



# **A Guide for Women Referees**

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# Introduction

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This publication has been developed to assist women who already are referees or who think they might become referees. Within this guide, women will find how they can benefit from being a referee, how they can make the most of the skills they already possess and, most importantly, how the kids will benefit from their participation.

## **In AYSO, it's about more than the game.**

Women have so much to offer that it is hard to understand why so few women choose to become referees. In reality almost all soccer moms already have the basic skills to be referees. If you have more than one child you have surely 'refereed' a disagreement between children.

For some reason, many believe that you have to be a man to be a good referee. This is simply not true. Women make great referees. In fact they are better equipped to handle some aspects of the job than men; you don't have to be a "tomboy" or an exceptional athlete. What you need is a sense of fairness, a concern for the safety of kids and a desire to make sure that their soccer experience is fun. In fact, the spirit of refereeing is to ensure it is a Fun, Safe, Fair experience.

## **A Word of Caution**

Inevitably, when we talk about women referees we will examine some of the differences between men and women. Of course these statements are generalizations and don't apply to every man or every woman. They are not intended to offend anyone. However we must confront reality. Men and women are not the same. That doesn't mean one is better than the other; only that they may have different ways of doing things. In this guide we will discuss some of the ways those differences will affect you and how you can use many of them to your benefit.

# Benefits

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Why should women become referees? Why is that important? When a woman joins the ranks of the referee team there are a number of benefits to the region and the players and to the woman herself.

## **Benefits to the Region and the Players**

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**Recruiting women expands the pool of potential referees.** Including women in the search for referees essentially doubles the possibilities.

**Women referees make positive role models for girl players.** Many girls play soccer in AYSO. Girls who see women refereeing are likely to view their own participation more positively and to continue to play as they get older. The benefits to girls who play sports include academic success and better long-term health. (See appendix A). Girls should see their future as one of unlimited possibilities and having the experience of seeing women in non-traditional roles helps to provide them with tangible evidence of that. Furthermore, the more games they have that are managed by good women referees and the less remarkable that becomes, the better.

**Women referees make positive role models for boy players.** It is important for boys to view women as capable in many different roles and seeing women referees in authority helps to foster this understanding. What is essential to the development of male players is that they are exposed to and accept good referees who happen to be women. More and more good female referees dispel the myth that women are not as good as their male counterparts. This is especially important where culturally women are not viewed as equals.

**Women generally have good communication skills.** Women are willing to talk about things to make sure everyone understands. This is a valuable skill when working with coaches, players and other referees.

**Women make good team members.** Women tend to work cooperatively and support and protect their fellow teammates. As Anson Dorrance, the former coach of the United States women's national soccer team said, "You basically have to drive men but you can lead women. Women relate through an interconnected web of personal connections, as opposed to a more traditional male hierarchy."

**Women can be less intimidating to young players.** The reason for this is two-fold. First, women are usually smaller than men so their physical presence is



less imposing. They simply don't tower over young players as much. Second, young children generally spend more time around women than men and an unfamiliar woman is less scary to them than an unfamiliar man. While roles are certainly changing, the primary caregivers for most children are women. The vast majority of elementary school teachers are female as well.

## **Benefits to the Woman Referee**

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**She will share a positive experience with her child.** If she is a mom, being a referee allows her to participate with her child in a fun, family activity they can both enjoy. Even if she has no children of her own, her interaction with children will be an enriching experience for all of them.

**She will feel good about herself.** She will have the personal satisfaction helping kids and her community. At the end of the day, knowing that she has made a contribution toward the healthy development of kids is an undeniably good feeling.

**Refereeing will help her maintain fitness.** Refereeing burns calories. She will be exercising without even thinking about it. This kind of weight-bearing activity strengthens bones and reduces the possibility of osteoporosis, which can be a problem for many women as they get older.

**She will earn respect.** Players and others will respect her knowledge of the game and appreciate her commitment to young people. **She will enjoy the challenge each new game brings.** No two games are the same even when played by the same two teams. There is always something new. She will never be bored.

**She will learn more about the game of soccer and develop a deeper appreciation of the game.** She will learn the Laws of the Game and understand the calls other referees make. She will be better able to enjoy the "beautiful game".

**She will meet new people and make new friends.** She will work with other people who care about kids and want to help them have a fun experience. She will join a family of referees. Referees love to talk about the game. They help and support one another.

She will have fun. Yes, you really can have a lot of fun.

# Concerns

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Potential volunteers; both women and men, express very real concerns when asked to make the commitment to become referees. Some of them are practical considerations and others are expressions of fear of not being good enough to handle the 'job'. All experienced referees were once new and inexperienced. They had many of the same doubts that these new recruits have. Here is a list of reasons and assurances that may help to allay those concerns.

