

## Refing 101 for Coaches and Parents

This article will give a little insight around all things referees for the West Seattle Soccer Club. There have been many comments over the past few years, much of it constructive, some of it in frustration and some from a lack of knowledge of how the whole referee process works. So this article is an attempt to describe all the things that have to happen before a referee shows up at your field (or not).

Let's break it up into a few different sections:

- Deciding to become a Referee
- Certification and Continuing Education Process
- Assigning Process
- Reporting Process
- Common Complaints

### Deciding to become a Referee

So who decides to become a referee? What is the normal personality type, and what are the reasons to put yourself out on the field? Referees come in all personality types, but usually their first motivation is money. For a youth referee, it is the promise of a good paying job and being out on the field around a game they love. For an adult, it is much of the same.

For a youth though, it is much easier to make the decision to become a ref than to actually follow all the way through to getting on the field. The personality type of a successful youth referee is normally a little outgoing, bold and someone not intimidated by loud sidelines. And it is also someone who is open to mentoring and coaching to become a better referee.

### Certification and Continuing Education Process

Just like any quality job, every new referee must dedicate some time to an educational clinic and passing a test. These are clinics that are given by referee chapters throughout the state, and the license is recognized nationally. These classes are usually planned right before the spring or fall seasons, so the new referees can get on the field soon after the class. If a referee decides to, they can upgrade to higher grades if they decide to ref higher level games, all the way to college and professional matches.

In addition to the initial class to get certified, each referee must get continuing education and pass a test every year to remain certified for the following year. Along the way, they are mentored by referee assignors and other more senior referees, and they get evaluated by fellow referees for every game they ref. This is all intended to give the referee as much education and wise guidance as possible as they sharpen their skills with every game they do.

### Assigning Process

So after the referee has his shiny new badge and uniform, how does he get assigned to a game? This has changed quite drastically over the last 10 years. It used to be that the local assignor would keep a list of licensed referees and use email or phone calls to try to fill all the games for the upcoming weekend's games manually. But now, there are online sites where referees can register and then self-assign to those games that fit their schedule. The club or association assignor then attempts to fill the open games with whatever refs are still available. The WSSC uses Trias as their referee assigning site. All referees must be RMA cleared (Risk Management Application), which is required for anyone (including coaches and other WSSC volunteers) that works around kids. This assigning site is connected to the national background check system, which clears all referees before they are able to self-assign.

Some referees assign themselves to games week by week, some plan for the entire season. The assignors give each referee a rank, depending on experience. Every game also has a rank. So as long as each referee's rank is the same or higher than the game's rank and they fulfill the other business rules like age and distance between game locations, they can self-assign themselves to games every weekend without any assistance from the assignor.

Games pay anywhere from \$14 for a U8 game all the way up to \$52 for a U18 game. There are also different pay ranges for center referees vs. AR's (assistant referees). Many youth referees start out at the younger games, but move up to being an AR on a U11 or U12 game because it is seen as less stressful and earns them a bit more money. This is one of the reasons why the younger games lack coverage. But the main reason is that we just don't have enough licensed refs to cover our games.

### **Reporting Process**

After a game has been played, the referee then must submit a match report in the assigning system (Trias). This site is where the referee puts in scores, red/yellow cards and any comments about the game. They also rate the coach, player and sideline behavior for each side. This detail is used if there is any dispute with the game. If a team has a lot of complaints from multiple referees, the coach may be contacted by the club.

This match report can also be used to report if they were not able to make it, or if one or both teams did not arrive. Filing this match report is necessary for the referee to get paid for that match.

### **Common Complaints**

The two most common complaints we get from coaches and parents are that 1) their games lack coverage and, 2) the refs don't know the rules. Here is some feedback on both of those issues.

1. **Game coverage is low or non-existent** - Many of our games in the U8-U10 range have trouble getting coverage. There are several reasons for this:
  - New referees never get all the way through the registration process and preparation needed to get out onto the field. This could be because it may have been the parent that wanted this more than the youth ref, or they never put the effort into getting through the process.
  - The new referee had a bad experience on the field with some loud and unthinking coaches or sidelines and has decided not to come back out.
  - As mentioned above, some referees decide to move up to the older ages, either as a center ref or assistant ref, leaving the younger games without coverage.

This is a serious concern of the WSSC, and we have been taking steps to improve coverage. But this is a partnership with our coaches and members. We can help the refs get through the registration process and give them the encouragement and mentoring to get on the field, but if they get yelled at during a game as they are learning how to become a referee, that causes an unnecessary reduction in our referee force. Plus, it takes more time from our volunteer board to have to monitor those situations.

2. **Referees don't know the rules** – we get comments that the referees make bad calls, or shouldn't be out there because they don't know the rules. Two thoughts on this – these referees have taken more training than most coaches have, and many times the referees make the right call and the person making the comment is wrong. Secondly, even if they did make a wrong call, that is part of the learning process. MLS referees make mistakes all the time. The key to keeping our referees and growing them to be better on the field is to take constructive comments and observations, and giving them to the referee in a way that they will accept and learn from. This is best done through the referee evaluation function of Trias, rather than having a heated discussion on the

field. You can access the Referee Evaluation function on the Trias site by going to Information—Evaluate Referee.

### **Closing Thoughts**

The goal of WSSC with regards to referees is that we want to embrace our new charges, and make sure they make it to the field week after week and do a good job on the field for our membership. We have methods to make our referees better, but we heavily rely on the sidelines (coaches, players, parents) to stay positive. The appropriate way to give feedback on a young referee is through the Trias website. This allows us to take real action and to see patterns over time to address before it's too late. If you want to see referees show up on games, please help us by treating them with respect.

In addition to needing more youth referees, we also are in constant need of adult refs. Every year, I make a plea at our coaches meeting to get out on the field as a referee, but from our end of year survey, only about 3% of our coaches have been licensed. Most of our older games need to use older teens or adults, so adding adults to our referee team is critical. I've been a player for over 40 years, a coach for 15 years and a referee for 10 years, and I learn something new at every clinic I go to. Believe me, the view from the referee's point of view is much different than the view of a coach, and this experience will add to the effectiveness of the coach with their own team.

Please help us make the game day experience the best for everyone out on the field – players, coaches, spectators and referees.

Tim McMonigle  
WSSC Ref Assignor