



**RESPECT
THE CALL**





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INTRODUCING STRONGER POLICY TO PROTECT OUR REFEREES

EFFECTIVE MARCH 2025

Join U.S. Soccer in creating a better future for our game. Our updated Referee Abuse Prevention Policy (Policy 531-9) is designed to make youth and amateur matches more safer, more fun, and more empowering for everyone involved. Referee abuse will not be tolerated. We're asking everyone to do their part by knowing the rules, reporting referee abuse, and embodying behaviors that represent the best of us.

STAY IN THE GAME! WATCH OUR POLICY VIDEO ABOVE TO MAKE SURE YOU KNOW THE RULES

THE POLICY

CLEAR RULES & CONSEQUENCES FOR A WINNING EXPERIENCE

U.S. Soccer is standing firm to protect referees and restore respect to the game. The updated policy includes stronger sanctions for any form of physical or non-physical abuse towards referees. We encourage every player and coach to learn what behaviors cross the line, so they can avoid penalties and help create a better culture for the future of soccer.

THE NEED FOR CHANGE

Referee abuse is an issue on the rise – one that threatens the future of soccer.

90% of referees report that abuse has increased over the last 5 years.

60% of referees choose not to recertify due to harassment and threats.

Youth soccer needs referees to grow – without them, games can't happen

Source: U.S. Soccer Refereeing Department

A NEW WAY TO SUPPORT REFEREES

U.S. Soccer has updated our Referee Abuse Prevention Policy. Adhering to this updated policy and sharing it with your audience is the new way to support referees.



Stronger sanctions for physical and non-physical referee abuse



Clearer definitions for what constitutes different categories of abuse



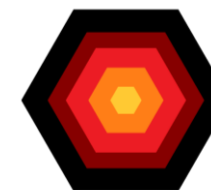
Suspensions can be a **number of games AND/OR time-based** depending on severity and circumstance



Penalty multipliers for repeat infractions or abuse against a minor



Coaches, players, spectators, and referees are all encouraged to **report abuse**



March 2025: Updated policy in effect – please **share to spread awareness**

Information about policy updates and shareable collateral will be sent via email and are available at

[USSOCCER.COM/RAP](https://ussoccer.com/rap)



REFEREE ABUSE PREVENTION

POLICY 531-9 / YOUTH & AMATEUR

EFFECTIVE MARCH 2025



NON-PHYSICAL ABUSE

Contact doesn't have to be made for damage to occur. Non-physical abuse – hurtful language and aggressive behavior – has no place in our game. It disrupts matches, interferes with the referee's ability to do their job, and it hurts the game for everyone. Left unchecked, non-physical abuse takes an emotional toll and has the potential to escalate into physically dangerous situations. The updated policy is designed to eliminate this behavior.

LEVEL 1: VERBAL TAUNTING

Speech or gestures intended to belittle the referee, damage their credibility, and undermine their ability to effectively officiate the game.

