

THE NATIONAL REFEREE ASSESSMENT PROGRAM FIELD ASSESSMENT OF REFEREES AND LINESMEN

INTRODUCTION

The United States Soccer Federation Assessment Program, under the Director of Referee Assessment, develops policies, programs, and procedures to guide the evaluation of officials by trained and certified assessors. The objective of this evaluation -assessment- is to assist officials at all levels of the game to improve and sharpen their skills.

Assessors, certified by the United States Soccer Federation, function under the direction of State Directors of Assessment who report administratively to the state Referee Administrator and who are responsible for carrying out the mission of the National Program. There are presently four assessor grades: Associate (the Entry Level), Assessor, State Assessor, and National Assessor. A limited number of National Assessors are certified each year. They report directly to the National Director of Referee Assessment and are responsible for assessing officials at the highest levels of the game and - where qualified as instructors - for conducting Entry Level Assessor Clinics. Official assessments of upgrading purposes must be conducted by a currently certified and registered United States Soccer Federation Assessor. Assessors, like referees, must register each year to retain their certification.

RESPONSIBILITY FOR SCHEDULING ASSESSMENTS

The State Director of Assessment (or in the absence of an SDA, the State Referee Administrator) is responsible for developing a corps of assessors large enough to meet the assessment needs of the State Association. The SDA, or a delegate, is responsible for scheduling assessors to meet the needs of officials within the state.

ASSESSMENT FORMS

The results of an assessment on a referee or linesman are reported in two ways. A numeric rating on each of 8 Assessment Criteria is developed by the Assessor. From his numeric evaluation, he develops a Feedback Form containing a summary of his findings. The Feedback Form is provided to the official following the game or within 10 days thereafter. It is United States Soccer Federation Policy that the numeric-rating/worksheet is NOT provided to the official.

It is the responsibility of the State Director of Assessment to develop means for circulating completed forms to officials in a timely manner. It is also his responsibility to provide copies of these assessments to the State Referee Administrator to support officials' requests for upgrading. The State Association is also encouraged to develop a database of information that can be drawn upon to facilitate referee administration.

Assessments of National and State 1 referees are to be submitted to the United States Soccer Federation and the National Director of Assessment where the Official has been assessed on amateur first division games or higher level of competition. These assessments are entered into a national database. This provides an opportunity for senior officials to be evaluated by the United States Soccer Federation for assignment to national games and to provide a list of officials who should be considered for the International Grade.

ASSESSMENT CRITERIA

The following information is a summary of the criteria for the United States Soccer Federation Assessors. It is intended to serve as a guide for use in evaluating and reporting on referees and linesmen who seek performance improvement and upgrading.

Dress and Appearance

All referees and linesmen must wear the uniform prescribed by FIFA and the United States Soccer Federation. To be assessed, the official must be currently registered and wear a current badge of the appropriate level during the match being assessed.

Under appearance, assessors will be concerned that the official presents a neat, proper, and professional appearance. They are instructed not to "nitpick" such things as hair style, beards, and other subjective factors.

Pre-Game Organization

A well officiated game starts with, and is aided by, careful attention to pre-game procedures. The assessor is instructed to observe, without intruding, the following items:

Arrival. Officials are expected to arrive a minimum of thirty minutes prior to the match for routine league matches. For United States Soccer Federation Cup Games and other major tournaments, one hour prior to the match.

Field Inspection. All three officials should inspect the field. Inspection should include examination of all marking and dimensions. Special attention should be given to critical marking like the penalty-area, penalty-mark, and goal- and touchlines. Goals and nets should be checked, and corner flags checked for proper height and location. Dangerous objects on the field should be examined and dealt with as necessary.

Personal Equipment. All three officials should have two watches, two pens or pencils and notebook, linesmen's flags, coin, red and yellow cards, and two whistles. They should also have access to supplementary equipment such as a ball pump, inflation needle, and other items.

Instructions to Linesmen. Instructions to neutral linesmen should include designation of one of them as a senior linesman, positions at the kick-off, goal-kick, corner-kick, penalty -kick, and free-kicks near the goal. The referee should indicate the direction of his diagonal and the functions of the linesmen on set plays and at the scoring of a goal. He should emphasize their roles in dealing with off-side infractions and how they should deal with fouls in their vicinity and away from his vision (including fouls by defenders in their own penalty-areas).

Players' Equipment and Identification. A formal check should be made of team colors, especially goalkeepers and players' equipment. Nothing dangerous should be permitted. Footwear should conform to the Laws of the Game. Player passes should be checked where they are in use by the league or competition; it is expected that the referee be aware of the requirements for the particular competition.

Game Ball. The game balls and reserve balls must be inspected.

Starting Time. The referee should never be the cause of a delayed kick-off, but many other factors may play a part - absence of a team, shortage of players, and so on. The referee should make every reasonable effort to start on time. Similarly, there should be no unnecessary delay after half-time.

FITNESS

United States Soccer Federation referees are required to take an annual fitness test to be recorded by the SRA. However, during the course of a match, an individual's level of fitness may fluctuate, thereby affecting his performance on the field. In evaluating the referee's fitness, the assessor considers his age and experience (an "old hand" may do far less unnecessary running than would a beginner).

The assessor evaluates such things as:

Was play held up because the referee could not keep up?

Was he noticeably slower at the end of the game?

Was he capable of sprinting when necessary?

How well did he cover the field of play? (Some items will be considered under "Positioning" and may have nothing to do with fitness, but with lack of good mechanics.)

