

How To Run A Mentoring Program

1. DESCRIPTION

This workshop describes the process of setting up and administering a Regional mentoring program. It also describes mentoring activities that can be hosted / administered at the Area or Section level.

This lesson plan may be presented as a webinar, as an Expo workshop, or as an in-class workshop within a Region or Area.

2. GOALS

The objectives of this workshop are:

- Help referee program administrators understand the importance of mentoring.
- Describe how to set up and run a successful Regional mentoring program.
- Describe ways that Areas and Sections can enhance mentoring programs, and how they can help when Regional staffs lack the resources to run a Regional mentoring program.

3. PREREQUISITES

None.

4. STUDENT MATERIALS

None.

5. INSTRUCTOR EQUIPMENT AND MATERIALS

Companion PowerPoint.

6. INSTRUCTOR NOTES

None.

7. ATTACHMENTS

Handout #1, "Starting a Regional Referee Mentoring Program"

Handout #2, "Referee Mentoring Event Planning Guide"

LESSON PLAN

I. INTRODUCTION

- A. Introduce self and co-instructors.

II. BODY

- A. What Is Mentoring and Why Is Mentoring Important?

1. Every year, Regions recruit a new crop of volunteer referees. But every year Regions also lose a significant number of the referees that they recruited and trained in previous years. Why does this happen?
 - a. Lack of experience on the part of the new referee breeds a lack of confidence in what they're doing.
 - b. Criticism from coaches and spectators is publicly embarrassing, abusive, and reinforces the sense that they can't "do it right."
 - c. Actual or perceived lack of support from the Region can cause anger and frustration.
 - d. Our referees are volunteers. If they aren't happy doing it, or feel that they cannot "do it right," there's nothing that prevents them from "un-volunteering" themselves.
2. One of the ways Regions can combat the high attrition rate is by establishing a mentoring program for new referees. Mentoring occurs when a more knowledgeable and experienced person (the mentor) helps a less experienced person (the mentee). Mentoring builds both confidence and competence in mentees by allowing them to build upon their knowledge and skills more quickly than if they were learning solely on their own.
3. Referee mentoring is also an effective tool for helping referees who wish to attain a higher level of certification (a higher badge level). Experienced referees who are already refereeing at a higher level can mentor referees who want to upgrade by passing along their own knowledge and experience.
4. This course is designed to help referee administrators set up and run a Regional mentoring program. The support of Area and Section staff for mentoring programs can be critical for smaller regions, so we'll also talk about ways that Area and Section staffs can help their Regions with mentoring activities.

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B. The Regional Mentoring Program For New Referees

1. A Regional mentoring program needs three key ingredients to work:
 - a. Support from the Regional Commissioner (RC) and the Regional board
 - i. Support from the RC and the board is required because the use of experienced referees as mentors reduces those referees' availability to officiate games. The RC and board must support a short term loss for a long term gain.
 - ii. Support from the RC and Board is also important because ideally your Region will do things such as sponsor mentor training courses and recognize its mentors with special ball caps, T-shirts, badges, or other items that will identify when a mentor is on the field.
 - b. A mentoring program administrator
 - i. The responsibilities of the mentor program administrator include selecting and recruiting new mentors, making sure they are trained, and pairing them with new or upgrading referees. The program administrator can be the Regional Referee Administrator, the Regional Director of Referee Mentoring and Assessment, the Regional Director of Referee Instruction, or any other willing and knowledgeable volunteer.
 - c. Mentors
2. The first step for the Regional mentoring program administrator is to identify potential referee mentors for new referees.
 - a. Any experienced referee is a candidate for becoming a mentor, but ideal candidates will have some or all of the following:
 - i. A gregarious, outgoing (or at least an approachable, non-threatening) personality.
 - ii. A demonstrated ability to communicate constructive advice in a positive manner
 - iii. Significant refereeing experience and acknowledged skills and abilities
 - iv. Intermediate Referee or higher certification (this is a big plus in terms of knowledge, but is not a requirement)

