Soccer Referee Protocols for Spectator & Coach Misbehavior

ZERO TOLERANCE! Important new protocols starting fall 2024:

Spectator Misbehavior
Stop the game, bring the coaches to the center circle, ask them identify the person and have the person leave*. If the coach does not comply, or the person does not leave, do not restart the game. Leave the field as a team, contact your assignor, report the situation in the game report or the referee abuse app. REFEREES DO NOT ENGAGE WITH SPECTATORS

* "Leave" means, the referee cannot see or hear the person/people who was/were asked to leave.

Coach Misbehavior
At the first sign of dissent, do not talk to the coach. Show the caution (yellow card). If it continues, do not talk to the coach. Show the caution, and since it's the second one, follow that with a send-off (red card). If the coach does not leave, do not restart the game. Leave the field as a team, contact your assignor, report the situation in the game report or the referee abuse app.

What is Dissent?
In the youth game environment, referees are advised that dissent is a comment, or compilation of comments that is/are personal in nature (Hey Ref…), disruptive to the game, and public in delivery (meaning someone heard it).

- Because there are thousands of forms of dissent, it's easiest to say "We can't describe it, but we all know it when we hear or see it"
- At its most base level, dissent is expressing an opinion that is different from an official position
- Below are a few examples of dissent. This is not an all-encompassing list, and are just a few of the many examples available:
  - Hey Ref: that was a foul; that was a handball; call it both ways; what are you watching; that's not a penalty; etc.
  - Repeatedly questioning calls regardless of the tone of voice, a sarcastic clap or thumbs up, waiving the arms up and down in a 'what was that' motion.
  - Trying to become part of the referee's decision-making process from the technical area.

Coaches with legitimate questions should politely ask the referee if it's okay to approach and ask a question. Spectators should never cross the field boundary lines to approach a referee before, during or after the match.

Laws of the Game
"whether decisions are right or wrong, the 'spirit' of the game requires that referees' decisions must always be respected. All those in authority, especially coaches and team captains, have a clear responsibility to the game to respect the match officials and their decisions" – 2024/2025 Laws of the Game, page 11

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