



Policy to Address Youth Game Official (Referee) Abuse

Idaho Youth Soccer Association

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Provide a set of rules specific to Referee Abuse (Adult or Youth) to allow IYSA to apply strong, swift sanctions to those found guilty of this offense, without undue delay or hardship to all parties involved. This policy is not intended to supersede USSF Policy 531-9—Misconduct Toward Game Officials.

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1. Purpose

The Policy to Address Youth Game Official (Referee) Abuse has been generated to reverse the growing trend of game official abuse within the leagues and tournaments that are sanctioned by the Idaho Youth Soccer Association (IYSA) and US Soccer. It is our intent that this Policy will be enacted to eliminate the physical and verbal abuse of Game Officials, as well as discourage public dissent. We at IYSA want to make it clear that physical or verbal abuse of game officials (Center Referee, Assistant Referee(s), Fourth Official) is as unacceptable as physical or verbal abuse of players. The purpose of this policy is to adopt basic standard sanctions for improper conduct toward game officials.

This Policy is not written in an effort to insinuate all Game Official actions and behaviors are correct, and that all points from coaches and spectators are incorrect. Rather it is to clearly provide sanctioning actions against the physical abuse, verbal abuse and negative criticism against Game Officials. Clearly Game Officials, or Referees, will make mistakes in officiating, particularly in the younger age groups of our organization. All officials must start with their first year of officiating under different levels of youth games and thus will inevitably be assigned as the "Center Official" for a young players match. These same officials may also be officiating at a higher level game than they are comfortable with because of the large turnover of officials causing shortages. Mistakes WILL BE made. When this occurs, there are appropriate procedures for coaches and spectators to report any concerns about the quality of the officiating that they have received. IYSA encourages constructive comments about referees, especially as they are applied to the Laws of the Game. Game Officials must receive positive support from coaches and spectators to continue to grow as an official, no different than the players on the field.

It is NEVER acceptable to abuse or negatively criticize a game official, verbally or otherwise, in ANY situation. IYSA will not tolerate any verbal or other abuse or criticism of referee by any coach or spectator.

2. Jurisdiction of Reported Abuse of Game Officials

The Judicial and Ethics Committee (JEC) shall be the governing committee for all reported abuse of game officials as informed by IYSA staff. The JEC will follow the established procedures for its existence in applying the appropriate sanctions for reported incidents that fall within this policy. These sanctions do not limit, prevent or replace any voluntary or required report or referral of improper conduct, by an adult toward any other adult or by an adult toward any child, to any law enforcement or child protection agency.

Game Official Abuse complaint need not be initiated by the official or the official's governing body. These events can be reported and acted upon by the JEC if witnessed at any IYSA sanctioned event by any member of the IYSA Staff, IYSA Board of Directors, the IYSA Technical Directors, Presidents of IYSA approved clubs in good standing, or the IYSA State Youth Referee Administrator (SYRA). Furthermore, sufficient complaints received by witnesses about game official abuse can be investigated by the JEC and if sufficient evidence exists, can apply this policy to the sanctioning of offending person(s) on behalf of the Game Official.

3. Conflict of Interest

As applied to any incident involving abuse of Game Officials, no member of the convened Judicial and Ethics Committee shall participate in any case or controversy in which that member has a direct interest or the appearance of a conflict of interest, as determined by the Chairperson. Members of the Judicial and Ethics Committee may decline assignment to any case or controversy based on their actual or perceived conflict of interest.

4. Applicability

Each Coach is responsible for his/her actions, the actions of his/her players, and bench personnel (team trainers, assistant coaches, team managers, etc.). Each coach, player and spectator shall at all times support the game officials. Failure to do so will undermine the game officials authority, and has the potential of creating a hostile environment for the players, spectators, coaches, and officials alike. No one is to address the referee in a negative manner (physically, verbally, or non verbal gestures) during or after the game.

5. Policy

Coaches and/or bench personnel may NOT address any member of the game official crew during play except for:

- Responding to a referee initiated communication
- Making a request for substitutions
- Pointing out emergencies or safety issues, such as an injured player on the field
- To request clarification of any call provided the request is courteous, non-argumentative and non-threatening

Negative or critical comments directed to any member of the referee crew from spectators will not be tolerated. All IYSA approved clubs or associate members shall be responsible for the appropriate behavior of their spectators. Coaches are designated on site representative of their club and thus responsible for ensuring all spectators associated with his/her team follows these guidelines relating to communications with a game official.

