

Subject: Youth Soccer Insider: Ref Watch: How the last game of the season can present unique challenges

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Ref Watch: How the last game of the season can present unique challenges

By Randy Vogt

I'm a positive thinker. But all the positive-thinking in the world cannot erase the fact that refereeing is a challenging and sometimes dangerous avocation.

Since I keep a very short note on every game that I have officiated, I know that the number of cautions and send-offs I hand out is much higher for the last game of a team's season than its other games. I would say that it's roughly double. Why can the last game be such a problem? Referees and assistant referees have to be particularly vigilant for these reasons:

1) Familiarity can breed contempt. If a youth soccer team is playing a 10-game league season, chances are that the last game (and sometimes the last portion of its schedule) is against an opponent it has played before. Add in that these two teams might have met in cup or tournament play and you could have teams playing against one another three times in the past two months. And No. 3 of white might remember that he had an issue with No. 8 of blue, unknown to the game officials that day. Even if the teams are very friendly with one another, I have heard teams say, "We are playing these guys again?"

2) The game means little in the standings. Every game means something at the start and midway point of the season as teams go for promotion and to avoid relegation. A game could mean just about nothing (except placement) for the last match of the season if two teams in the middle of the standings are playing one another, with no possibility of promotion and relegation. This type of game might seem to be the easiest to ref as there should be no pressure on the players. On the contrary, as what can wind up happening is some players and coaches take the game seriously, others do not and this very different attitude causes issues. It can cause friction among teammates and issues among opponents. Joking and giggling among teammates can be interpreted very differently by opponents as they believe the opponents are laughing at them.

3) The most important reason that the last game of the season can be problematic is sent-off players and dismissed coaches will not be suspended the next week. Many have even told me, upon being sanctioned, that their team is not coming



back to play in the league so they will not be suspended. This is where U.S. Youth Soccer and U.S. Club Soccer need to work together. If a team goes from one umbrella to another the next season, one group needs to send the ref's supplementary report (about the game) to the new league, which needs to read it and suspend accordingly. Unfortunately, there is little that can be done if the players are U-18 and they are graduating from high school and not playing organized soccer in the future. If they plan on playing in the future, an adult league could suspend the player or the youth league could send the supplementary report to his/her new college coach, which would go a very long way. Just putting that info in the league guidelines and making U-18 teams aware of this would calm down the last game of the season.

([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 [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 <http://www.preventiveofficiating.com/>)

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