

COACHES HAVE NO EXCUSE

by Bobby Howe, USSF Director of Coaching

I would like to draw upon the spirit of goodwill that abounds at this time of year to discuss the Player/Coach/Referee relationship.

Since the history of the officiated game, there have been differences of opinion among players, coaches and officials. In a sense, this is quite understandable because all parties observe the game from a different point of view. Perhaps if they were to appreciate the other person's perspective of a soccer game, there would be better relationships.

PLAYER PERSPECTIVE

The game presents a series of motor and sensory challenges for the player. How do those challenges affect his/her behavior in the game?

- 1) Throughout the game the player has to adjust to the movement of the ball.
- 2) At times, the player has to run with the ball.
- 3) The player has to deal with the constant pressure of the opposition.
- 4) The environment, importance of the game, the time of the game, winning and losing, making mistakes in the game and individual personality will affect the level of stress to which the player is subjected.

Whatever the circumstances of the game, the player has to make very important decisions and maintain a very high level of concentration. It must be understood the players are playing to win the game, therefore, the game is very competitive: **THE HIGHER THE STANDARD OF PLAY, THE MORE COMPETITIVE THE GAME.**

While soccer is unlike rugby or football in its physical aspect, soccer is a **CONTACT SPORT**, although most of contact is incidental as a result of players challenging for the ball. All referees will be able to recite the specific rules, which disallow certain types of contact. However, the key to their observation is the **INTENT OF THE CONTACT.**

- a) Was the player going for the ball or the opponent?
- b) Did the player hit the opponent before the ball or did the opponent fall over the after correct challenge for the ball?

Despite its simplicity, the very nature of the game of soccer presents individual and group "battles" on the field which have to be won.

Referees must understand that the player regards the game from one perspective - **THEY CANNOT BE IMPARTIAL.**

COACH PERSPECTIVE

The coach's perspective is entirely different from the players and the referee. No matter what their personality is like, **THE COACH CANNOT BE IMPARTIAL** the coaches observe the game for the advantage of their teams.

Soccer coaches must not fall into the trap of copying coaches of baseball, football and basketball, where it is almost accepted to be highly critical of officials during the game. In those traditional American sports the coaching staff plays a vital role in the outcome of the game while the game is being played. Therefore, emotions tend to run high. Soccer coaches can do very little to affect the outcome of the game while it is being played. **SOCCER IS A PLAYERS' GAME.**

While emotions are undoubtedly affected, the coach is under no real pressure during the game: he/she does not have to **RUN, SWEAT, OR MAKE SPLIT SECOND DECISIONS AS DO THE PLAYERS AND THE REFEREE.**

THE COACH HAS NO EXCUSE FOR POOR BEHAVIOR.

The following are points for consideration:

- 1) Coaches should recognize the importance of their behavior; harsh criticism of the referee by the coach during the game often gives license for the players and parents (spectators) also to criticize.
- 2) Coaches should address referees respectfully, quietly, in a non-confrontation manner.
- 3) Before each game, coaches should try to remind the players that the referee needs to concentrate and unnecessary talking (directed at the referee) tends to create less concentration on the job of refereeing.
- 4) Coaches should not approach the referee at halftime. This is the only time during the game that the coach has to talk to the players as a group. He should not waste this valuable time in talking to the referee.

REFEREE CONSIDERATIONS

As I have never refereed a game I do not feel qualified in providing a referee perspective. However, the following are considerations for referees based upon player and coach perspectives.

As I have asked referees to try to understand the demands of the players, equally, players must understand the demands of the referee:

- 1) They have a high level of concentration for the duration of the game in which they are making split second value judgments which may affect the outcome of the game. This is a tremendous responsibility.
- 2) The referee is human. They will make mistakes. However, they will make fewer mistakes than most players on the field.
- 3) Referees should not become defensive when criticized nor should they intentionally try to antagonize the players or coaches. If players or coaches become abusive, the referee should deal with the situation efficiently and GET ON WITH THE GAME.
- 4) Soccer is a simple game with simple rules. The difficulty that many referees encounter is that rules are BLACK and WHITE and soccer is a GREY game.

Therefore, common sense should be applied to the decision-making process.

GOOD REFEREEING IS BORN OUT OF COMMON SENSE.

GREAT REFEREEING IS BORN OUT OF EXPERIENCE AND KNOWLEDGE OF THE GAME + COMMON SENSE.

5) The very nature of the game presents different challenges and ever changing situations within a game. The nature of the game also dictates that one game will be entirely different from another. At this time, lack of experienced referees often dictates that most referees are asked to officiate different standards of play and both boys and girls games. Each game represents a different challenge. It is vital that the referee recognizes the standard and type of game and TAKES EVERY GAME SERIOUSLY.

Finally, coaches and referees must recognize that soccer is a players' game and not an arena for them to exhibit their egos. The best referees are those WHO ARE NOT REMEMBERED after the game because they have allowed the players to play. The challenge of the game will inevitably lead to errors on the field. While players must be punished for foul play and abusive conduct, they may be forgiven for mistakes. While referees must be impartial and control the game in a non-officious manner, their mistakes in judgment can be understood and, therefore, forgiven.

Reprinted from FAIRPLAY Vol.8, Issue 1 Spring/Summer 1997
A Publication of the U. S. Soccer Federation