DEFINITION

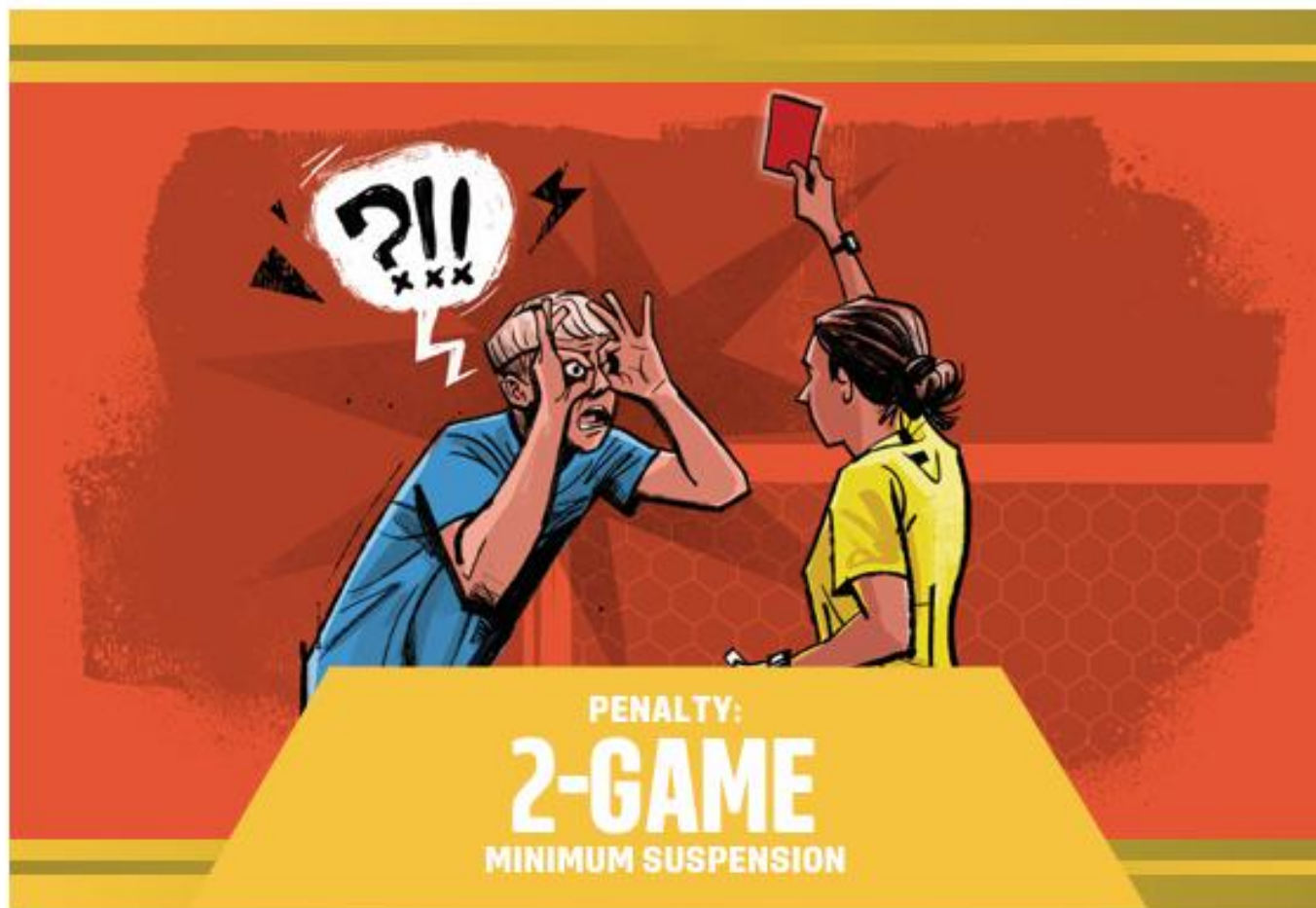
Insulting, Belittling, Insinuating or Taunting Behavior
Undermining Referee Authority.

EXAMPLES

- **Questioning Competence:**
"Do you even know the rules?"
- **Mocking Appearance or Abilities:**
"Did you forget your glasses?"
- **Accusations of Bias:**
"What's the other team paying you?"
- **Dismissive Language:**
"You suck."
- **Aggressive Tone:**
"You're the worst ref we've ever had."

RECOMMENDED APPROACH

If you have concerns about a call, respectfully ask the referee for clarification. Share your perspective calmly, avoiding yelling, insults, or offensive gestures.



LEVEL 2: HARASSMENT/INTIMIDATION

Occurs when language or body language is intended to make a referee feel unsafe but where the threat of violence remains unspoken.

DEFINITION

Harassment, Intimidation, Retaliation, Abusive or Threatening (Non-Physical) Language.

EXAMPLES

- **Using Expletives:**

*"That call was complete \$H*t!"*

- **Personal Attacks:**

"You're a F-ing joke!"

- **Escalating Intensity:**

*"You can't make a single good f***** call!"*

- **Getting In The Referee's Face.**

RECOMMENDED APPROACH

Take a moment to gather yourself before you speak to the referee. Ask for clarification calmly, aiming for constructive communication rather than causing conflict.

Disclaimer: *These are only a few examples of abuse – other actions or statements may also fall into this category.*



LEVEL 3: THREATS/DEROGATORY LANGUAGE

When aggressive language or threats of violence enter the mix – or when abuse spills online.

DEFINITION

Aggression, Attacking, Derogatory, Cyberbullying, Doxing, or Threatening (Physical / Violence) Language.