**“I don’t know anything (enough) about soccer.”** Most of our referees knew little; probably less than you do about soccer before they became referees. Don’t worry. Many leading soccer experts say we have the best amateur referee training program in the world. We will teach you more about the Laws of the Game than most Americans will ever know.

**“I’m not the right kind of person to be a referee. What if I make a mistake?”** To be the right kind of person to referee AYSO games, all you need is to enjoy kids having fun playing soccer. We can teach you the rest. If you care about kids, you are the right kind of person. There is no need to feel embarrassed about making mistakes, because we are all trying to do our best and even our most experienced referees were beginners at some point.

**“I don’t have time.”** Becoming a referee is the perfect place for those AYSO parents who have crowded schedules. Unlike the coaches who must commit to working with the players two or three days a week, you can schedule as many or as few games as you can comfortably do, usually on a single day.

**“I couldn’t put up with all the criticism and complaining from the sidelines.”** That’s good. We are glad to hear it. You shouldn’t tolerate such behavior. The majority of players and adults involved in our program are here because we do not allow unsporting behavior. We have strict policies governing such behavior and your region should be strongly committed to these policies.

**“I want to be able to see my own child’s game.”** We can ensure you can watch your own child’s game because you will have control of your schedule.

**“I don’t have anyone to watch my other children.”** Some regions have provided someone to watch referee’s children during their games. In other regions, referees with this problem team up and take turns. ‘I’ll watch yours this time and you can watch mine next time.’

**“I don’t want to be the only woman out there.”** We don’t want you to be either. The more women who referee the better it will be for all women. In some regions, women have joined together. They are then trained together and continue



to team up for games. Most referees are happy to be mentors, to offer their knowledge and support to new referees whether they are men or women.

# Commitment

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Women (and men) who volunteer to become referees make a remarkable commitment to the players and to their regions. Without these dedicated volunteers along with many others, players couldn't play. In AYSO, we realize that the most valuable thing a volunteer gives is her time. For our part we are mindful that we must not squander that time. We have an obligation to these volunteer referees. We are committed to support these referees by ensuring that we do the following:

**Make sure referees are well-trained.** If new volunteers are provided with adequate training, they will be better prepared and will have fewer problems with games. Knowing that you know what you should do gives you the confidence you need to referee a game. If games go well, referees will want to keep doing them.

**Eliminate bad behavior on the part spectators and coaches.** It isn't any fun to referee while under verbal attack. It's hard to do your best when you are constantly being criticized. Referees will quit. Every regional board must enforce a strict policy regarding referee abuse. When referees are having pleasant experiences they are more likely to continue.

**Assign mentor/advisors to support them.** New referees need extra support at the beginning. A mentor/ advisor can answer questions, help with sideline control and offer suggestions. They can help the referee build confidence while they gain valuable experience. They can help the referee overcome a "bad game". For this reason, they really should be experienced referees themselves. As much as possible, we should have experienced women referees become mentor/advisors, not just to mentor new women referees but also as mentors for men. This will help to dispel the myth that women are less capable than men when it comes to sports.

**Establish good communication.** Keeping referees informed and up to date is critical. Volunteers may become dissatisfied and disillusioned if they are not kept well-informed. We should not rely on word of mouth to convey important information; we should use more than one form of communication. Regular meetings are valuable as well. People do their best when they know what is expected of them.

**Supply women referee with uniforms that fit.** How they look is important to many women. We should provide shirts that fit them. Having to wear a man's shirt with the pockets in an awkward location or one that is way too long will turn some of them off. It's important to demonstrate we value participation by women



enough to go to the trouble of purchasing shirts that were designed for women referees.

**Work around their schedules.** Allowing referees to work around their other obligations will make it more convenient for them to help with games. We should be flexible and grateful for any game the referee can volunteer to do.

**Encourage continuing training.** Referees will gain confidence as they learn more about the games they officiate. Offer frequent opportunities for additional training and especially encourage women to attend. This training can range from complete to mini-sessions on a limited topic.

**Make sure we have women at all levels of certification.** We should encourage our more experienced referees to upgrade. Entry level referees should see that women are as able as men to do upper level matches and that all referees can aspire to doing the most challenging matches.

**Make sure we don't push them into games they aren't ready for.** It's a delicate balance between encouraging women to take on more challenging matches and pushing them into games they aren't ready for. Doing a match that you simply can't handle is discouraging and many referees have let this end their careers. A good administrator observes his/her referees and knows when one is ready for the challenge and needs a gentle push and when the referee needs more experience or training. When she is ready, provide her with experienced assistant referees who can provide support as she takes on the new challenge of more difficult matches.

**Organize a women referee club.** Forming a club for women referees can provide women with the opportunity of sharing their perspective on the refereeing world. In this forum, women may feel more comfortable discussing challenges they have faced and learning how other women might have dealt with it.

