



IYSA Announcement

Updated Addendum to The Referee Abuse Policy

As you are aware, we have a severe shortage of referees. This is due, in large part, to the abuse they are subjected to by coaches, players, and sidelines. Approximately 30% of all games have had no referee at all this past 12 months. The behavior towards referees must change.

For the past several years IYSA has had a Referee Abuse Policy in place, but despite that, we are still seeing a sharp increase in abuse incidents as well as drop off in the number of referees. It seems that despite our best efforts it hasn't been enough to curb the growing number of games where referees are being subjected to verbal and sometimes physical abuse.

Effective immediately IYSA will enforce a ZERO TOLERANCE policy regarding any inappropriate behavior towards referees.

Until this behavior changes, any coach, parent, or spectator at the field, who berates a referee, will risk a **no spectator** suspension going forward. Meaning—that team will not be allowed to have ANY spectators on the sideline for a given period. That could be for as long as the remainder of the season or event they are participating in.

A coach is responsible for coaching the players and is also responsible for the behavior of the parents and spectators on the sideline. Parents and spectators have the responsibility to cheer for their player and their teammates. At no time does their role cross over to being a referee mentor or educator, regardless of their knowledge or understanding of the game. That role belongs to the State Referee Committee (SRC).

DO NOT tell the referee "to call the game", "to keep the kids safe", "to call it both ways", "that they are a terrible referee", or "that you are going to file a complaint." There is no reason to yell these things or any other derogatory or personal, public, or provocative remarks directed at a referee as it is viewed as a threat.

There are no excuses. If you are making any remark towards a referee, your behavior puts the entire sideline at risk for being uninvited the rest of the season. You put your team at risk of game stoppage and forfeit, and other potential outcomes as adjudicated by the league/event and IYSA.

How will this be enforced? – First offense could lead to an individual or sideline being dismissed. If individuals are not named or identified, the entire sideline will be dismissed. Second offense from the team, the whole sideline will be dismissed. Referees assigned to future games will be told that Team X is not allowed to have ANY spectators within 100 yards of the field, or the game will be forfeited by that team.



What does this mean for referees?

Referees, keep doing your best work! We want referees to be respectful and understanding. We realize that you will have to be the bigger person in many circumstances, but we will rely on the referees to be the administrator of the game and be responsible with that power. If there are any instances that you feel need to be brought to our attention, please continue to use whatever reporting mechanism the league or event has when completing your match review.

Referees will continue to have the ability to clear a sideline if the sideline has become out of the control. We ask that you only use this option to safely continue the match. However, if a sideline is cleared by the referee, IYSA will review the Match Report, do some additional groundwork, and decide if that team's sideline should be dismissed for a given length of time. We recognize that there will be some level of interaction between the referees and the fans in most games and we ask that you use your best judgement. Please do not use this authority to clear an entire sideline for one comment. Please give coaches and/or parents warnings. Please be direct and clear with the coaches from the beginning. If you ever feel threatened or feel that the crowd has crossed a line, then absolutely feel free to dismiss the sideline before the match will continue. We know it will take time and commitment to change the sideline culture, but we are committed to doing it.

How will this work once a sideline is suspended?

For this to work, IYSA will send an email notice to the referee assignor or league administrators. The notice will include the name of the team that has a suspended sideline. The suspended sideline will be aware of their suspension, and hopefully, there should not be any discussion necessary with them prior, during, or after the match.

When a team has received a suspended sideline order, the only permitted people to be present at the game are the coaches listed on the game day roster/digital player card and a team manager for player safety/injury issues. All other spectators will be required to be at least 100 yards away from the field. If a suspended sideline is not complying, the referee should not start the match until the sideline complies. If a sideline continues to not comply, the referees should call the match, fill out the game report and notify us of what occurred. We will mark the game as a forfeit for that team.

We are working diligently to make the referee experience at all ISYA games and events to be positive and productive. This is an ongoing effort, and we will continue to pivot and adjust as necessary.



Policy FAQ's

A referee has all the power?

Referees have always had the ability to make a judgement call to clear a sideline or end a match in situations they deem unsafe.

Can I say anything during my child's match?

Idaho Youth Soccer is not expecting or mandating that sidelines be silent. Exclamations in the moment are part of the game. A "handball" or "offside" as an immediate response to a situation is more than acceptable so long as that exclamation ends there. It is not acceptable to address the official with anything further.

Complaints are just part of sports – referees know that when they sign up.

Complaints are part of the sports atmosphere. Our youth referees, like our youth players, are still learning and developing their skills. Again, exclamations are okay, but anything after an exclamation is not welcome or needed.

