



AMERICAN YOUTH SOCCER ORGANIZATION

Referee Abuse Prevention

Area 1F



August 21, 2025



Referee Abuse Prevention

Introduction



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Objectives

1. Why the new policy?
2. What constitutes referee abuse?
3. What the penalties are for referee abuse?
4. How do you report referee abuse?

Referee Abuse Prevention

Why a New Policy



THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Referee abuse is an issue on the rise – one that threatens the future of soccer.

90% of referees
report that abuse
has increased over
the last 5 years.

60% of referees
choose not to
recertify due to
harassment and
threats.

Youth soccer needs
referees to grow –
without them,
games can't happen

Source: U.S. Soccer Refereeing Department

A NEW WAY TO SUPPORT REFEREES

U.S. Soccer has updated our Referee Abuse Prevention Policy. Adhering to this updated policy and sharing it with your audience is the new way to support referees.



Stronger sanctions for physical and non-physical referee abuse



Clearer definitions for what constitutes different categories of abuse



Suspensions can be a **number of games AND/OR time-based** depending on severity and circumstance



Penalty multipliers for repeat infractions or abuse against a minor



Coaches, players, spectators, and referees are all encouraged to **report abuse**



March 2025: Updated policy in effect – please **share to spread awareness**

Information about policy updates and shareable collateral will be sent via email and are available at

[USSOCCER.COM/RAP](https://ussoccer.com/rap)

AYSO Adoption

“It shall be the duty of each coach, referee, official, and other volunteer, spectator, team member and other participant to...Prohibit and abstain from making negative comments and complaints about officiating. Any abuse, assault and/or gross misconduct directed at any match official will be disciplined in accordance with U.S. Soccer Policy 531-9 Misconduct Toward Game Officials in Amateur Matches, which policy is effective March, 2025.”

—AYSO National Rules & Regulations, Section I.E.1.e
<https://online.fliphtml5.com/lchtd/wjvz/#p=38>



U.S. Soccer Policy 531-9

- Misconduct against Referees may occur before, during, and/or after the match, specifically when the Referee arrives at and/or departs the venue. May also apply later, if related to the match.
- Applies to all registered referees
- **Referee Abuse** is extreme, deliberate, and non-contact behavior that causes a Referee or Protected Party significant harm, or demonstrates a material lack of respect.
- **Referee Assault** is any deliberate physical action against a Referee.

Referee Abuse Prevention

What Is Referee Abuse



The Spectrum of Bad Behavior

- Not all dissent is Referee Abuse

Frustration

Dissent

Referee Abuse

Referee
Action

- Do nothing
- Player counseling
- Non-verbal warning
- Verbal warning

- Verbal warning
- Caution
- Send-off / dismissal
- Referee or Incident Report, as appropriate

- Send-Off / dismissal
- Coaches conference during match
- Referee or Incident Report, as appropriate

Dissent Defined

Dissent

“Public protest or disagreement (verbal and/or physical) with a match official’s decision; punishable by a caution (yellow card)”

—IFAB Laws of the Game, Glossary

Not All Dissent is Referee Abuse

- Dissent is not always Referee Abuse
- But Referee Abuse is an extreme form of dissent

NON-PHYSICAL ABUSE



Non-Physical Abuse

LEVEL 1: VERBAL TAUNTING

Words or gestures that are:

- Insulting
- Belittling
- Insinuating
- Taunting
- Undermining Referee Authority



Non-Physical Abuse

LEVEL 2: HARASSMENT / INTIMIDATION

Language or body language intended to make referee feel unsafe:

- Harassment
- Intimidation
- Retaliation
- Abusive or Threatening (Non-Physical) Language



USA RESPECT
THE CALL

Non-Physical Abuse

LEVEL 3: VERBAL TAUNTING

Aggressive language and threats of violence:

- Aggression
- Attacking
- Derogatory
- Cyberbullying
- Doxing
- Threatening
(Physical/Violence) Language