**Reward and thank them.** We must thank our referees publicly, perhaps in the local newspaper or our region's website. We should certainly thank them at an end-of-the-season ceremony but they can be thanked throughout the season also. And we can reward them. There are many ways to reward unpaid volunteers. Volunteers appreciate sincere praise. An end-of-the-year party is a great way to reward volunteers. We can provide water and snacks. If we have a snack bar on game days, we can make sure referees can get drinks and food. We could give them uniforms and equipment. We could provide them with soccer videos and books or special flipping coins.

As a new referee or recruit, if the support for you is weak or lacking, talk to your Regional Referee Administrator (RRA). The RRA can enlist the help of the regional board and others within AYSO to improve the support provided to you and all other new volunteers.

# Differences

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## **Men and women referees are different.**

Men and women are not the same so it should not come as any surprise that men referees and women referees are different. That doesn't mean one group is better; it just means they are not the same. Remember, when we talk about men compared to women, these are generalities. **They will not apply to every woman and every man.**

However, some of the obvious differences between most men and women referees are:

- Height – In general, men are taller.
- Voice – In general, men's voices are deeper.
- Strength – In general, men are physically stronger.
- Size – In general, men are bigger.
- Speed – In general, men can run faster than women.

Of all of the qualities listed above, the only one that presents a challenge for women referees is speed. Later we will discuss what women referees can do to overcome this.

## **Making the most of what you have.**

Successful women referees have learned how to use their innate characteristics to become better referees. There are 20 tips listed below for taking full advantage of your inborn traits. Use the following to make your job easier:

### **1. Women are usually shorter than men.**

This may make them less intimidating to younger players. You can take full advantage of this by remembering to get down to the players level when you speak to them. Try kneeling down for the coin toss or when you need to speak to a player.

### **2. Women may be familiar to very young players.**

Because most young players are around women more frequently, the children may be more comfortable in their presence. Try to deal with the younger players in as friendly and pleasant a manner as possible. Remember unknown authority figures can be frightening to some small children and behave more like a 'mom' than a policeman.

### **3. Women referees make positive role models for girl players.**

Many of our players are girls and they like having women referees. Girl players who see women referees are more likely to view their own participation positively. It is important for young girls to see women in positions of authority so that they can envision themselves taking responsible roles later in life. Be sure to make your interactions as positive as possible. When you give that early word of warning, try to eliminate negative words. For example, say "You're a better player than that" instead of "Don't do that anymore".

### **4. Women referees make positive role models for boy players.**

It is equally important for boys to see women in positions of authority in a discipline they perceive as male dominated. Seeing women in responsible positions will help to foster respect for women in young men. As the referee you can help develop this respect by respectful treatment of the players.

### **5. Women make natural referees.**

Any woman with more than one child is already a referee. By adding some training a woman can put those skills she already has to good use. One of your jobs as a referee is to restore fairness. You must be extremely careful not to appear to favor one team over another.

### **6. Usually women are good verbal communicators with adults.**

Most women are comfortable discussing things. Make sure you talk to other referees on your referee team to ensure there are no misunderstandings before you take the field.

- 7. Usually women are good verbal communicators with children.**  
Most women will have experience in communicating with children. Use those skills to talk to players during the match. Often the quiet word will prevent more serious problems.
- 8. Many women have good non-verbal communication skills.**  
Mothers can sometimes give “The Look” that can stop their misbehaving children in their tracks. If you have mastered this technique, use it to quiet an unruly player or spectator.
- 9. Women are less likely to referee a game they aren’t prepared for.**  
Don’t allow a ‘hole in the schedule’ to push you into a match you cannot handle. Listen to more experienced referees and to your mentor/advisor. If they feel you are ready and encourage you to referee a higher level match, do it.
- 10. Women are not likely to have a physical confrontation with a player, coach or spectator.**  
Most men will instinctively protect a woman under attack. If a man threatens a woman, he will look like a bully. For these reasons, women rarely come under attack. Stay away from physical confrontations with anyone. A calm demeanor will help defuse many negative situations.
- 11. Women make good team members.**  
Often women have had experience working together to accomplish some goal. Be a good team member. Support your teammates and always try to work cooperatively with others for the best outcome.
- 12. Women understand the need for schedules.**  
Because women are used to juggling complex schedules, they understand the importance of following one. Be respectful of schedules and on game days, work within the assigned times.
- 13. Women understand the consequences of last minute cancellations.**  
Because most women have had to deal with a sudden school closure or a babysitter who cancelled at the last minute, they appreciate the difficulty such things can cause. Be sure to notify the appropriate person as soon as possible, if you must cancel.
- 14. Instructors find that women referee candidates make good students.**  
Because society doesn’t expect them to be ‘sports experts’, they are usually willing to reveal they don’t know something or don’t understand something. Take as much training as you can. When you are unsure about some information, you should ask.

