

MASSACHUSETTS YOUTH SOCCER

ZERO TOLERANCE POLICY

This Zero Tolerance Policy is an effort to decrease the abuse of soccer Officials (Referee, Assistant Referee, Linespeople, 4th Official). We must all work together to deter and eliminate all levels of verbal abuse or negative criticism of Officials. We would not tolerate such behavior towards our children, we must not tolerate the same towards our Officials.

This Zero Tolerance Policy is not intended to label Officials as always right and spectators and/or coaches are always wrong. Just as players make mistakes during play and coaches may err in strategy or methodology, Officials will make mistakes in officiating, particularly in the younger divisions where they are learning how to officiate.

The current state of affairs regarding chronic shortages of qualified Officials will likely be with us for some time. We simply cannot afford to experience the high levels of attrition of Officials that have occurred in the past. One consequence of this shortage is the need from time to time for an Official to be assigned to officiate a higher level match than they otherwise might be comfortable officiating. In all cases, our Officials must receive only positive support from coaches and spectators to continue to grow as an official.

This Zero Tolerance Policy applies to all coaches, players, parents, spectators, and other supporters and Officials participating in a Mass Youth Soccer program or event.

The coach is responsible for ensuring all spectators associated with their team follow this Zero Tolerance Policy relating to communications with an Official. A coach or spectator may not express any disagreement or dissatisfaction whatsoever with the officiating to any Official, directly or indirectly. A coach or spectator may not, before, during, or after a match, discuss with, or voice within earshot of, an Official any critique of the Official's performance, other than to thank and positively compliment the Official. Any other critiques may only be voiced or communicated through the appropriate league's reporting channels.

Abusive and obscene language, violent play or conduct, fighting, and other negative or derogatory behavior (such as sarcasm or taunting) directed to or about Officials or otherwise deemed detrimental to the match will not be tolerated. The ultimate responsibility for the actions of coaches, players and spectators resides with the member organizations (towns, clubs, leagues).

It is the responsibility of the coaches to provide all Officials support and spectator control, and it is the responsibility of the member clubs to provide instructions to their coaches on how they are expected to carry this out. This policy applies before, during, and after the match at the soccer field and its immediate surrounding areas.

Parents, Guardians & Spectators

No parent, guardian or spectator shall address the Officials at any time.

This includes, but is not limited to:

1. Parents, guardians and spectators shall not dispute calls during or after the match..
2. Parents, guardians and spectators shall not make remarks to the Official(s) or advise the Officials(s) to watch certain players or attend to rough play.
3. Parents, guardians and spectators shall never yell at the Official(s), including criticism, sarcasm, harassment, intimidation or feedback of any kind before, during or after the match.

The only allowable exceptions to the above are:

1. Parents, guardians and spectators may only respond to an Official who has initiated a conversation, until such time as the Official terminates the conversation.
2. Parents, guardians and spectators may point out an emergency or safety issues, such as a player apparently injured on the field or observed fighting.
3. Parents, guardians and spectators may compliment the Official after the match.

Additionally, parents, guardians and spectators shall not make derogatory comments to coaches, players, or spectators of either team.

Consequences (for Parents, Guardians & Spectators)

In the opinion of the lead Official, depending on the severity of the offense, the lead Official may take any of the following actions:

1. Issue a verbal warning to the coach of the offending party's team and have the coach address the parent, guardian or spectator to cease their actions.
2. Stop the match and instruct the coaches to direct the parent, guardian or spectator to leave the field area.
3. Abandon the match if the parent, guardian or spectator does not leave the field area.

Players

The conduct of the players and substitutes is governed by the Laws of the Game as provided by IFAB and USSF and in effect from time to time. The Laws themselves describe the consequences associated with violating the Laws of the Game. Additional consequences for players who engage in misconduct may be established by the club and/or league, but may in no case be less severe than the consequences established by IFAB, USSF, or Mass Youth Soccer and in effect from time to time.

