

Meridian Police Activities League Flag Football

Policy to Address Referee Abuse

Purpose

The policy to address Referee Abuse has been generated to reverse the growing trend of referee abuse during the season and tournaments. It is our intent that this policy will be enacted to eliminate the physical and verbal abuse of referees, as well as discourage public dissent. Meridian PAL wants to make it clear that physical or verbal abuse of referees is unacceptable and will not be tolerated. The purpose of this policy is to adopt basic standard sanctions for improper conduct toward referees. This policy is not written in an effort to insinuate all referee actions and behaviors are correct and that all points from coaches and spectators are incorrect. Rather it is to clearly provide sanctioning actions against the physical abuse, verbal abuse and negative criticism against referees. Clearly, mistakes will be made by referees in officiating, particularly by new officials. When this occurs, there are appropriate procedures for coaches and spectators to report any concerns about the quality of the officiating that they have received. Meridian PAL encourages constructive comments about referees, especially as they are applied to the flag football rules. Referees must receive positive support from coaches and spectators to continue to grow as an official, no different than the players on the field. It is NEVER acceptable to negatively criticize or abuse a game official, verbally or otherwise, in ANY situation. Meridian PAL will not tolerate any verbal or other abuse or criticism of any referee by any coach or spectator.

Jurisdiction of Reported Abuse of Game Officials

The Meridian PAL Flag Football Committee shall be the governing committee for all reported abuse of game officials. The committee will follow procedure in applying the appropriate sanctions for reported incidents that fall within this policy. These sanctions do not limit, prevent or replace any voluntary or required report or referral of improper conduct, by an adult toward any other adult or by an adult toward any child, to any law enforcement or child protection agency.

Referee Abuse complaints need not be initiated by the official. These events can be reported and acted upon by the committee if witnessed at any PAL sanctioned event by any member of the Meridian PAL Board of Directors or Committee Members. Furthermore, sufficient complaints received by witnesses about referee abuse can be investigated by the committee and, if sufficient evidence exists, can apply this policy to the sanctioning of the offending person(s) on behalf of the referee.

Reporting Concerns of Officiating

Any concerns or complaints about the quality of a referee's application of the flag football rules shall be directed to Meridian PAL Committee Members. Coaches, parents and spectators should never approach an official to discuss their concerns or frustrations. Parents and spectators may report their concerns to their Head Coach only. Head Coaches will report their concerns to their respective league director. Please use a 24 hour rule before reporting any concerns to allow for a cooling off period.

Applicability

Each coach is responsible for his/her actions, the actions of his/her players, and bench personnel (assistant coaches, etc.). Each coach, player and spectator shall at all times support the referees. Failure to do so will undermine the referee's authority, and has the potential of creating a hostile environment for the players, spectators, coaches, and officials alike. No one is to address the referee in a negative manner (physically, verbally, or non-verbal gestures) during or after the game.

Policy

Coaches and/or bench personnel may NOT address any referee during play except for:

- Responding to a referee-initiated communication
- Making a request for substitutions/timeout
- Pointing out emergencies or safety issues, such as an injured player on the field
- To request clarification of any call provided the request is courteous, non-argumentative and non-threatening

Negative or critical comments directed to any referee from spectators will not be tolerated. Coaches are responsible for ensuring all spectators associated with his/her team follow these guidelines relating to communications with a referee.

Although abuse towards any referee will not be tolerated, any abuse towards a youth referee (under the age of 18) will result in more severe disciplinary actions by Meridian PAL. A spectator may not express any dissatisfaction with the officiating to the youth referee. Under no circumstance is it acceptable for a spectator, before, during or after a game, to express any dissatisfaction of or critique the referee's performance, other than to thank and compliment the

officiating to the youth referee. A coach may not, before, during, or after a game, discuss with a youth referee their critique of the referee's performance, other than to thank and compliment the referee. If a coach is concerned during a game for the health and safety of a player or players, or feels any player is at risk, the coach may respectfully and in a non-threatening manner request that the head referee apply immediate attention to the safety situation. A coach after a game may also provide positive feedback, in a respectful and non-threatening manner that will assist in the growth of the referee. However, at any time, if the referee asks the coach to cease discussions, the coach must comply or find themselves in violation of this policy. Meridian PAL recognizes that there is value in the ability to have positive feedback discussions with game officials after the game, but greatly cautions that it does not degrade into anything that can be construed as negative. Any concerns or complaints about the quality of a referee's application of the flag football rules shall be directed to Meridian PAL Flag Football Committee Members.

Handling Dissent is a part of every referee's job. Meridian PAL recommends all referees to apply the "Ask – Tell – Dismiss" for all irresponsible behavior as noted by non-players. It is a practical and flexible approach to deal with irresponsible behavior of coaches and bench personnel. However, if dissent from coaches and bench personnel transitions into verbal abuse, hand gestures, or threatening behavior, or is received from a spectator, it must be handled as referee abuse and not dissent.

Any Meridian PAL Board Member present at any game where referee abuse is occurring and not addressed by the referees SHALL, if necessary, intervene if any coach, spectator or other adult is criticizing or abusing a youth referee, verbally or otherwise, and may take immediate appropriate action. This may include but is not limited to asking the offender to leave the site, and/or suspending or abandoning the match.

Disciplinary Sanctions

At the discretion of the head referee a warning may be given, but is not required, for a first time violation of this policy. All incidents will be reported to the Meridian PAL Flag Football Committee, who has authority to immediately apply disciplinary sanctions for any individual or group of individuals involved with abuse of a game official, even prior to a hearing. The Flag Football Committee will make all efforts to convene any hearing prior to the next scheduled game. However, in the event this is not possible, the Flag Football Committee's immediate action of recommended sanctions shall be applied.

The following sanctions shall be applied by the Flag Football Committee as necessary for the reported events. It is noted, however, that this sanction table is not intended to limit

Committee's sanctioning actions, rather be applied as a guide. Extemporaneous circumstances may exist that require fewer or additional sanctions to be applied.

Type of Abuse	Recommended Sanction
Criticism, heckling, or verbal abuse of a referee (not including offensive, insulting, or foul-language) FIRST OFFENSE	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> One (1) game suspension Committee review to consider additional sanctions or remedial actions
Serious verbal abuse of a referee (example: using offensive, insulting, or foul language), or repeated offense of a less serious nature	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two (2) game suspension MINIMUM Committee review to consider additional sanctions or remedial actions
Entering the field to confront an Adult referee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Two (2) game suspension MINIMUM Committee review to consider additional sanctions or remedial actions
Entering the field to confront a Youth referee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Three (3) game suspension MINIMUM Committee review to consider additional sanctions or remedial actions Letter of apology to the youth referee, delivered by PAL Possible form of appropriate apology to players / coaches / parents of the teams affected by the conduct
Threatening <i>any</i> referee (by word or action)	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Suspension from all remaining events until Committee review to determine final sanctions Possible referral to local law enforcement agency
Physical abuse of any referee	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Lifetime ban from PAL sanctioned events Referral to local law enforcement agency