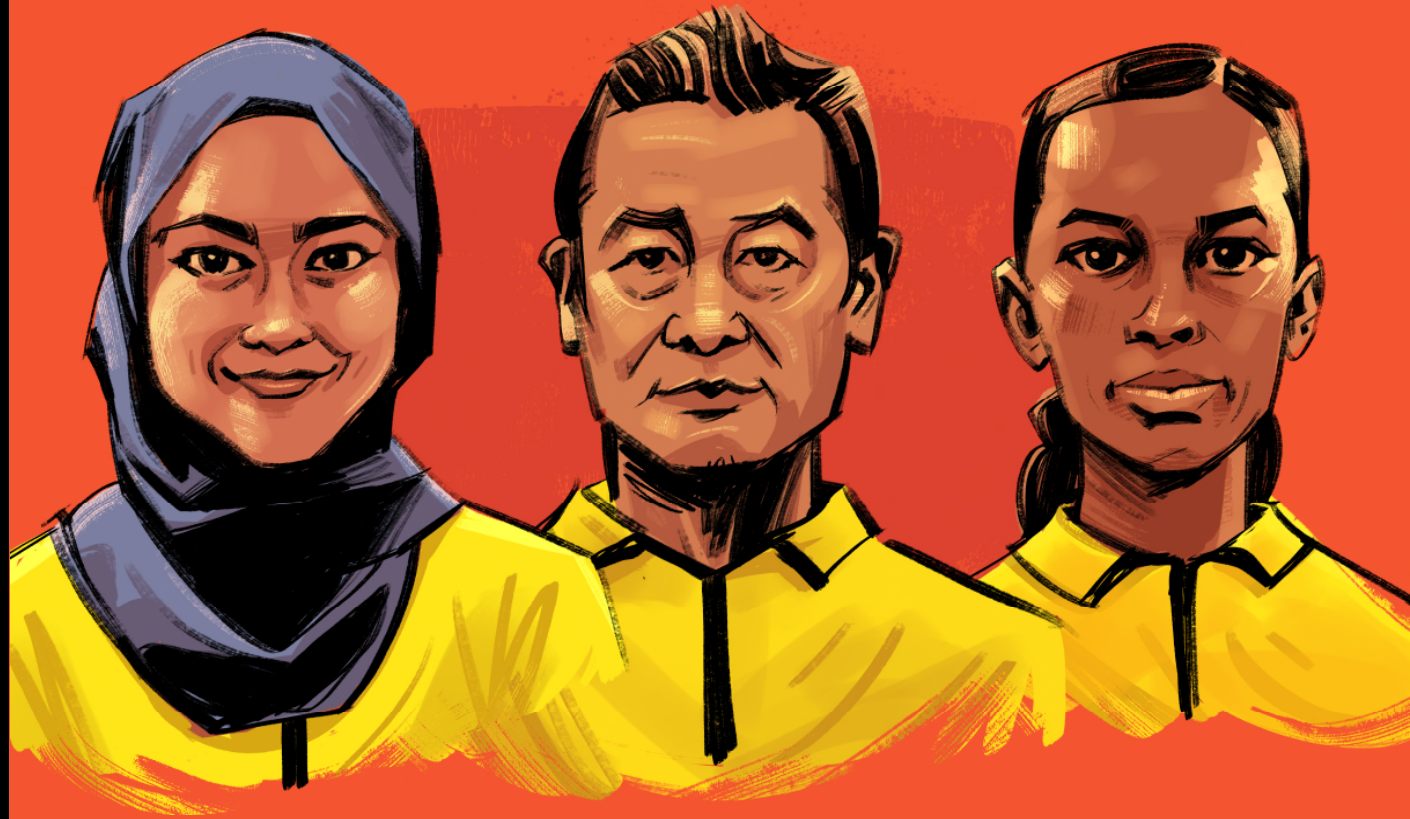


Non-Physical Abuse

LEVEL 4: VERBAL TAUNTING

Discriminatory or derogatory words or actions based on:

