

Subject: Youth Soccer Insider: The Refs Who Don't Care

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The Refs Who Don't Care

By Randy Vogt

I was appalled as I saw my colleagues officiating. I was to ref the next game at the field and saw the ref, on a warm day on a turf field, wearing a short-sleeve referee shirt and black sweatpants. There was only one assistant referee and he was thankfully wearing black referee shorts but his black socks were pulled down to his ankles (maybe to avoid the "referee tan") and he was also wearing gray running shoes instead of black. Because of their diverse outfits, they did not look like a team. The other touchline was manned by a club linesman as only one AR was either assigned or showed up at the game.

Despite the artificial turf field, the speed of play was not quick as both U-17 teams struggled with possession. But the game had its moments, as do all youth soccer games. The ref made his residence inside the kickoff circle, rarely straying outside of it. He did manage to move a bit upfield when the ball was in the penalty area but he was still 40 yards from the ball.

I checked the goals and thankfully, both were anchored. But there were huge holes in both of the nets so a ball could have easily gone through it and been a valid goal without the knowledge of the officials. So I used a lot of duct tape to fix these holes and thought how I was expending more energy fixing the goals than the officials were doing officiating the match in progress.

This did not go unnoticed. As I was going from one goal to another and back again, I passed the teams' benches and one of the coaches said to me, "Are you wearing a Fitbit?" as I was walking a lot just to get the goals in shape before my game.

Sadly, these refs are not *rare* exceptions and all other officials care about what they are doing, as I have increasingly been appalled by what I have seen by my colleagues. Thankfully, the majority of refs remain quite dedicated. And I understand that not every youth soccer ref has the youth or the passion to move



to the higher levels, such as adult soccer, high school or college soccer and even the pros one day. But refs need to be concerned about the players as well as their own reputations. Not caring is completely unacceptable, whether you are a referee or the butcher, the baker, the candlestick maker.

The refs who don't care are content with receiving a few assignments on the weekend and making a couple of hundred dollars.

The refs who don't care are the ones who show up at the field just before kickoff time, even for their first game of the day, and never seem to smile. They are the officials who check the player and coaches passes in world record time and often allow illegal equipment, such as jewelry, to be worn by players. It's the assistant referee who plays around with the flag or seems more interested in what's happening on the adjacent field. Those who don't care are the ones I never see at clinics, very rarely at meetings and who hardly think about officiating until putting on their uniform on the weekend.

An assignor became justifiably annoyed when he heard that a ref said, "We don't follow the rules around here?" So if a ref does not follow the rules, then what exactly does a ref do?

Soccer Americans might ask why refs who don't care are assigned at all and the answer is there are referee shortages across the United States and these refs are needed so that all games are covered. But they are setting themselves up for failure. After all, they will receive a reputation for not hustling and the same players, coaches and spectators at that slow-moving game might be the same people, although with different roles, at the very quick, competitive game. They will know that the ref does not hustle, at least in the game they saw. Should the ref actually move around the field in the better game, then they'll know that he or she only works hard for certain games.

Consequently, I have never seen a ref who did not care years later as they repeatedly complain about the people at youth soccer fields and determine that refereeing is not for them. But they only have themselves to blame as they were the problem all along.

(Randy Vogt has officiated over 9,000 games during the past three decades, from professional matches in front of thousands to 6-year-olds being cheered on by very enthusiastic parents. In his book [Preventive Officiating](#), he shares his wisdom gleaned from thousands of games and hundreds of clinics to help referees not only survive but thrive on the soccer field. You can visit the book's website at www.preventiveofficiating.com)

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