Can I talk to a referee at all?

Coaches – We would encourage you to introduce yourself and start a mutually respectful relationship prior to the match starting. Throughout the match, anything specifically stated to a referee should be done with respect.

Players – Most referees welcome communication with players – especially if it is done respectfully. Take ownership of your game and ask for clarification on a call or decision with respect.

Parents – there is no reason to speak with a referee during the game. After the game you may do so but only to say "thank you" or engage in a positive way and certainly not to complain or argue a decision that was made.



What about protecting our players? Referees need to keep our players safe.

Soccer is a physical game – referees use their best judgement and experiences to keep play within the bounds of safe play.

How do we file a complaint or address a poorly called match?

IYSA welcomes feedback. Coaches and team managers are welcome to address issues regarding referees or any match issues by reporting it to IYSA. We are aware many teams are now utilizing video for game analysis and player development – please include video whenever possible.

Referees are not professional; they show up late or not at all. What accountability is there for a referee?

Again, Idaho Youth Soccer welcomes feedback. Additionally, the SRC wants feedback on their referees as well. The SRC certifies and trains these referees – they have an expectation of their referees and would like to be aware if these expectations are not being met. Just as there have been instances of coaches, players, or parents receiving “punishment” for their actions, so too have referees.

In addition, if a full crew does not show up to your match, your club is only billed for the referees that showed. The referee assignor reports to IYSA when referees show or don't show.

My child has been playing for years and we've never seen this issue. Is this even a problem?

Every year the referee pool sees about 1/3 of its referees choose to not return. Many cite poor treatment when asked why. IYSA continues to work with the State Referee Committee and clubs to recruit new referees, but we are flooded with responses from parents, coaches, and formerly registered referees stating they would never certify because of the treatment they have seen towards referees or the treatment they have previously received.



Each season there are reports of not only berating referees or verbal threats made to individuals, but actual physical violence against referees. We have heard of many examples of parents or coaches stepping into a referees "safe zone" during or after a match.

Some referees are literally scared to face youth soccer parents, others are just simply fed up with getting berated.

This seems heavy handed. Punishing the whole sideline for the mistake of one person? Isn't there a middle ground? Has anything else even been tried?

Consider the referee that is responsible for hundreds of matches a season. We cannot afford to lose any more referees. The mistakes of one individual or a few individuals is creating a greater impact that is felt throughout the league.

IYSA has banned individuals, has banned entire team sidelines, has issued other punishments, but the problem persists. We are in a dire situation and at the risk of not having enough referees to cover matches. We simply cannot afford to lose anymore.

We are asking the sideline to work together in holding each other to a higher standard. If one parent is struggling to stop chirping at the referee, other sideline parents should be able to convince them to quiet down and stop. This way everyone can watch the game.

What about better training or mentoring for referees? Why doesn't IYSA do something to help the referees instead of just blaming the parents?

IYSA is working with the SRC to mentor as many referees as they can each season. Qualified individuals capable of mentoring a referee are also the individuals who are responsible for officiating hundreds of matches, and their schedules are tight.

IYSA has committed to helping the Idaho SRC with funding and support as much as we can.



Just get referees that know what they're doing. The referees you have are too young.

It can take anywhere from 3 to 5 years to become a confident/seasoned referee. The bottom line is that it takes experience. What IYSA has found is that new referees, young or old, are not being allowed an opportunity to get that learning experience without intense and loud criticism or even threats made against them. They are leaving the role before they have time to master the craft. It has become a vicious circle that we need to break.

Referee Assignors also hope to give new referees lower-level matches, but the lack of referees does not always allow for this.

IYSA just sides with the referee.

This is a common complaint from coaches, and on the flip side – from referees feeling IYSA sides with coaches. Officials see the same coach with bad behavior season after season without a change in behavior.

At the rate the referee pool is decreasing, officials need to be protected. Period.

It costs too much to be referee and the pay isn't good enough.

We agree, we just announced a large increase in pay for IYSA ran leagues and events and will work with other leagues and events across the state to convince them to do the same. IYSA will provide about 100 scholarships for new officials as well and has committed to try to do the same each season.

We understand that the term "Zero Tolerance" elicits concern and strikes a nerve as too extreme of a solution; we hope that you'll see from our responses and clarifications above that the situation we find ourselves in requires a serious culture change that can only be ignited by a shock to the system. IYSA will continue to work with the SRC, and will support trainings, certifications, and scholarships. In the meantime, we will do all we can to improve on the only thing we can control in the youth soccer ecosystem: the behavior of the individuals on our sidelines, and the positive experiences each of our youth players have participating in our programming.