

Assignors, Referees, and Referee Associations

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As the quality and quantity of youth soccer continues to develop in Missouri, so should the referee program strive to continue to keep pace with this development. What some may see as a necessary or inevitable evolutionary process by no means will be smooth or easy. It is therefore important, especially in the referee community, to remember the proper and acceptable role of each assignor and referee, as well as the role of referee associations. Such associations can and should play an important part in the continued development of newer referees. In order to put the members of the referee community and referee associations in proper perspective, let's review a few basic facts as they exist in 2006.

FACT: The registration of USSF referees is covered by US Soccer Bylaw 532. This Bylaw states that all referees must be registered on referee registration forms through the SRA.

These administrators are specifically authorized under the USSF National Referee Committee. The NRC provides the functional guidelines for administrators within each state through the State Referee Committee. Here in Missouri that means the State Referee Administrator appoints District Referee Administrators who are responsible for administering the programs to benefit all referees from within their geographic area. This includes the registrations, using the criteria in the USSF Administrative Handbook. Currently these areas coincide with the Missouri Youth Soccer Associations four districts. Within each district, the DRA may choose to use local area administrators to help facilitate this administration.

FACT: Referee associations have no control over, nor are part of, these registration procedures.

Referees and assignors get their re-registration forms directly from the USSF. Their registration includes instructions from the USSF specifically stating that they can **ONLY** re-register through the state administrator in accordance with US Soccer Bylaws.

FACT: Individual USSF registered assignors and referees may feel free to accept, or not accept, games from any USSF affiliated member.

Individual assignors and referees must still do their own homework before accepting games. This is to ensure that both the affiliation of an organization is current with the USSF, and that the game is being scheduled and played in accordance with the requirements necessary to keep their liability insurance in force.

FACT: USSF guidelines state that a properly registered referee should first honor commitments to do "affiliated" games. This policy does make a specific exception for interscholastic games however, Referees do not have insurance coverage through the USSF when officiating unaffiliated or interscholastic games.

Unaffiliated games, including interscholastic games, cannot be used for advancement or assessment under the USSF guidelines. All USSF referees must be aware of the re-registration, upgrade and maintenance requirements for the grade that they hold. They must be able to prove these have been met each year to the satisfaction of the state administration. Assignors are a vital and important key in helping all referees be aware of the requirements for their grade.

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FACT: Referee Associations are not officially recognized by the USSF or its affiliates.

While this statement speaks for itself, the purpose of referee associations should be a fraternal organization that serves the common good of its membership and of the game. They should have regular meetings in a relaxed atmosphere so that the members may share information, ideas and problems. These forums can offer an opportunity for referees to learn from each other, as well as from recognized speakers. Many times simply talking about game problems with more experienced fellow referees will help new officials. Such informal, comfortable and relaxed discussions should only benefit all concerned. In practical application, many referee associations do become indirectly involved in the assignment of officials. They should do this by functionally assisting in the facilitation of information, communication and other coordination to large pools of referees for multiple leagues. This is acceptable as long as it is mutually beneficial to the leagues, assignors as well as the referees. Referee associations should never be perceived as collective bargaining agents for referees. The independent contractor status of Assignors and Referees should never be in doubt. Certainly these organizations can limit their membership along whatever guidelines are mutually beneficial to the member purposes and the game of soccer.

FACT: Affiliated leagues are required to utilize a registered referee assignor, according to the By-laws of the United State Soccer Federation.

As simple as this statement seems, it does not state how a League is to appoint a referee assignor. Leagues are free to contract the services of any referee assignor, be they a member of a referee association, an assignor of a nearby league, or a league officer or member. Referee Assignors provide a service to a league much in the same way that a groundskeeper or registrar do. The United States Soccer Federation nor the Missouri Referee Development Program has no authority to interfere in a League's process of appointment of a referee assignor, other than requiring the assignor be registered with USSF.

To summarize, referee associations certainly can have their necessary unofficial niche in the grand scheme of the game. Without their existence the referee community would be hard pressed to serve the game in a competent systematic fashion. What everyone should always strive to remember is that associations are made up of individual members who share a common goal, service to the game. Part of that service, for everyone, should be to help with referee recruitment and retention. Certainly, referee associations should focus a lot of their energies and resources toward these two important items. Keeping experienced referees in the game can only serve the common good for many generations to come.