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- v. Certification as a referee assessor (this is a big plus in terms of knowing how to watch referees manage games, but it is not a requirement)
3. The next step is to schedule and hold a mentor training course using the lesson plan and PowerPoint, "How To Be A Mentor".
 - a. This course provides new mentors with an understanding of the importance of referee mentoring, tips for the proper style of interacting and communicating, and specific tools for mentoring new referees, youth referees, and referees who are seeking to upgrade their badge level.
 - b. Make sure that you provide the new mentors with copies of (or links to) the current AYSO edition of the Laws of the Game, and the AYSO Rules and Regulations.
 - c. Completion of this course is all that is required for certification as a Referee Mentor. The mentoring program administrator should complete and submit a roster in eAYSO so that the new mentors will become certified.
4. Next, mentors should be assigned to new referees. Ideally there will be enough mentors so that each mentor will be assigned no more than three mentees.
5. If mentors are assigned to brand new referee candidates, the best case is that the mentors will meet their mentees at their Basic Referee Course or Basic Online Referee Companion Course. If that can't happen, mentors should be encouraged to make contact with their mentees before the new referee's first game.
6. If at all possible, arrange to hold a "mentoring day" prior to the start of the regular season. This is a great way for new referees to get some game experience and lots of mentor feedback in a safe environment. (See Handout #2 at the end of this lesson plan for guidelines on how to hold a referee mentoring event.)
7. Mentors should arrange to observe a new referee's first "real" game. It can dramatically increase a new referee's confidence to have a mentor and protector available, and the mentor's advice can decrease the amount of time it takes for the new referee to become highly competent.
8. After the first game or two of the season, the mentoring program administrator should make contact with mentees to get their feedback on how the mentors are performing. If feedback indicates that a particular mentor is having

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difficulty establishing positive relationships, the administrator can take the appropriate action.

9. During the season, the mentoring program administrator (possibly in conjunction with another referee staff member such as the Regional Director of Instruction) can invite mentees and their mentors to attend short evening or weekend roundtable discussions and share their experiences and learning.
10. The administrator, referee staff, and Regional board should recognize the mentors' time and achievements in some meaningful way: ball caps, T-shirts, pizza dinner, gift cards, or whatever else the Region can manage.

C. The Regional Mentoring Program: Experienced Referees And Upgrade Candidates

1. Experienced referees may also benefit from being assigned a mentor. The mentoring program administrator should use care in approaching the referee, however: handled incorrectly, the offer of a mentor could be taken as a criticism.
2. Experienced referees, and referees who are interested in upgrading, obviously have some different characteristics when compared to new referees:
 - a. They enjoy AYSO and/or refereeing enough to want to become better referees.
 - b. They are more experienced and confident.
 - c. They are typically more knowledgeable (although not always with completely *correct* knowledge).
 - d. They have developed certain refereeing habits (although not necessarily *good* habits).
 - e. They probably haven't been mentored in some time and are no longer used to that type of relationship.
 - f. The higher the mentee's certification level, the more experienced and confident they are. This can actually present a potential challenge to a mentor. It's often tougher to convince an Advanced Referee who's working on the National badge that he or she has an area of potential improvement than it is to convince a Regional Referee who's working on the Intermediate badge.

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- c. Organize and host an Area-wide mentoring day for new referees (see the referee mentoring event attachment at the end of this lesson plan)
- d. Publish a “Tip of the Week” for referees in the Area or Section

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III. CONCLUSION

- A. Referee mentoring is vitally important to the AYSO National Referee Program.
 - 1. It helps us retain referees.
 - 2. Once word of mouth spreads that we are supporting and protecting our referees, it helps with recruiting, too.
 - 3. It helps our new referees quickly become capable and confident.
 - 4. It helps experienced referees upgrade.
- B. Ask for and answer any questions.
- C. Thank everyone for participating.

Starting A Regional Referee Mentoring Program

1. Designate an administrator for the Referee Mentoring Program.
2. Identify potential referee mentors for new referees.
3. Schedule and hold a mentor training course using the lesson plan and PowerPoint, "How To Be A Mentor".
4. Assign mentors to new referees. Ideally there will be enough mentors so that no one mentor will have to be assigned to more than three mentees.
5. Have mentors meet their mentees at their Basic Referee Course or Basic Online Referee Companion Course. If that can't happen, mentors should be encouraged to make contact with their mentees before the new referee's first game.
6. Mentors should arrange to observe a new referee's first game.
7. If at all possible, arrange to hold a "mentoring day" prior to the start of the regular season.
8. After the first game or two of the season, make contact with mentees to get their feedback on how the mentors are performing.
9. During the season, invite mentees and their mentors to attend short evening or weekend roundtable discussions and share their experiences and learning.
10. Recognize the mentors' time and achievements in some meaningful way: ball caps, T-shirts, pizza dinner, gift cards, or whatever else the Region can manage.

