
Developing & Maintaining A Youth Referee Program



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Introduction

This booklet is meant to encourage and assist regions, regardless of size, to plan and implement a successful Youth Referee Program. Each region should encourage players to become involved in their local referee programs. Player/referees are a great addition to any region.

History Of The Youth Referee Program

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:

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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

National Referee Advisory Commission, Point of Contact for Youth Referees

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

Establishing A Youth Referee Program

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 chapters.

Chapter 1: Preparation and presentation of proposal for regional approval

Chapter 2: Recruitment of potential youth referees

Chapter 3: Orientation of potential youth referees and program organization

Chapter 4: Initial training and certification

Chapter 5: Practice sessions

Chapter 6: Scheduling and assigning

Chapter 7: Follow-up training and advancement

Chapter 8: Mentoring and dealing with difficult adults

Chapter 9: Youth referee camps and competitions

Chapter 10: Recognition and review

Chapter 1: Preparation and Presentation of 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 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.

Chapter 2: Recruitment of Potential Youth Referees

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 and the Recruiting and Retaining Referees booklet both of which are available on the aysohelp.org website and 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.

Chapter 3: Orientation of Youth Referees and Program Organization

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.

Chapter 4: Initial Training and Certification

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.

Chapter 5: Practice Sessions

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.

Chapter 6: Scheduling and Assigning

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.

Chapter 7: Follow-up Training and Advancement

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 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.

Chapter 8: Mentoring and Dealing with Difficult Adults

Mentoring

Identify a list of potential referee advisors 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 advisor training session to discuss the unique features of mentoring a youth referee.

It's a good idea to have an advisor at every game a youth referee is assigned to whether the youth is centering or assisting. The advisor 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 advisor 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 Advisor Program is an AYSO program designed to offer a helping hand to new and developing referees of all ages. A copy of the Referee Advisor booklet can be obtained by calling the AYSO Supply Center at 888 243 2976.

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 advisors 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 advisors 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.

Chapter 9: Youth Referee Camps and Competitions

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.

Chapter 10: Recognition and Review

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

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

