



Referee Mentor Handbook

American Youth Soccer Organization

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Version History

Revision	Date	Description
001	2015	Initial version
002	7/20/2020	Updated publication year, format adjustments, changed to RDRA for Regional Director of Referee Assessment, added reference to "Be a Great Mentor" workshop
21	7/31/2021	Updated for 2021



The Program

The American Youth Soccer Organization (AYSO) National Referee Program is intended to develop the best-qualified Referees possible for officiating all AYSO games. An integral part of this program is providing advice and support to Referees to help them improve individual performance and maintain the highest standards of officiating performance throughout AYSO.

The Mentor

Referee development is a major responsibility of the AYSO National Referee Program. The first level of support to accomplish this for AYSO Referees is the Referee Mentor Program.

Under this program, Regional Referee Administrators and Regional Referee Directors of Assessment identify and assign qualified Referees to act as a “helping hand” to new and less experienced Referees. This “helping hand” consists of frequent interaction to support and encourage the development of the Referee; experience has proven that mentoring is a significant, valuable aspect to Referee development, retention and recruiting.

Mentor Role

The Referee Mentor plays many important roles in the development of Referees:

- As **Friend**, the Mentor must be persuasive in his comments to the Referee. The Referee must trust the motives as well as the judgment of the Mentor and believe that the Mentor gives freely of time and effort.
- As **Observer**, the Mentor must provide sound, simple advice and assistance that guides the Referee along the shortest path to success. The Referee must believe in the sincerity and credibility of the assistance given.
- As **Supporter**, the Mentor offers encouragement in unlimited supply. In this view, the Referee can do no wrong, but can always be encouraged to do better. *This is unconditional support for the person, not for everything the person does.*
- As **Advocate**, the Mentor is obligated to support the Referee in all encounters. No criticism or dissent can go unchecked; no party can challenge without the proactive, positive involvement of the Mentor.
- As **Choreographer**, the Mentor helps the new and developing Referee to stage the officiating process. From the arrival and inspection of the field to the post-game ceremony and bookkeeping.
- As **Advisor**, the Mentor provides accurate, factual information that gives the Referee additional insight and understanding. The Mentor can encourage and assist the Referee to move through the upgrade process.
- As **Coach**, the Mentor offers tactical instructions to help the Referee manage his games with practical and realistic suggestions in improving his performance and enjoyment of the game.



- As **Role Model**, the Mentor gives the developing Referee a real person to emulate. The Mentor's attitudes, values and behaviors set the example that the Referee is likely to follow on the field.

Mentor Qualifications

As a Mentor, you must have the following minimum technical qualifications:

- Regional Referee certification (Intermediate Referee Certification is recommended).
- Completion of the module "The AYSO National Referee Program" from the Intermediate Referee Course.

You should:

- Be committed to AYSO and the AYSO philosophies
- Be willing to devote time and energy to the Mentor Program
- Have clear and concise verbal communication skills
- Learn to properly observe a Referee's performance
- Have a positive attitude when presenting information
- Develop an aptitude for listening and responding to a Referee's questions and concerns
- Be able to encourage Referees
- Have an understanding of a Referee's shortcomings
- Serve as a role model to other volunteers
- Know the Laws of the Game and Referee mechanics

Mentors are appointed by the Regional Referee Administrator (RRA) or Regional Director of Referee Assessment (RDRA).

To help develop some of these mentoring skills, a developing mentor may consider attending the AYSO "Be a Great Mentor" workshop. This workshop may be hosted by a local Region, Area, Section or AYSO EXPO. Contact RRA for more information.



Guide for Mentors

Be Proactive Making Contact:

Working with your RRA or RDRA, contact the Referee you are assigned to mentor as soon as possible. Initial contact may be by telephone, email or on the field. Personal contact should be made as soon as possible. Do not expect the Referee to make the initial contact with you.