Referee Mentoring Event Planning Guide

A referee mentoring event is an opportunity for new referees to work one or more practice games in a safe environment – preferably before their first “real” game. Such events allow new referees to be mentored, to gain experience, and to become confident before their first competitive match.

When planning a mentoring event, first determine what you want your new referees to experience and learn. Possible objectives might be for each referee to have an opportunity to spend some time as both the referee and an assistant referee, and to experience certain events within a game such as a free kick or a penalty kick. With your objectives in mind you can determine the nature of the event you wish to organize. Make sure that you communicate your objectives to all of your participants (new referees, mentors, coaches, and players) so they have the right expectations coming into the event. Doing so will minimize the chance of people not getting what they expected.

When recruiting teams to play in the scrimmages, advise them ahead of time that you will be mentoring new referees and that they should expect mistakes and unusual calls. Also, let the teams know if you plan on having the referees fabricate any calls, such as penalty kicks, in order for the new referees to practice the proper mechanics. When the coaches know what to expect they are usually willing to participate and support the program.

Pre-Event Planning:

Decide how large an event you wish to have based on the number of referees that you want to mentor, the number of teams you have available to scrimmage, the number of mentors you have available to work with the new referees, and the venue that is available.

Select the date you wish to hold your event. Consider such things as the dates you will be holding your referee training, the date your season will begin, when fields are available, school holidays, etc.

Identify the field(s) you want to use for the event and secure any necessary permits.

Invite teams to participate in the scrimmages. U-10 boys and U-10 girls teams work well for new referees. Invite all teams in the age group that may be available to participate on a first-come, first-served basis. Accumulate a wait list once you have filled your schedule in case teams have to back out and you need to replace them.

Invite referees to participate in the mentoring event – again, first-come, first-served. Invite all of the recently trained referees you think will benefit from mentoring. Referees who only have 1-2 years’ experience can also benefit from this type of event.

Handout #2

Invite mentors to participate in the mentoring event. An event like this can also be used to train new mentors. Experienced mentors can work with and guide new mentors.

Scheduling

When scheduling the games try to match the levels of the teams as much as possible so the match is competitive. Don't pair an all-star team against a rec team. Determine whether you want to have the games spaced so that mentors can do consecutive games or if the mentoring times will overlap. Mentoring will occur before the match, during the match and after the match. The pre- and post-game briefings will be approximately 30 minutes. You can schedule these so the post-match briefing for game 1 is occurring at the same time as the pre-match briefing for game 2 or you can schedule them consecutively.

Examples:

Overlapping times

Time	Match 1	Match 2	Match 3
8:00 – 8:30	Match 1 pre-game		
8:30 – 9:30	Match 1 plays		
9:30 – 10:00	Match 1 post-game	Match 2 pre-game	
10:00 – 11:00		Match 2 plays	
11:00 – 11:30		Match 2 post-game	Match 3 pre-game
11:30 – 12:30			Match 3 plays
12:30 – 1:00			Match 3 post-game

Consecutive or non-overlapping times

Time	Match 1	Match 2	Match 3
8:00 – 8:30	Match 1 pre-game		
8:30 – 9:30	Match 1 plays		
9:30 – 10:00	Match 1 post-game		
10:00 – 10:30		Match 2 pre-game	
10:30 – 11:30		Match 2 plays	
11:30 – 12:00		Match 2 post-game	
12:00 – 12:30			Match 3 pre-game
12:30 – 1:30			Match 3 plays
1:30 – 2:00			Match 3 post-game

The scheduling you choose will largely be driven by your available resources. You can schedule up to four mentees per match (referee, 2 ARs, and an observer). Rotate the mentees through each position at the quarters. This gives the new referees the opportunity to experience both positions, referee and assistant referee, plus one quarter as an observer. If you can schedule one

Handout #2

mentor per new referee, that is ideal. You can also schedule only two mentors total: assign one to the referee position and the other to the ARs and the observer. During these kinds of scrimmages the mentor can run on the field with the referee.