EXAMPLES

- **Threatening To Inflict Harm On A Referee:**
 - “You’re gonna pay for that!”
 - “I’ll see you in the parking lot”
 - “I’m going to shove that card down your throat!”
 - “You better watch your back!”
- **Public Attacks Online** such as uploading a post to social media attacking the referee.

RECOMMENDED APPROACH

When you feel frustrated by a referee’s call, take a moment to pause and breathe. Reflect on how your reaction impacts your experience and the overall atmosphere of the game for everyone involved.

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NON-PHYSICAL ABUSE

LEVEL 4: OFFENSIVE OR DISCRIMINATORY ACT



U.S. Soccer is inclusive of everyone. Discrimination – attacking referees for who they are, or offending their dignity – will not be tolerated.

DEFINITION

Discriminatory or derogatory words or actions on account of race, skin color, ethnicity, nationality, social origin, gender, disability, sexual orientation, language, or religion.

EXAMPLES

- Racial or ethnic slurs.
- Offensive gestures.
- Homophobic language.
- Using harmful or sexist stereotypes.

RECOMMENDED APPROACH

Remember that soccer is for everyone. We're all human, and everybody deserves the opportunity to enjoy the game without being made to feel bad about who they are.

Disclaimer: These are only a few examples of abuse – other actions or statements may also fall into this category.





PHYSICAL ABUSE

Physical abuse makes the game unsafe for everyone. It's also easy to avoid. Outside of friendly handshakes, there's never a reason to touch the referee. Any unwanted physical contact is considered physical abuse. Physical violence can also result in criminal charges, lawsuits, or medical liability.

PHYSICAL ABUSE

LEVEL 1: MINOR OR SLIGHT TOUCHING



Even minor deliberate touches can be unwanted and make referees feel unsafe and are considered physical abuse.

DEFINITION

Minor or Slight Deliberate Touching.

EXAMPLES

- Tapping the referee's shoulder to get their attention.
- Touching the referee's chest with your finger.
- Grabbing the referee's jersey to get their attention.
- Intentionally bumping lightly into the referee.

RECOMMENDED APPROACH

Respectfully get the referee's attention without touching them – and, even in the heat of the moment, make a conscious effort to keep your hands to yourself.

Disclaimer: These are only a few examples of abuse – other actions or statements may also fall into this category.



LEVEL 2: INTENTIONAL CONFRONTATION

Escalation of using contact to intimidate or provoke a physical confrontation – or causing damage to property – without the intent to cause bodily harm.

DEFINITION

Pushing, Grabbing, Pulling, Squeezing, Pinching, Lightly Slapping, Use of Object in Non-Striking Manner, or Physical Property Damage

EXAMPLES

- Shoving the referee.
- Forcefully grabbing the referee's arm.
- Throwing a water bottle at the ground in front of the referee.
- Dumping the referee's bag into a trashcan.
- Aggressively grabbing the referee's jersey.
- Following the referee to the parking lot or to their car.

RECOMMENDED APPROACH

Understand that this behavior not only won't change the outcome on the field, it will keep you out of the game for a long time. Channel that energy to drive better on-field performance. Remove yourself from the situation if you need to calm down.

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PHYSICAL ABUSE

LEVEL 3: VIOLENT CONTACT



Malicious, violent contact intended to cause bodily harm – this is considered assault and can result in criminal punishment, legal suits, and medical liability.

DEFINITION

Hitting, Punching, Elbowing, Kicking, Biting, Spitting, Choking, Tackling, Throwing or Use of Object or Any Part of Body (Forearm, Knee, Head) in a Striking Manner

EXAMPLES

- Kicking the referee's shin.
- Throwing a punch at the referee.
- Placing hands on the neck to choke the referee.
- Throwing a water bottle with intent to hit the referee.
- Intentionally kicking the ball at the referee.

RECOMMENDED APPROACH

Before physical abuse ever escalates to this level, there are plenty of opportunities to choose another course of action. Remove yourself from the situation and give yourself time for your anger to defuse before doing something with serious long-term consequences.

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Effective
March
2025



REFEREE ABUSE PREVENTION

PENALTY SUMMARY

POLICY 531-9 / YOUTH & AMATEUR SOCCER



REFEREE ABUSE PREVENTION

POLICY 531-9 PENALTY OVERVIEW / YOUTH & AMATEUR

The Penalties Matrix defines consequences associated with physical and non-physical offenses against Referees.

