

# Introduction for Soccer Referees

## How To Start

Learning to referee soccer football games is largely a trial by fire. There is only a single referee on the field. Only that referee can change or not change a decision once made, and no one else can help though they can and will complain. Nevertheless, we are hoping you will join us in this rewarding and nearly thankless endeavor. Even before you formally are licensed and join a referee association, you can be put on their mailing list and attend our meetings. At that point, we will provide you with a law book and keep you up to date on our activities.

To start, you need a whistle, a watch, a law book, a thick skin, and a love for the game of soccer. The whistle should be large and deeply pitched. The watch should have a stop timer. The FIFA Law book should be read and then enforced more than the traffic laws in Massachusetts or some third world countries, but less than the traffic laws in Germany. A love for the game of soccer gets one through times that one's skin is not sufficiently thick.

The first place to try using your whistle and your new understanding of the game from having actually read the FIFA Law book (which most of us never do/did while we were playing), is during a club practice. Informal (even without full contact) and formal scrimmages in practice will give you a chance to learn with much less pressure than a game situation. Learn how to watch the game as a referee; find ways to stay close to, but out of the way of, play; get used to blowing a whistle and starting play.

Once you have begun to realize how different the twenty-third position on the field is, it is time for more formal education. Try and watch at least a couple of senior referees officiate, concentrating on the referee not the players. Try to watch a few soccer games on the TV and concentrate on the referees not the players. Where does the referee run in different phases of play? Where does he or she stand? Note that a good referee is rarely standing still! How does he or she talk to the players and how often? How does the referee communicate with whistle and signals? Try and watch a match while talking with another referee on the sidelines, this is even better. Start attending Soccer Referee Association meetings in your area.

Knowledge of the Laws comes from continuous reading and rereading of the FIFA Laws, from Association meetings. Discussions with more experienced referees will also help you understand the Laws. Find time to talk with coaches about what they desire in a referee, this can contribute to your better understanding the game. Although discussions with players about the Laws are encouraged, it is a rare player whose understanding of the Laws will contribute positively to your progress.

Fitness is a personal question. If you have played the game, you have some understanding of the pace and intensity involved. If you have not, here are some training suggestions. Soccer games last for up to ninety minutes and much of this time is spent running. A solid base of distance running, begun 6-8 weeks before the first match of your season, should be a minimum of preparation. In addition, most referees find that some type of speed work 50 or 100-yard sprints, possibly a few 220 or longer provide them with the necessary combination of endurance and the ability to "turn it on" when needed during a match. Soccer can be a difficult game to judge, but the closer you are to the activity, the better the chances of making the correct call.

You are then still not ready for your first real game, but there is no other choice. Call your local Area Assignor and say that you are ready for assignments. At this point, you should formally join the Referee Association. Your Assignor will try to pair you up with a senior referee or an evaluator for those first few weeks, but remember we are often short handed. As we said, learning to referee is largely a trial by fire.

Remember, your efforts are truly needed and appreciated.

## What You Need

There is certain equipment you need to function effectively as a referee, some more essential than others. Your basic uniform is similar to that of a player: a soccer referee jersey, all black soccer shorts, black socks with three stripes, and boots. In CYSA-S, the default jersey is Yellow. Mostly, make sure your jerseys are in good repair and clean. To accomplish this you will need at least one of the alternate Red or Black jerseys. For boots, you are probably best off with a pair of lightweight turf shoes, though some referees prefer molded soccer cleats or indoor soccer shoes. These should be kept clean and polished.

Boots may be your most expensive piece of equipment, so it pays to take good care of them. Always carry a spare pair of laces.

The essential equipment includes:

- **Jerseys**  
Usually carry two or three clean, official referee jerseys.
- **Shorts**  
Carry two pairs of all black soccer shorts with good pockets.
- **Socks**  
Bring black socks with three black stripes. Make sure you have ties to keep them up.
- **Boots**  
Keep these clean and in good repair.
- **Spare bootlaces**  
Like American Express traveler's –do not leave home without them.
- **Whistle.**  
The whistle should have a pleasant deep tone, especially around younger children. Larger metal whistles are usually better for this reason. The whistle can be on a lanyard wrapped around the hand (but *never* around the neck) or with finger grips (often used by ice hockey officials). Wash your whistle in hot water after every game to keep the pea from being stuck. Always carry a spare whistle on your person or with your kit.
- **Watch**  
An inexpensive digital watch, with a stopwatch and/or countdown timer, is ideal. Some referees wear one on each wrist in case one stops. If you record the actual time of day that each half starts, a touch judge can rescue you if your watch fails.
- **Coin**  
Large heavy ones that lay flat on the grass are best. Oddly shaped ones from foreign countries are fine.
- **Score card.**  
A folded index card will serve as a scorecard. Preprinted ones are available from the Official Sports or Law Five. The advantage of preprinted ones is that they have columns for each type of score and reminder boxes for the other information you should record. If you have a columned score card, you can write down the time of each score and recreate the intermediate scores if needed.
- **Writing implement**  
Old, short pencils that fit in the pockets of soccer shorts work well. Erasers are not needed.

Holding a pencil to your scorecard with a rubber band will save much trouble. A spare is also needed. Some of us keep the spare in our sock; some think this is dangerous. Some referees even use pens.

- **FIFA Law book**  
The USSF provides a new FIFA law book to each referee every year at re-certification. Never rely on old ones. Additional law books can be obtained from soccer equipment suppliers.
- **Touch flags.**  
These are easier to see than a waving cap. They are can be very expensive or very inexpensive. Always you remember to get them back from the Assistant Referees immediately after the end of the game.
- **Pencil sharpener**  
(If you use pencils). The electric desktop models are not advised.
- **Hand pump and pin.**  
It is the obligation of the home team to provide a properly inflated ball. Never the less, after you have refused two balls that feel like stuffed cabbage, and the home team is beginning to panic, you can be a good Samaritan. Always remove the pin before putting the pump back in your kit bag.
- **Sunscreen**  
This is often needed on the face in spring and summer.
- **Plastic bags**  
These hold muddy kit on the days one does not need sun screen.
- **Water**  
Drink plenty of water before, during halftime, and immediately after ever game regardless of weather.

You may have personal quirks. Some referees need liniment or asthma medication. Keep a list in your kit bag of the items *you* need and go over it before leaving for every match.