Ask the referees to bring with them the items that referees need to control a match: watch, pen, whistle, coin, wallet/match report. If your budget allows, you can provide items they need but don't have, such as whistle and coin. If a mentee shows up without a watch, they can either borrow one or have the mentor time for them.

If your region has provided the new referees with their uniforms, have them wear their uniforms with the gold jersey and have the mentors wear a contrasting color such as red. If your region has not yet provided referee uniforms you can provide them with a region branded t-shirt or ask them to wear a particular color t-shirt in order to provide some uniformity.

Possible topics for mentors to work on with the new referees:

Before the match:

- Referee team pre-game instructions
- Diagonal system of control/referee mechanics/signals
- Player safety check
- Coin toss

During the match:

Referee:

- Positioning
- Whistle loudness
- Recognizing fouls
- Restarts

Assistant Referee:

- Positioning for offside call, making the offside call, ball in/out of play

Remember:

- Referees only have a short time at each position so you can't give them a lot to focus on. They are new and easily intimidated so you don't want to overload them.
- **Praise them** for everything they do right, including just showing up for the mentoring event, and give them a lot of encouragement.
- Give them simple suggestions how to improve 1 or 2 items they need to work on. **Do not** give them more than 1 or 2 items to work on. You don't want to overwhelm them.

Handout #2

Logistics

- Pop-up shades, tables, and chairs for check-in area and for mentor briefing area
- List of participating referees, mentors, and teams
- Schedule of games (which teams on which field at which time)
- Schedule of participating referees
- Schedule of participating mentors
- Whistles & lanyards (if provided by Region)
- Coins (if provided by Region)
- Water and food/snacks for referees, mentors and staff
- Coolers/tubs for drinks
- Ice
- Trash bags
- First aid kit

Communication

Communicating with all parties involved with the event is essential. It is almost impossible to over-communicate with an event like this. Everyone needs to know where the event will be held (street address, GPS coordinates, landmarks, etc.), when the event will be held, and the times of the games they are participating in. If you need them there 30 or 45 minutes prior to game time make sure you tell them that. If you need them to bring anything, make sure you tell them what they should bring. If you want the coaches to have lineup cards so the new referees have an opportunity to see them and experience working with them, ask the coaches to bring a lineup card (but also have additional lineup cards available at the check-in table) If you do not have a collection of flags for the new referees to borrow and want your mentors to bring theirs make sure you ask them. Do not assume that anyone will automatically know what they should bring.

Determine the message that you want to give the new referees. What do you want them to hear at each step in the mentoring process that day: during the pre-game discussion, during the scrimmage in the referee position, during the scrimmage in the AR position, and during the post-game debrief. Provide an outline or script to your mentors and ask them to follow it. This will help to ensure that everyone is getting the same message and the same instruction. Keep your message simple. Remember, for the most part, these volunteers have never been sports officials before and this is a very scary experience for them. You want to set them at ease and get them comfortable with the thought that **THEY CAN DO THIS!** Keeping the message simple and limited to a few items at the beginning allows them to build confidence and a strong base upon which we can add additional layers of learning over time. If you dump a huge amount of information on them now and frighten them away you may never see them again.

Handout #2

Communicate with the new referees before the event giving them some advance notice of what to expect. Let them know they will be officiating a scrimmage and make sure the teams participating understand that the referees are new and will make mistakes. Let them know that the teams have promised to be on their best behavior and that they will not get any abuse or comments from the sidelines. A well-planned mentoring event should eliminate as much stress as possible for the new referees. Also let them know if you plan to have each referee take a turn as the referee as well as an assistant referee. Give them an idea of the format of the match and what unique things might happen during the match.

Finally, communicate with the teams that are participating in the scrimmages. Thank them for their help in developing the new referees and improving the referee program. Make sure they understand that this is to be a no-stress event and that there are to be no comments about the referees' performance unless they are positive and appreciative. Advise them whether you will be doing anything that differs from an ordinary match (such as having referees fabricate fouls in the penalty area in order to allow the new referees the opportunity to set up a penalty kick). If the coaches know about these unusual events in advance, a phantom penalty won't give them heartburn and they will better be able to support you and your objectives.