their Region, completed their background check, completed the AYSO Safe Haven Certification course (Concussion Awareness is highly recommended and may be required by your State, check with your region), completed Sudden Cardiac Arrest training, completed SafeSport if they are adults and signed up for a referee certification course.

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

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 on 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 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 a 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

Do not 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 trained officials. 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. Offering them a snack or a drink after a hard game is a nice way to show some appreciation. Additionally, 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 display good sportsmanship toward 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.

Motivating Factors

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 challenges
- To be part of the game or own kids' activity
- Want to be in charge of important kid activities. (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 the Laws of the Game
- Don't know soccer
- Lack of self-confidence
- Don't want to be yelled at (scared of the 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 going 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 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 request for help.)
- "We'll train and support you." (That is, you'll be there for them, while 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, referee mentors, 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 (Players, Coaches, Referees).
- Talk about the philosophy and goals of the program.

- Emphasize what makes refereeing enjoyable: fellowship, challenge, interaction with players, enjoyable physical activity, respect, and appreciation, and feeling good that you help kids to have a fun and positive experience.
- Anything else you can think of?

Commitment

All persons who volunteer to become referees make a remarkable commitment to the players and their Regions. Without these dedicated volunteers along with many others, players could not play. In AYSO, we realize that the most valuable thing a volunteer gives is time. We need to be mindful that time must not be squandered. Regions have an obligation to these volunteer referees and all in the AYSO Referee Program must be committed to supporting these referees by ensuring 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 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 of spectators and coaches

It is not any fun to referee while under verbal attack. It is hard to do your best when you are being criticized. Referees will not return under these conditions. Every Regional board must enforce a strict policy regarding respect for referees and consequences for any behavior in conflict with the policy. US Soccer's Referee Abuse Prevention (RAP) policy is designed to change this culture of abuse, and Regional Boards need to enforce it. 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. Experienced female referees should become mentors, demonstrating that female 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. Do not rely on word of mouth to convey important information; 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 referees 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. It is important to demonstrate the value of participation by females by purchasing shirts designed for them.

Work around their schedules

Allowing referees to work around their other obligations will make it more convenient for them to help with games. Regions 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 -- ranging from complete courses to mini-sessions on a narrow topic.

Make sure we have referees at all levels of certification

Regions should encourage more experienced referees to upgrade. Entry-level referees should see that all referees can aspire to do the most challenging matches.

Make sure we do not push them into games they are not ready for

It is a delicate balance between encouraging referees to take on more challenging matches and pushing them into games they are not ready for. Doing a match that you simply cannot 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 ready, provide referees with experienced assistant referees who can provide support as they take on the new challenge of more difficult matches.

Organize a referee club

Forming a club for referees can provide them with the opportunity of sharing their perspective on the refereeing world. If women referees would like to gather, they may feel more comfortable discussing challenges they have faced and learning how other women might have dealt with them.

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. 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 there is a snack bar on game days, make sure referees can get drinks and food. Provide them with uniforms and equipment and maybe with soccer videos, 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.

Shaping the Referee's Image

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 belong?

The general soccer public's perception of who is a good referee has a great effect on both the recruitment and retention of referees. Many coaches and parents see good referees as strong men with plenty of soccer experience. This image becomes self-fulfilling as parents and coaches question and do not trust, any referee who does not fit their image of a good referee. This perception affects recruitment, as potential volunteers avoid involvement because they do not fit their idea of a good referee. Retention is affected when excellent referees are frequently questioned and not trusted simply because they do not 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

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 the referee assessment.

The Regional Referee Program's component is a very different type of service. The Regional Referee Administrator, their delegate, is responsible for developing Referee Mentors. The Referee Mentor Handbook can be downloaded from AYSOU under the Document Library. There is also a Referee Mentor certification course which can be offered annually by the Region. The interaction of mentors with new referees can be a powerful tool for retention. When referees make connections with other referees the program becomes stronger.

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

Methods for Retaining Referees

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. Use Whistle Stop newsletter scenarios to stimulate discussion. Keeping in touch with other referees will prevent referees from becoming isolated and frustrated.

Encourage further training

Explain how it helps the referee and the program. Taking additional training helps volunteers become better referees.

Encourage further opportunities

There are many additional opportunities to contribute to the program: mentor, assessor, instructor, administrator, etc. 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 the Intermediate Referee course 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 one 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."

Abuse of Referees

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. Encourage the “Kids Zone” pledge.

US Soccer has strengthened the Referee Abuse Prevention (RAP) program to support all referees in the country and protect the integrity of the game. Abuse has a clearer definition, sanctions are stronger, and a person’s history will follow them from organization to organization. Regional boards can protect their referees and end the culture of abuse by enforcing this policy.

Coaches and spectators acting in an abusive, offensive, or insulting way are a particular obstacle to the recruiting and retaining of women and youth referees. Every Region must have a zero-tolerance policy for all referees but particularly those regarding the 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 does not 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 in partnership with all the coaches, referees, and parents need to understand that a negative coach is worse than no coach. Therefore, 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.

Appendix 1: Give-it-a-Try Scenarios

Instructions:

While in line or a group - 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 is a problem. If they do not 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 are referee material.

Scenario #1:

The red player and the blue player are running after the ball, which is rolling toward the touchline (sideline) 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, they have correctly identified the offense, 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. The blue player gathers the ball and heads up field.

If the referee stops play, they have correctly identified a careless trip.

Scenario #3:

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

If the referee does not stop play, they have allowed a fair tackle of the ball.

Scenario #4:

The red player dribbles the ball down the touchline and then shoots at the blue 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, they recognize 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, they recognize playing in a dangerous manner by the blue player.

Appendix 2: AYSO Team Opening Game Scenario

Objectives

Reinforce the importance of the AYSO team, made up of 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 announces the following:

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

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

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

Every volunteer on the AYSO team has a responsibility:

- 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.

Every member of the AYSO team ought 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." Close by thanking them for participating.

Trainer:

All of the members of the AYSO team: coaches, referees, other volunteers, and parents need to work together, support each other and never forget, "It is 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, caring referees.

When every member of the AYSO team understands their value to each other, 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!