ATTITUDE TOWARD PLAYERS COACHES, SPECTATORS, AND OTHER OFFICIALS

Good officials are expected to be firm but fair, authoritative but courteous, responsible yet cooperative. Referees will gain the most respect if approachable, even when that approachability may be misused by some who choose to express dissent. The assessor is careful to recognize the difference between permissiveness (a weakness) and approachability, which when combined with firmness, can be a great strength.

Referees should be tolerant and supportive of fellow officials, even when disagreements about decisions arise. The courtesy extended to other participants in a game should not lead to much fraternizing with the players, coaches, or other officials. Such actions can lead to a compromise of the referee's principles.

POSITIONING AND MECHANICS OF OFFICIATING

The assessor, after watching the game, will answer such questions as these about the referees's positioning and mechanics.

- Was he generally in good position on set plays such as goal-kicks, corner-kicks, throw-ins, penalty-kicks, and free-kicks near the goal?
- Was he generally in good position at other times; free-kicks in mid-field, off-side situations, during attacks, and during counter-attacks? Was he close to play, but not so close that he hindered it?
- Did the referee run a basic diagonal - but departing from it when necessary - keeping linesmen and play in view at most times? Did he ever duplicate responsibility with the linesmen? Did he work as a team?
- How good was cooperation between referee and linesmen? Did the referee accept information (flags) from his linesmen, or did he choose to ignore them - even when they were in a better position than he? When necessary to over-rule his linesmen did he handle it in a professional manner, and did the linesmen accept it without rancor or obvious disagreement?

GAME CONTROL

The assessor will look for answers to questions like these:

- How well did the referee control the game overall? Was he able, by virtue of his personality, to command respect and have authority? Was he "picky", stopping the game for trifling offenses, rather than letting it flow?
- Were decisions hesitant and late, or were they clear, firm and prompt? Did he permit constant dissent by players or by bench personnel?
- How well did he deal with serious infractions or persistent misconduct? Did he simply give a free-kick or could he be seen to warn first, then use his yellow card? When he cautioned or sent off players, did he use correct procedures? Was it clear who the offender was? Did he inform the player firmly - but tactfully - as to what action he was taking?
- Was he able to spot "off-the-ball" infractions and did he punish the offenders?

The assessor looks for an official's knowledge of the Laws, correct interpretation of their letter and spirit, and his courage to apply them and take stern action when necessary.

SIGNALS

There are three forms of signals used by officials; the whistle, the flag, and the hand. The correct use of approved signals forms an important part of the referee's performance.

THE WHISTLE

Two messages are conveyed by the sound of the whistle: Stop Play! and Play! The intensity with which the whistle is blown forms an important part of the message.

- Does the referee understand this and does he apply the principles of "hard" and "soft" whistles during the game? Does he only use the whistle when necessary, not calling attention to himself by unnecessary whistling?

COURAGE, CHARACTER, AND CONSISTENCY

Formally referred to as "impartiality", this section of the assessment form has been renamed to reflect more accurately the meaning of this section of assessment criteria. The assessor assesses the real ability of a referee when he is in adversity, since the strength of his personality is brought to the fore.

- How well does he stay "cool under fire"? What are indications that he has the personal strength to measure up to the demands placed on him?
- Does the referee continue to enforce the Laws of the Game without bias, amid the boos and displeasure of irate fans? Or, is he consistently "late" in making decisions, responding to appeals made by players, coaches and spectators? (The assessor is reminded, however, that it can be a sound technique to make "a late decision right" rather than one "too soon and wrong.")

The assessor is looking for consistency. If the referee's calls are consistently late and consistently in accord with player (and others') appeals, the assessor will doubt his fortitude and record it negatively.

ACCURACY OF DECISIONS

There are two aspects to this section of the criteria: Did the referee accurately identify the infraction? And, did he then mete out the correct punishment? In identifying the infraction, the assessor is reminded to be aware that the referee is much closer to play, and may have a better angle of view. He has no such ambiguity when evaluating the correctness of the punishment, however.

- Does the referee distinguish between intentional hand-balls and those other instances when the ball accidentally strikes hand or arm?
- Can the referee spot the player who climbs on an opponent to head the ball? And, can he see the player who "backs under" an opponent who is heading the ball?
- Does the referee correctly identify the culprit when a player is obstructed and, as a result, pushes his opponent in the back?
- Does the referee allow good sliding tackles when the dispossessed player falls the outstretched leg, but does he penalize the defender who intentionally slides in to take both player and the ball?
- Can the referee identify so-called "professional fouls" aimed at the Achilles Tendon, the back of the knee, or the ankle by going "over the ball"?

The correctness of the punishment is judged when a particular infraction warrants more than a free-kick. In these cases, does the referee caution or dismiss a player? Is the referee's decision accurate and sufficient for the task?

USE OF ADVANTAGE

The use of the advantage clause, and the ability to identify "trifling" or "dubious" infractions are trademarks of the master of the refereeing profession. These same skills can cause problems for officials, however, because decisions to apply or not apply these two parts of the Laws can affect control of the game.

The assessor considers these factors:

- Is he consistent? For similar infractions committed by players on opposing teams at different times during the game, does he allow advantage where it applies?
- Having applied advantage, does he nevertheless notify the player who committed the infraction?
- In a "tight" game, does the referee restrict the use of advantage to attacking portions of the field, using it sparingly, to maintain control?
- Does the referee always allow advantage where the infraction does not involve physical contact between players?
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The assessor considers the nature of the game. What is considered "trifling" at the professional level would be more serious in youth soccer, for instance. In competitive leagues, players often expect a certain amount of "illegal contact as part of the game".