

Subject: Youth Soccer Insider: The dumbest way to insult a referee

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The dumbest way to insult a referee

By Mike Woitalla

The ref calls a foul. The halfwit coach of the kid who committed it yells, "It's OK, Timmy! You didn't do anything wrong!" -- believing he's cleverly circumventing the dissent rule because he's not screaming directly at the ref.

The last time I got this kind of snide response from a coach, the phrase was, "It's OK, Sarah, I like how you're playing!"

The call on the preteen was for pushing an opponent, after the second time I whistled the same kid for the same infraction. She had also done it in between the two calls -- stretching her arm out as far as possible to fend off an opponent -- but I didn't call it that time, because the other player survived the push, won the ball, and dribbled away. But I told the girl, "You can't push with your arm."

Before I get back to the dissent issue ... pushing with arms is something I see very often at young ages. And it's done so awkwardly that I'm convinced coaches are teaching it, and the kids are trying to "use their arms" the way some coach demonstrated it, failing miserably at doing it subtly enough for a ref to ignore it.

Regardless of whether kids are being taught to foul -- although I'm quite sure they are -- the pushing-an-opponent call is a difficult one for the referee because quite frequently both players are pushing. The ref must be very alert to judge who deserves the call. If you ignore the pushing, things start getting out of hand and you get blamed for not cracking down when a kid goes tumbling. When you call it right away, you get that, "Let the kids play!" B.S. that coaches only yell when it's their player who's doing the fouling.

So I've found that if you call the pushing right off the bat, you send a message to the players that you're not allowing this foul -- and you prevent it from escalating into elbowing or blows to the face. Players tend to comprehend because their instinct is to



test boundaries. But when coaches interfere it undermines the ref and the players.

In the case of serial-pusher Sarah (obviously, that's not her real name) -- I stopped the game and explained to the coach that it was the girl's third blatant push. The coach actually argued at me, with the girl standing yards away, sending the message to the girl that blatant fouling was OK.

When I thought about the incident after the game, I recalled something I did when I was a 15-year-old player. The ref called a foul throw-in on me because I stepped on the sideline. I grumbled that I'm allowed to do that. On my next throw-in, I got called for the same infraction, and my coach subbed me.

I complained to my coach that the ref didn't know the rule. To which my coach said to me that he didn't care what the rule was, if the ref calls foul throws for stepping on the touchline, "Don't step on the touchline!"

That makes perfect sense. Players need to adjust to the refereeing. If they don't, they'll hurt their team's chances to win.

When a coach loudly condones a child's foul after the ref called it -- the coach is basically telling the kid to keep doing the same thing. That doesn't sound like a good game plan to me.

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