Although abuse towards any game official will not be tolerated, any abuse towards a youth game official (under the age of 18) will result in more severe disciplinary actions by IYSA JEC. A spectator may not express any dissatisfaction with the officiating to the youth game official. Under no circumstance is it acceptable for a spectator, before, during or after a game, to express any dissatisfaction or critique the referee's performance, other than to thank and compliment the officiating to the youth game official. A coach may not, before, during, or after a game, discuss with a youth referee their critique of the referee's performance, other than to thank and compliment the referee. If a coach is concerned during a game the health and safety of a player or players, or feels any player is at risk, the coach may respectfully and in a non threatening manner, request that the center applies immediate attention to the safety situation. A coach after a game may also provide positive feedback, in a respectful and non threatening manner, that will assist in the growth of the referee. However, at any time, if the official asks the coach to cease discussions, the coach must comply or find themselves in violation of this policy. Idaho Youth Soccer Association recognizes that there is

value in the ability to have positive feedback discussions with game officials after the game, but greatly cautions that it does not degrade into anything that can be construed as negative. Any concerns or complaints about the quality of a referee's application of the Laws of the Game shall be directed to IYSA staff using e-mail correspondence or one of the appropriate online forms available at <http://www.idahoyouthsoccer.org/administration/forms.aspx>).

Handling Dissent is a part of every game official's job. IYSA and US Soccer recommend all game officials to apply the "Ask – Tell – Dismiss" for all irresponsible behavior as noted by non players. It is a practical and flexible approach to deal with irresponsible behavior of coaches and bench personnel. However, if dissent from coaches and bench personnel transitions into verbal abuse, hand gestures, or threatening behavior, or is received from a spectator, it must be handled as game official abuse and not dissent.

Any IYSA Board Member or USSF-certified Adult Referee present at any game where game official abuse is occurring and not addressed by the game officials SHALL, if necessary, intervene if any coach, spectator or other adult is criticizing or abusing a youth referee, verbally or otherwise, and may take immediate appropriate action. This may include but is not limited to the offender to leave the site, and/or suspending or abandons the match.

6. Disciplinary Sanctions

At the discretion of the center referee, SYRA, or IYSA JEC, a warning may be given, but is not required, for a first time violation of this policy.

All Incidents will be reported to the IYSA JEC, who has authority to immediately apply disciplinary sanctions for any individual or group of individuals involved with abuse of a game official, even prior to a hearing. The JEC will make all efforts to convene the hearing prior to the next scheduled game event. In the event this is not possible, the JEC immediate action of recommended sanctions shall be applied.

The following sanctions shall be applied by the JEC as necessary for the reported events. It is noted, however, that this sanction table is not intended to limit JEC sanctioning actions, rather be applied as a guide. Extemporaneous circumstances may exist that require fewer or additional sanctions to be applied.

Type of Abuse	Recommended Sanction
Criticism, heckling, or verbal abuse of a referee (not including offensive, insulting, or foul-language) FIRST OFFENSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • One (1) game suspension
Serious verbal abuse of a referee (example: using offensive, insulting, or foul language), or repeated offense of a less serious nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two (2) game suspension MINIMUM • JEC review to consider additional sanctions or remedial actions
Entering the Field to confront an Adult referee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Two (2) game suspension MINIMUM • JEC review to consider additional sanctions or remedial actions
Entering the Field to confront an Youth referee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Three (3) game suspension MINIMUM • JEC review to consider additional sanctions or remedial actions • Letter of apology to the youth referee, delivered by IYSA • Possible form of appropriate apology to players/coaches/parents of the teams affected by the conduct
Threatening any referee (by word or action)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Suspension from all remaining events until JEC hearing to determine final sanctions • Possible referral to local law enforcement agency
Physical abuse of any referee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • Lifetime ban from IYSA sanctioned events • Referral to local law enforcement agency

Immediate and sincere remorse on the part of the offending coach, spectator, or bench personnel, may be taken into consideration when implementing the discipline.