Arrange an initial meeting or call in which you:

- Introduce yourself and explain your Referee experience
- Describe the Mentor Program
- Make sure that the Referee understands that the mentoring is intended to be a positive experience
- Learn as much about the Referee as possible
- Understand the Referee's goals, objectives, experience and concerns
- Answer any questions or allay any doubts
- Arrange for a next meeting, including attending the Referee's next game

Develop objectives for yourself that meet the needs of the Referee and AYSO.

As a Mentor, You Should:

- Act as a Mentor in all of the roles outlined above
- Always present a positive attitude toward officiating and AYSO
- Create a safe, positive environment for improvement
- Be available as often as needed to provide support and answer questions
- Observe the Referee as often as needed
- Encourage the Referee to continue certification to higher levels of officiating
- Ask the Referee to be an Assistant Referee for one of your games, or you to be an Assistant Referee for one of his games
- Participate with the Referee in continuing training and social activities offered by the Region
- Seek help from others to ensure that the needs of the Referee are met
- Report to the Regional Referee staff any special needs or problems that should be addressed on behalf of the Referee
- Actively recruit other volunteers to become Referees and Mentors
- Support the Referee at any game you observe. This includes positive support to coaches, spectators and players.



- Provide positive feedback to the Referee after all observations including:
 - At least two or three positive comments
 - Not more than two areas for improvement by the Referee
 - Specific comments made to the Referee using game experience or examples of alternative choices
 - Small, attainable, immediately improvable goals for the Referee
- Use positive language such as:
 - “You might consider trying...”
 - “Other Referees often find that...”
 - “From my experience...”
 - “What I’ve seen work in this situation...”
 - “It may be easier for you if you...”
 - “What options did you consider...”
- Avoid phrases such as:
 - “You should...”
 - “I always...”
 - “Never...”
 - “Always...”
- Encourage a two-way dialog with the Referee
- End discussions of observations with a positive comment
- Encourage the Referee at all times

Mentor Checklist for Observing a Referee

These observations are unlike observations for upgrade or assessments. These are not pass or fail situations and usually there is no written report prepared for the Referee. All observations should be positive win-win experiences. Unlike an Assessor, the Mentor need not be inconspicuous. If necessary, Mentors should ensure that the coaches and spectators are aware of their presence. Mentors may participate with the Referee, when necessary, in pre- and post- game activities. While not encouraged, limited discussion with the Referee may take place during the halftime break. There must always be a post-game discussion with the Referee.



Pre-Game: Did the Referee:

- Arrive early for the game?
- Dress properly and have all necessary equipment?
- Check the field and the nets?
- Check the players?
- Collect game cards and check them for completeness?
- Check the ball for proper size and inflation?
- Have a pre-game talk with the players?
- Conduct a pre-game conference with Assistant Referees?
- Introduce Referee team to the coaches?
- Count the number of players prior to kick-off?
- Conduct a coin toss and kick-off?

Communications with Assistant Referees: Did the Referee:

- Give clear instructions?
- Use the Assistant Referees well?
- Treat the Assistant Referees with respect?

Positioning: Did the Referee:

- Keep play between the Referee and the Assistant Referee?
- Remain close to play (15-20 yards)?
- Adjust to proper position on restarts?

Signals: Did the Referee:

- Whistle with authority?
- Use proper hand signals?
- Communicate with players and coaches by effectively using voice and positive body language?

Law Knowledge and Mechanics: Did the Referee demonstrate:

- Correct applications of the Laws?
- Consistent application of the Laws?
- Recognition of proper restarts?
- Proper administration of restarts?
- Good foul recognition?



Interaction with players and coaches: Did the Referee display:

- An attitude of helpfulness and tolerance?
- Respect?
- Friendliness without familiarity?
- Credibility in responses and decisiveness?
- Positive action even in disciplinary situations?

Post-Game: Did the Referee:

- Manage time well, starting & ending the game on time?
- Manage substitutions effectively?
- Participate in the post-game handshake?
- Thank the Coaches?
- Thank the Assistant Referees?
- Complete administrative duties such as game cards?

Most importantly, as Mentors, always remember that...

"In AYSO, it's about more than the game!"