Coaches, Assistant Coaches, & Bench Personnel

It is the responsibility of all coaches to maintain the highest standards of conduct for themselves, their players and supporters in all matches (Please refer to our Coaches Code of Conduct). Failure to do so undermines the Official's authority and the integrity of the match resulting in a hostile environment for players, the Official(s), coaches, assistant coaches, bench personnel, and spectators. As role models for all of the participants and spectators, coaches participating in a Mass Youth Soccer sanctioned event are expected to be supportive of, and to acknowledge the effort, good play, and sportsmanship on the part of ALL players from both teams. For example, coaches, assistant coaches and bench personnel are expected to show that although they are competing in a match, they have respect for their opponent, Officials, and spectators at all times. Mass Youth Soccer will not tolerate negative behavior exhibited either by demonstrative actions and gestures, or by ill-intentioned remarks, including those addressed toward the Officials or members of an opposing team. Coaches exhibiting hostile, negative, sarcastic, or otherwise ill-intended behavior toward Officials, opposing players, or opponent's coaches will be subject to sanction by the match Official. Additional sanctions may be imposed by the coach's club, the league that the match is being played under, or as allowed by Mass Youth Soccer policies after a review of the match report.

- Coaches shall not interact directly or indirectly with the coaches or players of the opposing team during the match in any manner that may be construed as negative, hostile, or sarcastic either by way of demonstrative actions and gestures or by ill-intentioned remarks.
- Coaches shall not offer dissent to any call made by the Officials at any time.
- Coaches are not to address the Officials during the match except to:
 - A. Respond to an Official who has initiated a conversation.
 - B. Point out emergency or safety issues.
 - C. Make substitutions.
 - D. Ask the Officials, "What is the type of restart (direction and Indirect Free Kick or Direct Free Kick)?"
 - E. Ask for the time remaining in the half.
- Coaches are allowed to ask an Official after a match or during the halftime interval, in a polite and constructive way, to explain a law or foul, but not judgment calls made.
 - A. Polite and friendly concern can be exchanged with the referee. If the polite tone of the conversation changes, the Official may abandon the exchange at any time and the coach will cease further discussion or interaction.
 - B. Absolutely no sarcasm, harassment, or intimidation is allowed.

NOTE: It is recommended that coaches or other team members do not engage in any conversation with the match Officials once the match has concluded.

Consequences for Coaches, Assistant Coaches, & Bench Personnel

In the opinion of the lead Official, depending on the severity of the offense, the lead Official may take any of the following actions:

1. Issue a verbal warning to the offending coach, assistant coach, or bench personnel.
2. Caution the offending coach, assistant coach, or bench personnel.
3. Eject the offending coach, assistant coach, or bench personnel. Once ejected, the individual will be required to leave the field area immediately.
4. Abandon the match, if the coach, assistant coach, or bench personnel do not leave the field area after having been instructed to do so.

Additional consequences associated with the ejection of a coach, assistant coach, or bench personnel may be assessed by the club or league which sanctioned the match in accordance with their documented policy. These consequences may be no less stringent than sanctions as may be imposed by Mass Youth Soccer following their review, if conducted, of the incident.

All cases of alleged abuse or assault of a referee shall be reported to the Mass Youth Soccer State Office and State Referee Administrator within 48 hours of conclusion of the match. Mass Youth Soccer will then conduct a verification of the complaint and subsequent actions as required by applicable sections of USSF policy in effect at the time of the incident. Although Mass Youth Soccer is continually bound by USSF policy and its various revisions, definition of “referee abuse” and “referee assault” found in USSF Policy 531-9 as of the date of this Zero Tolerance Policy is offered by way of information, as follows:

Referee Abuse

- (a) Referee abuse is a verbal statement or physical act not resulting in bodily contact which implies or threatens physical harm to a referee or the referee’s property or equipment.
- (b) Abuse includes, but is not limited to the following acts committed upon a referee: using foul or abusive language toward a referee that implies or threatens physical harm; spewing any beverage on a referee’s physical property; or spitting at (but not on) the referee.

Referee Assault

- A. Referee Assault is an intentional act of physical violence at or upon a referee.
- B. For purposes of this Policy, “intentional act” shall mean an act intended to bring about a result which will invade the interests of another in a way that is socially unacceptable. Unintended consequences of the act are irrelevant.
- C. Assault includes, but is not limited to the following acts committed upon a referee: hitting, kicking, punching, choking, spitting on, grabbing or bodily running into a referee; head butting; the act of kicking or throwing any object at a referee

that could inflict injury; damaging the referee's uniform or personal property, i.e. car, equipment, etc.