- Race
- Skin Color
- Ethnicity
- Nationality
- Social Origin
- Gender
- Disability
- Sexual Orientation
- Language
- Religion



PHYSICAL ABUSE



Physical Abuse

LEVEL 1: MINOR TOUCHING

Minor or Slight Deliberate
Touching



Physical Abuse

LEVEL 2: INTENTIONAL CONFRONTATION

Using contact to intimidate or provoke a physical confrontation:

- Pushing
- Grabbing
- Pulling
- Squeezing
- Pinching
- Lightly Slapping
- Use of Object in Non-Striking Manner
- Physical Property Damage



Physical Abuse

LEVEL 3: VIOLENT CONTACT

Physical contact that is malicious, violent, or intended to cause harm:

- Hitting
- Punching
- Elbowing
- Kicking
- Biting
- Spitting
- Choking
- Tackling
- Throwing or Use of Object or Body Part in a Striking Manner



USA RESPECT
THE CALL

Dissent vs. Referee Abuse

Characteristic	Dissent	Referee Abuse
Primary Focus	Questioning a referee's decision	Directed at the referee <i>personally</i>
Examples of Actions	Verbal disagreement, questioning calls, sarcastic clapping, throwing water bottles	Offensive, insulting, or abusive language; physical or aggressive behavior; targeting discriminatory characteristics.
Severity	Less severe; often results in caution (yellow card)	More severe; often results in send-off (red card) or dismissal)
Impact on Referee	Can disrupt game flow and erode authority if persistent	Creates a hostile environment and affects the well-being of referee
Examples of Language	"Hey ref, what was that call?"	"He ref, what the f**k was that call, you a**hole!?" "You don't know what you're doing!"

Referee Abuse Prevention

What Constitutes Referee Abuse

Questions?

EVERYONE PLAYS®
BALANCED TEAMS
OPEN REGISTRATION
POSITIVE COACHING
GOOD SPORTSMANSHIP
PLAYER DEVELOPMENT



Referee Abuse Prevention

What Are the Penalties for Referee Abuse



Penalties (First Offense)

NON-PHYSICAL OFFENSES of gross misconduct, abuse, and / or assault

NON-PHYSICAL*	MIN. GAMES	TIME	
Insulting, Belittling, Insinuating or Taunting Behavior Undermining Referee Authority	2		Level 1
Harassment, Intimidation, Retaliation, Abusive, or Threatening (Non Physical) Language	4		Level 2
Aggression, Attacking, Derogatory, Cyberbullying, Doxing or Threatening (Physical / Violence) Language	6	6 - 24 Months	Level 3
Offensive or Discriminatory Act	10	12 - 24 Months	Level 4

PHYSICAL OFFENSES of gross misconduct, abuse, and / or assault

PHYSICAL*	MIN. GAMES	TIME	
Minor or Slight Deliberate Touching	3	1 - 6 Months	Level 1
Pushing, Grabbing, Pulling, Squeezing, Pinching, Lightly Slapping, Use of Object in Non Striking Manner, or Physical Property Damage	10	6 - 24 Months	Level 2
Hitting, Punching, Elbowing, Kicking, Biting, Spitting, Choking, Tackling, Throwing or Use of Object or Any Part of Body (Forearm, Knee, Head) in a Striking Manner		12 Months - Lifetime	Level 3

Penalty Factors

KEY PENALTY FACTORS

- Single offenses are at **minimum the prescribed game penalty or time penalty** for non red zone offenses
- Penalties can be **both game and time depending on severity / circumstances**
- Second time offenders receive **double punishment**
- Third time offenders receive a **lifetime ban**
- More than one offense at the same time is **at least the punishment for the most serious offense**
- Offenses against minors are automatically subject to a **“minor multiplier” resulting in triple punishment**
- **One offense warning per league** to be managed by states and leagues collaboratively
- Game consequences are **inclusive of 1 game penalty for any red cards given**
- Optionality for **50% penalty for first offense from a minor**

Please follow your current reporting structure – updated reporting procedure will be a part of Phase 3..

