

JOE KNOWS AYSO

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AYSO frequently receives questions regarding rules, regulations, policies, interpretation of FIFA Law and AYSO modifications. In my position as National Referee Administrator, I am often asked to respond.

Question from Cathy:

Joe, what is the AYSO policy on referee abuse and most especially on youth referee abuse?

Answer:

Thank you for your question about referee abuse, Cathy. In the AYSO National Rules and Regulations under "Duties and responsibilities of coaches and officials" it states in part, "It shall be the duty of each coach and official to: Conduct him/herself in a manner becoming a member of AYSO," "Limit their sideline participation during AYSO games to positive instruction and encouragement" and "Negative comments and complaints about refereeing shall not be allowed."

In addition, all AYSO games are conducted in accordance with the FIFA *Laws of the Game*, which specify that the powers and duties of the referee include the right to "stop, suspend or terminate the match because of outside interference of any kind," "take action against team officials who fail to conduct themselves in a responsible manner and may at his discretion, expel them from the field of play and its immediate surrounds" and "provide the appropriate authorities with a match report which includes information on any disciplinary action taken against players, and/or team officials and any other incident which occurred before, during or after the match."

There are many different kinds of abuse, but regardless of the kind, there are policies and laws in existence that enable the referee to take action immediately and the appropriate authorities to also deal with those guilty of abuse. We expect AYSO regions to enforce these policies and to do all they can to ensure those who abuse referees are dealt with appropriately. If the abuse is severe enough, there are also state laws that may be involved and criminal charges can be made against violators. Check with your local law enforcement agencies for information regarding the laws in your state.

We do not differentiate between youth and adult referees regarding policies on abuse although we would expect that due consideration be given to youth and that special care be taken to protect them by having responsible adults nearby to assist them when needed.

Question from Scott:

Joe, I am a volunteer referee for U-6 and U-8 girls. I had a problem with a coach today that has deeply disturbed me. I have heard horror stories about inappropriate behavior by coaches or parents, but never in my life before today have I ever been involved with or seen anything like this. After today's events, being a referee or coach in youth sports no longer appeals to me. I feel like I'd

much rather be on the sidelines watching and cheering for my daughters. Yet I don't want to give in. After 18 years of teaching experience, I still believe in teaching ethics and character to young people.

Any words of wisdom on how to get past this and not feel depressed about it would be extremely helpful. I am saddened by the lack of respect shown to referees in today's society, and it is an especially terrible example when done by a coach of seven year olds.

Answer:

Scott, one bad experience can easily deter those without the passion to make a difference. From the sound of your email, I do not think you fit that mold. Someone with 18 years of experience working with children, the desire to teach ethics and good character, and a reluctance to give in are the qualifications of someone with a passion to make a difference, and that, my friend, is you.

It is unfortunate that there are those among us who, for whatever reason, have lost sight of the real purpose of youth sport and labor under the delusion that they can somehow live vicariously through their children or achieve respect through intimidation or misuse of their position. The good news is they are in the minority. The bad news is their numbers may be growing.

I understand your feelings. Been there, done that and I have witnessed the struggle of others as they wrestled with the desire to hang it up. I wish I could give you an easy solution, but obviously the decision is yours. What is it that keeps referees volunteering even when they are confronted with inappropriate behavior? In AYSO it certainly isn't the money, so what is the motivation? Personally, I believe motivations contain a variety of ingredients, with varying amounts of each depending upon the individual.

Some are motivated by the positive experiences and the occasional spontaneous expressions of appreciation. Others find satisfaction and reward in spending time with others of like-mind running a great youth program. Some especially enjoy the opportunity to spend time with children, sharing the joys of team sport and competition. Opportunities to improve health and fitness through fun physical activity are motivating factors for some as well. I must confess that some gain a degree of satisfaction in helping the less knowledgeable adults learn appropriate behavior and the consequences associated with noncompliance.

Referee techniques for dealing with inappropriate behavior are as varied as are the motivations for continuing to referee. AYSO has assembled a booklet with specific recommendations useful for referees, coaches and spectators to use when individuals behave inappropriately at soccer games. The booklet is called "Problems Outside the Touch Lines" and is being distributed to all who attend the 2003 AYSO Section Meetings. The theme of the booklet is "Be Somebody" and react to the common thought that "Somebody ought to do something" when inappropriate behavior is occurring. Everyone has an obligation to demonstrate their displeasure when improper behavior is being modeled in front of impressionable young players. If we do nothing, what we are teaching our youth is that this kind of behavior is acceptable and the ugly cycle continues.

Well, Scott, I hope these comments are helpful to you in making your decision. I'll leave you with one last thought . . . Be Somebody.