**15. Most women referees have little misinformation to unlearn.**

Because most new women referees did not grow up with the sport of soccer, they usually have little misinformation to unlearn. When you hear something that doesn't make sense or sounds wrong, make sure you clarify it.

**16. Women are likely to ask for help when they need it.**

Women may be more willing to admit they are 'lost' and need directions. Similarly, they are willing to ask for clarification or interpretation of something they are unsure of. When you need help, do not hesitate to go to a referee mentor/advisor and ask for it.

**17. Women usually don't rely on their imposing presence.**

Since women are usually not large, they are not tempted to "tower over" a player or to "throw their weight around" to intimidate a coach. Approach players and coaches in a calm, non-threatening manner in order to gain their cooperation.

**18. Women usually are careful about their appearance.**

Because most women are careful about the way they appear, their uniforms usually look professional. Remember a referee who is wearing a proper uniform is more likely to be perceived as an authority.

**19. Older teenage boys don't view women as rivals.**

During their teenage years it becomes important for many young men to establish a "pecking order" or earn the position of the "alpha male". This sometimes effects their interactions with male referees. With female referees it is less true. Use that to your advantage. You will find that it is more effective to get their cooperation than it is to boss them at this age. If you are knowledgeable and fair and fun, you will gain their respect.

**20. Women referees are less likely to overprotect older girl players.**

Some male referees have a natural instinct to protect women and girls. This sense of gallantry may cause them to call more fouls in girls' games. Women are less likely to do this. Remember, if you wouldn't call it in a boys game, don't call it in a girls game.

**SPEED:** As we noted earlier, most men can run faster than most women, but speed is usually not a factor until the players reach their teenage years. Well over 80% of AYSO players are under 12. Refereeing the very youngest players does not require a lot of speed by the referee.

For those more advanced games where speed is needed when refereeing a game, what can women do to overcome this difference?

- **Train:** Practice running long and short distances trying to improve your time with each session.



- **Do interval training:** Alternate slow jogs with sprints.
- **Be decisive:** The sooner you decide to change position on the field the more time you will have to make the change.
- **Learn to read the game:** Knowing what the teams are trying to do will help you anticipate where the next challenge is likely to come and you can begin to move to your position earlier. Use restarts to get into position where the challenges will occur. Don't wait for play to begin, get there as fast as you can.

Remember that women referees bring different traits and skills to the game of soccer. By learning how to take advantage of these differences and overcome their challenges, they can improve the experience for the players and everyone else involved.

Finally, the AYSO National Soccer Program will be enhanced by increasing the number of women who referee. When the women who accept the challenge of becoming referees are no longer the pioneers but are the soccer moms who want their kids to experience the fun of playing soccer, then we will begin to approach equity with men on the soccer field. If you are a woman who is a referee, your participation is appreciated. You are vitally important to the health of the program and most importantly to the players.

# Appendix A

## 25 Benefits of Girls Playing Sports

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1. Sports are FUN.
2. Girls and women who play sports have a more positive body image than girls and women who don't participate.
3. Girls who participate in sports have higher self-esteem and pride in themselves.
4. Research suggests that physical activity is an effective tool for reducing the symptoms of stress and depression among girls.
5. Playing sports teaches girls how to take risks and be aggressive.
6. Sport is where girls can learn goal-setting, strategic thinking and the pursuit of excellence in performance and other achievement-oriented behaviors – critical skills necessary for success in the workplace.
7. Playing sports teaches math skills.
8. Sports help girls develop leadership skills.
9. Sports teach girls team-work.
10. Regular physical activity in adolescence can reduce girls' risk for obesity.
11. Physical activity appears to decrease the initiation of cigarette smoking in adolescent girls.
12. Research suggests that girls who participate in sports are more likely to experience academic success and graduate from high school than those who do not play sports.
13. Teenage female athletes are less than half as likely to get pregnant as female non-athletes (5% and 11% respectively).
14. Teenage female athletes are more likely to report that they have never had sexual intercourse than non-athletes (54% and 41%).
15. Teenage female athletes are more likely to experience their first sexual intercourse later in adolescence than non-athletes.
16. High school sports participation may help prevent osteoporosis.

17. Women who exercise report being happier than those who do not exercise.
18. Women who exercise believe they have more energy and felt they were in excellent health more often than non-exercising women.
19. Women who are active in sports and recreational activities as girls feel greater confidence in their physical and social selves than those who were sedentary as kids.
20. Women who exercise miss fewer days of work.
21. Research supports that regular physical activity can reduce hyperlipidemia (high levels of fat in the blood).
22. Recreational physical activity may decrease a woman's chance of developing breast cancer.
23. Women who exercise weigh less than non-exercising women.
24. Women who exercise have lower levels of blood sugar, cholesterol, triglycerides and have lower blood pressure than non-exercising women.
25. Regular exercise improves the overall quality of life.

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