Egregious offenses (example: repeated or multiple abusive situations, physical contact with a referee, or exceptionally inappropriate behavior directed toward a referee) shall result in immediate and continuing suspension of the offending person pending a complete hearing by the JEC. The JEC will determine if further or more serious discipline is warranted. Habitual, or “repeat” offenders show a general disregard to the rules of IYSA and require strong action. Discipline may include but is not limited to, suspension for the season, suspension for multiple seasons, or even lifetime bans.

A plea of ignorance to this policy and disciplinary actions is not sufficient as abuse goes beyond the threshold for common sense and the overall treatment of a human being. It should be obvious to all those involved with youth sports that abuse of any type is not warranted, encouraged, or tolerated.

7. Suspension

Any ejection/suspension of a coach, bench personnel or spectator shall be written up on appropriate form and submitted to IYSA for JEC review (US Soccer Referee Report with Supplemental Report for Game Officials, and IYSA Incident report for all other personnel).

An IYSA Board Member, Center Game Official, or Tournament Director may immediately send off a coach, spectator, or bench personnel if abuse of a Game Official is observed. The JEC or tournament director may suspend a coach, spectator, or bench personnel as actions of a reported Abuse of Game Official. Suspension is defined as being suspended from attending the game in which the abuse occurred, and/or future games/events as specified in the suspension sanctioned by the JEC. If a coach, bench personnel, or spectator is suspended, he or she may not attend any game at that division level and age group until the completion of the suspension.

Furthermore, the suspended coach, bench personnel, or spectator may not attend other IYSA sanctioned games or events until the completion of the original suspension at the applicable age and division. For example, if a coach of a U16B is suspended for two games, to include the game at which the abuse of the game official occurred, and the next scheduled game of that age group is in 6 days at 1:00pm, the coach may not attend any other IYSA sanctioned games or events until the completion of that game in 6 days (likely 2:30pm). If there are no further planned IYSA sanctioned games or events, it is up to JEC to determine at which point the coach is no longer suspended. All game suspensions shall be clearly communicated to the suspended individual as well as the club/group that he/she represents, as well as followed up in writing as to be clear.

Failure to follow this verbal and written suspension will lead to further sanctions to this individual.

8. Appeals

Any Appeals to sanctions or suspensions shall be forwarded using appropriate follow-up actions as established by IYSA using the Judicial and Ethics Committee (JEC) procedures. Failure to appropriately follow the JEC Appeals process shall render the appeal null and void. All sanctions/suspensions will remain in effect until conclusion of the appeal process of the JEC.

9. Definitions

Abuse (of a Referee) – A verbal statement or physical act not resulting in bodily contact which implies or threatens physical harm to a referee or the referee’s property or equipment. Abuse includes but is not limited to:

- Use of Foul or Abusive Language
- Spewing any beverage at (but not on)
- Spitting at (but not on)
- Verbal Threats

Assault (of a Referee): An intentional act of physical violence at or upon a referee. Assault includes but is not limited to:

- Hitting, Punching, or Choking
- Spitting on
- Grabbing
- Bodily running into
- Kicking or throwing at

- Damaging Uniform
- Damaging personal property
- Any unwelcome physical contact

Bench Personnel – Members of the team’s staff (ex. Team trainer, team manager, etc.)

Dissent (directed toward a Referee) – Disagreeing by words or actions. Dissent includes but is not limited to:

- Voicing disagreement with a decision
- Body language expressing disagreement with a decision

Game Officials – Officials assigned to apply the Laws of the game as prescribed by FIFA as well as local rules implemented by IYSA and IYSA sanctioned event coordinators.

IYSA – Idaho Youth Soccer Association

JEC – Judicial and Ethics Committee – a committee to receive complaints alleging rules violations, code of conduct violations, and other actions that are inconsistent with the traditions and spirit of the game of soccer. The parties subject to the jurisdiction of the Judicial and Ethics Committee, against whom complaints may be made include, but are not limited to players or prospective players, coaches or prospective coaches, affiliate members or prospective affiliate members, affiliate’s board of directors, affiliate’s or IYSA’s administrative staff, affiliate’s team managers and team officials, team supporters, referees, or referee organization board members. The Judicial and Ethics Committee shall make its best effort to provide timely and concise investigations into complaints allowing the accused and accuser to present evidence, and then report their findings to the IYSA President as well as the accused