

Eric's Turf
By Eric A. Beck, SRA - Oregon

As the State Referee Administrator for Oregon, I have many conversations with referees from all over our state. One common topic of discussion is the difficulty many referees face when working on youth games. Yes, that's right, youth games! It is hard to imagine that the youth games can be more difficult to officiate than adult games. I heard the same complaints so often I decided the best way to fully understand what was really happening out on the pitch was to learn with first-hand experience, so I asked to be assigned to do some youth games.

I quickly became aware of the obvious difference between youth and adult games-all the "noise". What noise you might wonder? Well, let's see, how can I describe it? Here are some clues: it comes from a large group of big, loud, mean and ugly, extremely irritating, soccer "know-it-alls", who can't wait to shout out commands to both the players and the referees. It's bad enough when you have one noisemaker on the sideline, but when you get a whole group of them together, it can really ruin a good soccer game! Anybody figure it out? Shouldn't be too hard since everybody has one and many of you are one - **A SOCCER PARENT!**

I am sure many of you were aware how often the game you were watching or playing in did not have three officials. There are many different reasons for this. However, national statistics show that the number one reason that referees decide they do not want to referee anymore is due to the "referee abuse".

It's all a part of the game you might say. **WRONG** - it is absolutely unacceptable for anyone to stand on the sidelines and yell at the referee or the assistant referees!!!! Maybe if we could improve on our sideline etiquette, we would have a full crew of officials.

How many soccer players do you know who can play a game without making any mistakes? How long does it take to develop the skills necessary to play at the top level? How many players really make it that far? Referees are no different, their skills as referees need to develop with experience too. Youth games are a perfect referee training ground. Many of the assistant referees you are screaming at may have only been refereeing for a couple of months, or may be brand new! Shame on you!

During one game this season, I noticed that the sideline was very quiet. I wondered what could possibly be wrong. At half time I asked one of the parents why it was so quiet and nice. She informed me that their team had a policy that if a parent felt so moved as to share with the world what they thought about the game, another parent would walk up to them and quietly hand them a roll of duct tape. That's all it took! She said so far, no one had even had to actually apply the tape, just having the duct tape handed to them gave the message they needed to hear.

Hopefully you can't put yourself in this category, but if you can, maybe you should think about it. The coaches don't need your help, the players don't need your help and the referees are trained to try not to listen to you anyway. So please think about what this sounds like and keep your comments to yourself, or, if you absolutely have to say something, please be sure it is positive in nature and not instructive. Everyone would enjoy the game so much more. After all, isn't that the reason we are all out there!