Key Penalty Factors

- Single offenses are at **minimum** the prescribed penalty
- Second time offenders receive **double** punishment
- Third time offenders receive a **lifetime ban**
- More than one offense at the same time is at least the punishment for the **most serious offense**
- Offenses against minors (youth referees) receive **triple** punishment
- Possible reduction in penalty for first-time minor offenders

Referee Abuse Prevention

Penalties for Referee Abuse

Questions?

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Referee Abuse Prevention

What to Do if You See Referee Abuse



Referee's Role

- It is **not** the referee's responsibility to administer the penalties associated with the respective levels of referee abuse
- Nor should Referees describe the potential penalties to the person causing the referee abuse
- Decisions regarding penalties will be made by the appropriate administrative authorities within the Region, Area or Section, as appropriate

Referee's Role

- Referee is only responsible for:
 - Enforcing the Laws and rules involving dissent by word or action, abusive, offensive, and insulting language or gestures, and violent conduct
 - Properly reporting instances of dissent and Referee Abuse, including providing a detailed description, specific language or actions used
 - Keeping personal notes about incidents of dissent and Referee Abuse should additional information be needed for adjudication

How to Report Referee Abuse Incidents

“Continue to process the misconduct reports in the same manner as before:

- Misconduct reports for team members (players & coaches) and Incident reports for Spectators must include the following:
 - Match details, including but not limited to team information, age group, score and date
 - Detailed statement about the incident, including the specific details of the behavior or action (i.e., assault, abuse, mistreatment)
 - Specific language no matter how uncomfortable you may be writing it down

The report should be delivered to the Regional Commissioner, Area Director or Section Director, where the appropriate disciplinary actions will be determined.”

—AYSO Referee Guideline 2025–2026, page 34

<https://www.ayso1ref.com/rg>



Document It

**American Youth Soccer Organization
REFEREE REPORT**

Return completed form to the Regional Commissioner, Safety Director, Area Director, or Tournament Director

Complete this form for any of the following (check box):
☐ Injury/Illness ☐ Theft ☐ Rights ☐ Property Damage ☐ Call to Police ☐ Other

Player Name: _____ Position: _____
 Home Coach: _____
 Section/Area/Region: _____

Date of Game: _____ Start Time: _____ Gender (Age Group): _____
 Field Location: _____ Field Conditions: _____

Other conditions affecting the game or incident: _____

Referee Name: _____ Level: _____ Phone Number: _____
 Asst Referee: _____ Level: _____ Phone Number: _____
 4th Official: _____ Level: _____ Phone Number: _____

SERIOUS INJURY during the game

Name	Team	Player #	Time	Nature of Injury

Participants CAUTIONED before, during or after the game

Name	Team	Player #	Time	Type of Misconduct

Participants SENT OFF before, during or after the game*

Name	Team	Player #	Time	Type of Misconduct

* If player possesses cards are used in this competition, each Player's conduct must be reported after the game and returned to the proper authority with this report. If a coach is removed from the game, include it and must also be returned and returned with this report. Check with the competition authority for requirements.

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**American Youth Soccer Organization
REFEREE REPORT DETAILS**

Player Name: _____ Position: _____ Gender (Age Group): _____
 Home Coach: _____
 Section/Area/Region: _____

Describe any unusual incident or send OFF

Additional Remarks:

Referee Name: _____ Telephone #: _____
 Email: _____
 Date: _____

[For additional description or remarks, use additional sheets.]

In a lawsuit involving Serious Assault or Serious Injury, a copy of this report must also be submitted to the Regional Safety Director, Regional Commissioner, Area Director and Section Director.

