

Young Referees - The Future of Football

As the new season starts and we become fixated with Fantasy Football teams and VAR it is an ideal opportunity to reflect on some “home truths”. Referees are the lifeblood of Youth Football, especially Young Officials starting out on their careers and without them and the countless other volunteers up and down the country the ability for thousands of youngsters to play competitive football would not exist.

As a referee myself (sadly no longer in the “young” category) and having been both a Manager and Club Chairman in Youth Football I am acutely aware of some of the issues that our younger referees can face.

Firstly, let us dismiss the myth that refereeing is easy and anyone can do it! If it was then many of the vocal critics would have a go themselves. It takes a period of study, attendance on a FA accredited course and several observations in game situations before you finally become a “qualified” referee.

Once qualified, a referee will not be perfect and he or she will still be learning on the job, just as someone who has just passed their driving test is not yet an accomplished driver.

Consider this; your referee may be nervous and relatively new to officiating. They may also be alone when they arrive on a match day - you will possibly have an assistant, teammates will have each other and parents/supporters all have a sense of camaraderie on the touchline. It can be lonely and sadly sometimes it can also be intimidating.

As a coach, your attitude on a match day is vital and you set the standards. You should always strive to make a young referee feel welcome and ensure that they feel valued and respected from the moment they arrive. Allow them time to settle and become familiar with their surroundings, whilst introducing your Linesman and Pitch Marshall if appropriate in good time. If issues need addressing be as helpful and understanding as possible. Remember, they are not an annoyance to be dealt with, they are a vital part of the match day and the game cannot take place without them.

During the game, do not ever be tempted to blame a referee for any shortcomings, especially if you are losing. The referee may well make mistakes and get the odd decision “wrong” in your opinion - constructive criticism (ideally away from players and parents) and after the game has finished is the best method. Many young referees value your input as it will help them to improve and develop.

If you support and respect your referee your players will follow. My suggestion is to treat the referee as if they were your own son/daughter. Think carefully about how you would want them to feel during and just as importantly after the game? Remember they are volunteers, they are doing their best and they want to enjoy the experience as much as you and your players and supporters!

Make every effort to ensure their wellbeing is your priority - you want them to come back as you can't play without them!

In summary, you should NEVER :-

- * Use foul or abusive language towards a referee
- * Belittle them or make sarcastic comments.
- * Ignore a request for support or understanding, especially if they are struggling
- * Fail to provide a welcome, introduce linesmen/pitch marshalls and put them at ease
- * Verbally attack a referee or question decisions in front of your players
- * Allow your supporters to intimidate or shout abuse.