

Gil Weber's Pregame Discussion Points For Referees Working Games At Youth Recreational Level (All Ages) Or Competitive U-14 And Below

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These abbreviated pregame discussion points are intended for referees working youth recreational games of all ages, and competitive games U-14 and below. They are an age and level-specific edit of the full version of my pregame instructions first published in 1999 and regularly updated since then. That full version can be viewed and downloaded from either of these URLs:

http://www.virtual-soccer-ref.net/misc/2016_gil_weber_pregame_instructions.pdf

http://asktheref.com/g/2016_gil_weber_pregame_instructions.pdf

At the professional level two-hour pregame discussions are not out of the ordinary as the crew goes over the tactics typically employed by each team and the propensities of individual players. Obviously the youth games most of us work (or mentor) are nowhere near that level. And most referees doing youth games typically don't have the luxury of more than a few minutes before games for a conversation with their assistant referees, particularly at tournaments where one might be lucky to have ten minutes between games.

Thus choosing what to say and how to say it in a limited amount of time is critical. This is particularly important when you're working with very young or inexperienced ARs who still may be trying to get comfortable switching the flag from hand to hand. So **asking** combined with **telling** can be very effective. And that may mean first finding out who the ARs are, how long they've been officiating, and what they can do so you'll then know what to ask of them.

Don't expect to get in all of what you read here, especially in the time crunch between games. Too much too quickly may be information overload for young and/or inexperienced ARs. Instead, consider the points I've listed here as those I would hope to cover **if I had the time** when working with assistant referees at this level of competition. And then create your own pre-game discussion **addressing those points that meet the needs of the game level you're working that day and the experience levels of your assistant referees.** (Note: using a highlighter to mark the most important points here will help you focus on what must be hit. You may find it helpful to write those key points on small cards for review with the ARs.) Also take into consideration special protocols of the league or association, for example AYSO

where the teams may be on opposite sides of the field and both ARs then will have bench, substitution, and spectator-management responsibilities.

1) Getting Off To A Good Start

It's preferable that the three officials check-in the teams together. But if duties must be split then the AR(s) not with the referee should first collect a coach or manager's pass for each of the team personnel who will be on the bench. Then as each player's pass is collected, check for shinguards and jewelry, and be certain that the jersey numbers on the team roster sheet are the same as the numbers on the shirts. Note any changes on the team roster.

2) Having A Clear View Along The Touchline

It's essential that AR1 has a clear view all the way down the touchline to the far corner flag. If a coach constantly stands at the line blocking the view, the AR should **politely** ask the coach to step back at least three feet. If the coach repeatedly blocks the AR's view that AR should call over the referee to handle the coach.

The AR on the spectator needs a similar clear view and freedom to run. If spectators crowd the line making it hard for the AR to run or see past midfield to the far corner flag, the spectators should be **politely** asked to move back at least five feet. If that request doesn't work the AR should call over the referee who can and should deal with it.

3) Watch Each Other

Each time play is stopped everyone on the crew must make eye contact with each other. Then if necessary an AR can tell the referee any concern with a hand signal and voice. For example, pointing to a player and saying the player's number, and then pointing to one's eyes will tell the referee to watch her. The AR must be prepared to give the referee jersey numbers and specifics when asked by the referee.

And at each stoppage it's also important that both ARs look across the field to the other AR. Make eye contact. If there is a flag up behind the referee's back, for example for a substitution, mirror it by making the same signal.

4) Offside

Offside is the AR's most important responsibility. The referee depends on ARs to be properly positioned to judge **offside position** and then to determine if

there is **offside**. Remind them to be sure that the player in an offside position has become involved in play before raising the flag for offside.

ARs should always apply the “*Wait and See*” principle learned in an entry level class to decide if a player really is offside. A second or two late and correct is better than a fast but, ultimately, wrong flag.

If the referee misses a flag raised for offside **don't drop the flag simply because the referee did not see it**. Stay there with the flag raised. **But raising the flag is not enough**. If the referee misses the flag the AR must get the referee's attention quickly. Shout loudly, “*Flag up!*” or shout the referee's name and, “*Flag, offside!*”

5) Ball Out Of Play

If the ball goes over the touchline or the goal line and then comes back into the field, the AR should raise the flag and stand there until the referee blows the whistle or until the attack breaks down and there is no longer a threat on goal. If there is no eye contact then shout for the referee's attention.

6) Goal Or No Goal

If the ball goes in the goal and, in the AR's opinion, it's a good goal make eye contact first and then, if the referee points to the center circle, run **slowly** up the touchline while watching the players. On the other hand, if in the AR's opinion it's not a good goal then the AR should stand still, at attention, and raise the flag **only** if the goal-scorer was offside. The referee should look over at the AR and realize something was not right.

If the referee comes over to the AR he/she will need specifics.

Finally, if the ball goes into the goal and comes back out, and if the referee did not realize it and play continues, the AR **must raise the flag to signal ball out of play, and stand there**. The AR **must** get the referee's attention, shouting if necessary, **so the flag should not be dropped**. Once the referee sees the AR then the AR can drop the flag and sprint up the touchline. This is a game-changing incident and the crew must get it right.

7) Fouls In Or Near The Penalty Area (Note! Be careful how much responsibility you put on young and/or inexperienced ARs. This goes to the opening statement about assessing the ARs' experience.)

The referee and ARs are supposed to be a team everywhere on the field including the penalty area. If the AR sees what he/she thinks is a foul in

or near the penalty area in favor of the attacking team, make eye contact first. If the AR is absolutely certain that the referee did not have a good view of the incident and would have called whatever the AR thinks the referee has not seen then the AR should signal by wiggling a raised flag in the **right hand**.

If the referee whistles and the foul was outside the penalty area then the AR should stand at attention and use his/her voice if necessary to confirm "outside." On the other hand, if inside the penalty area then after the whistle the AR should hold the flag horizontally below the waist confirming to the referee the location and severity of the foul. The AR then takes up a position just off the field at the intersection of the penalty area and goal line and acts as a goal judge. The referee will watch the goalkeeper and the other players.

8) Deal With What's Important. Don't Look For Problems.

The crew should deal with what's important, not with little things that really don't impact on the game. Example: on free kicks far from goal the ARs should not worry about the exact blade of grass. Same for offside restarts or throw-ins -- if the player is close the ARs should let play resume.

Finally, the referee should ask the ARs if there are any questions on things discussed or if there are there were issues not covered that the ARs would like to discuss.

Then go out and have fun!

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(Special thanks to Jim Geissman and Michelle Maloney for the inspiration to create this document and invaluable editing and remarks that helped refine the content and tone to the experience levels of the referees and ARs working these games.)

Gil Weber is a National Referee Emeritus, State Assessor, Referee Instructor, and Assignor. He was also a contributor to the USSF's *Advice to Referees* (first 11 editions), *Laws of the Game Made Easy*, the *Guide for Fourth Officials*, the *Women's World Cup '99 Fouls and Misconduct* video, *You Make the Call*, and other Federation referee educational programs.