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Referee Report For players and coaches

- <https://ayso1ref.com/referee-report>

AYSO INCIDENT REPORT FORM

Return completed form to the Regional Commissioner, Safety Director, Area Director, or Tournament Director

Complete this form for any of the following (check box):
☐ Injury/Illness ☐ Theft ☐ Rights ☐ Property Damage ☐ Call to Police ☐ Other

Player Name: _____ Position: _____
 Home Coach: _____
 Section/Area/Region: _____

Date of Game: _____ Start Time: _____ Gender (Age Group): _____
 Field Location: _____ Field Conditions: _____

Other conditions affecting the game or incident: _____

Referee Name: _____ Level: _____ Phone Number: _____
 Asst Referee: _____ Level: _____ Phone Number: _____
 4th Official: _____ Level: _____ Phone Number: _____

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Player Name: _____ Position: _____
 Home Coach: _____
 Section/Area/Region: _____

Date of Game: _____ Start Time: _____ Gender (Age Group): _____
 Field Location: _____ Field Conditions: _____

Other conditions affecting the game or incident: _____

Referee Name: _____ Level: _____ Phone Number: _____
 Asst Referee: _____ Level: _____ Phone Number: _____
 4th Official: _____ Level: _____ Phone Number: _____

SERIOUS INJURY during the game

Name	Team	Player #	Time	Nature of Injury

Participants CAUTIONED before, during or after the game

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Incident Report For spectators

- <https://www.ayso1ref.com/incident-report>

Identifying Spectators

- Ask the coach for help regarding the name of the offending spectator
 - *It is the coach's responsibility to manage their touchline and assist the referee in this regard*
 - Failure to do so could be considered Referee Abuse committed by the coach
- If the coach tries but fails to get the name:
 - Use descriptions (e.g., female, short hair, glasses, etc.)
- If the coach refuses to get the name, include this detail in the report

Submit It

- For games organized by a Region
 - Submit Report to Regional Commissioner and Regional Referee Administrator
- For games organized by an Area
 - Submit Report to Area Director (Jason South) and Area Referee Administrator (Alfredo Padilla)
 - Contact info available at <https://www.ayso1f.org>
- For games organized by a Section
 - Submit Report to Section Director (Jane Prado) and Section Referee Administrator (Rick Roberts)
 - Contact info available at <https://www.aysos1.org>



Referee Abuse Prevention

How to Report

Questions?

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Resources

- U.S. Soccer Policy 531-9 Misconduct Toward Game Officials in Amateur Matches
 - https://wiki.ayso.org/wiki/File:Referee_Abuse_Policy_531-9_Custom.pdf
- U.S. Soccer Referee Abuse Prevention webpage
 - <https://ussoccer.com/rap>
- AYSO Section 1 Referee Abuse Prevention guidance
 - <https://ayso1ref.com/referee-abuse-prevention-guidance>
- RAP penalty overview
 - https://ayso1ref.com/RAP/Referee_Abuse_Policy_531-9_Penalty_Summary_2122025.pdf
- Referee Report (for player and coach incidents)
 - <https://ayso1ref.com/referee-report>
- Referee Incident Report (for spectator incidents)
 - <https://ayso1ref.com/incident-report>
- AYSO National Rules and Regulations, Section I.E.1.e
 - <https://online.fliphtml5.com/lchtd/wjvz/#p=39>
- AYSO Referee Guideline 2025–2026
 - <https://www.ayso1ref.com/rg>



AMERICAN YOUTH SOCCER ORGANIZATION

Proper Referee Attire

Area 1F



August 21, 2025



Proper Appearance and Equipment

Shirt

- Matching (yellow default)
- Contrasting with both teams
- Tucked in
- Optional black undershirt

Badge

- AYSO Regional Referee

Shorts

- Black
- Appropriate length

Socks

- Black
- Pulled up

Hat

- Optional
- Black
- No logo or AYSO logo

Glasses

- Prescription glasses OK
- Sunglasses discouraged

Shoes

- Good running shoes
- Black preferred
- Turf or trail runners ideal



Card Wallet



Match Report



Whistle



Pens



Stopwatch



Coin