NON-PHYSICAL OFFENSES of gross misconduct, abuse, and / or assault

NON-PHYSICAL*	MIN. GAMES	TIME
Insulting, Belittling, Insinuating or Taunting Behavior Undermining Referee Authority	2	
Harassment, Intimidation, Retaliation, Abusive, or Threatening (Non Physical) Language	4	
Aggression, Attacking, Derogatory, Cyberbullying, Doxing or Threatening (Physical / Violence) Language	6	6 - 24 Months
Offensive or Discriminatory Act	10	12 - 24 Months

PHYSICAL OFFENSES of gross misconduct, abuse, and / or assault

PHYSICAL*	MIN. GAMES	TIME
Minor or Slight Deliberate Touching	3	1 - 6 Months
Pushing, Grabbing, Pulling, Squeezing, Pinching, Lightly Slapping, Use of Object in Non Striking Manner, or Physical Property Damage	10	6 - 24 Months
Hitting, Punching, Elbowing, Kicking, Biting, Spiting, Choking, Tackling, Throwing or Use of Object or Any Part of Body (Forearm, Knee, Head) in a Striking Manner		12 Months - Lifetime

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KEY PENALTY FACTORS

- Single offenses are at **minimum the prescribed game penalty or time penalty** for non red zone offenses
- Penalties can be **both game and time depending on severity** / circumstances
- Second time offenders receive **double punishment**
- Third time offenders receive a **lifetime ban**
- More than one offense at the same time is **at least the punishment for the most serious offense**
- Offenses against minors are automatically subject to a **“minor multiplier” resulting in triple punishment**
- **One offense warning per league** to be managed by states and leagues collaboratively
- Game consequences are **inclusive of 1 game penalty for any red cards given**
- Optionality for **50% penalty for first offense from a minor**

Penalties

Offender	Offense	Jurisdiction
Player, Coach, manager, club official or other bench personnel.	Gross mistreatment, abuse or assault of a match official.	ENYYSA Arbitration Hearing
	All other offenses	LIJSL Arbitration
Spectator / Parent	Gross mistreatment, abuse or assault of a match official. (1 st or 2 nd offense of the seasonal year for a team)	LIJSL Arbitration
	Gross mistreatment, abuse or assault of a match official. (3 rd or more offense of the seasonal year for a team)	ENYYSA Supervisory Hearing
	All other offenses	LIJSL Arbitration

Penalties for spectators' misconduct towards a referee

If it is determined that spectators violated the ENYYSA Zero Tolerance policy with respect to misconduct towards a referee or match official, the following minimum fines to the team's club.

Official	1st offense by team during seasonal year	2nd offense by team during seasonal year	3rd offense by team during seasonal year
Adult Referee	\$250	\$500	\$1000 + ENYYSA Supervisory Hearing
Minor Referee	\$750	\$1500	\$3000 + ENYYSA Supervisory Hearing

Additionally, if it is determined that the team officials (coaches, managers, club officials, etc.) either failed to act appropriately to control the sidelines or failed to control the sidelines after instructions from a referee, the coach will be suspended for 3 games.

Organizations sanctioning the match may impose additional penalties such as game forfeit, point deduction, etc.

Last or no other recourse to correct a chronic offender(s). A recommendation of possible suspension of child of parent involved in league.



REPORTING ABUSE

We understand the vast majority of players, coaches, and spectators already do the right thing. A small minority hurts the game for the rest of us – but it's up to all of us to uphold the integrity of the game. **With the updated policy, players, coaches, and spectators are encouraged to report abuse. The penalty framework only take effect if abuse is reported. We're asking you to do your part to support referees by reporting any instance of referee abuse.**

WE ALL HAVE A ROLE TO PLAY

The game belongs to all of us. To ensure that soccer remains a positive experience for everyone, we need your help to stop referee abuse. Here's how you can make a difference:

Coaches



Lead by example. Set the tone for good sportsmanship with your players.

Players



Respect your referees, whether you agree with their calls or not.

Parents & Spectators



Cheer for your team, not against the referee. Help create a positive environment.

Referees



Know that your voice matters. Report abuse and keep the game safe.

THANK YOU FOR DOING THE RIGHT THING

Together, we will protect the integrity of the game.

