

REFEREES WE NEED YOU!!

By Lance Calloway, WCYSA Executive Director

If you have been out on the fields for the past few WCYSA seasons you likely have noticed shortages of youth soccer referees. Historically a large number of our referees who cover the WCYSA youth matches often are youth ages 11-16 years old. Unfortunately, we have had a significant decline in the number of youth referees signing up to take the referee courses or to sign up to referee matches the past few seasons.

Our local referee association, Whatcom Co. Soccer Referees Association (WCSRA), has the challenge of continually recruiting and training youth soccer referees for over 1000 recreational youth soccer matches each season. Historically WCSRA has done an outstanding job on organizing a great group of youth referees to cover these matches for our programs. WCSRA has been a leader in Washington in youth referee development and they still are working hard to develop great referees for our soccer community.



There are several reasons that have been cited that have led to the declining numbers of referees for our programs. A large majority of the issues we, as adults, can work to make it more appealing to these youth referees to make themselves available to officiate our children's matches.

Coaches and parents along the touchlines harassing and demeaning youth referees are pushing our developing referees from doing matches. Recent comments we received through the youth referee assignor really illustrate the issues some of these kids who are refereeing feel. One parent passed along her daughter's experience *"The reason why she has not volunteered to ref is she had a really bad experience with a parent hackling her last year and I cannot get her back out there. It was a U6 game and the one parent was extremely derogatory and demeaning to her. The coach stood by and allowed it to happen. I should have said something to him, but was hoping she wouldn't let it get to her. Unfortunately, it did and now I can't get her back out there."* We had another parent comment *"There were over aggressive coaches/parents for the first couple games made it uncomfortable where he didn't want to continue to referee."* We need to keep in mind these youth referees are developing and learning to referee just as the players are learning to play and the coaches are learning to coach. The major difference here is too often the adults on the touchlines get upset with the youth referee when they make a mistake. The adults need to remain calm when a referee makes a mistake or doesn't make a call. It is not that big of a deal. Our coaches are provided with mechanisms to provide feedback that is passed along to our referee assignors to work with the officials to improve.

With the issues cited above of the derogatory, rude and uncalled for comments made to our youth referees, many of them felt the abuse was not worth the money they were earning. The WCSRA has set the referee fees for the officials that WCYSA pays per match per level of play. The last time a fee increase was brought forward by the referees association was in 2011. WCSRA approached the WCYSA board late this fall with proposed referee fee increases as an incentive to hopefully draw in more referees and to keep them refereeing. Below are the referee fees the WCYSA Board of Directors approved at the last board meeting going into effect Spring of 2017:

Level	League	Past Fee	2017 Fees	Change
U8	Rec	\$ 9.68	\$ 16.00	65%
U9	Rec	\$ 9.68	\$ 17.00	76%
U10	Rec	\$ 16.93	\$ 20.00	18%
U12	Rec	\$ 19.19	\$ 25.00	30%
MS	Rec	\$ 22.00	\$ 35.00	59%

The WCYSA Board believes this increase in fees for our referees is a good investment in further developing our programs and that we hope to draw out more referees to cover our matches for the kids.

One change that the U6 & U7 age groups will see this upcoming spring is that the micro matches will be managed by the coaches, referees will not be assigned to the U6 & U7 matches. In talking with our referee assignors and development staff, the coaches at these ages are already on the field assisting the players learn the basics so they will be providing the refereeing. The officiating at these ages is mainly calling out of bounds, an intentional handball, or excessive pushing. The coaches will be jointly managing the games going forward. WCYSA will be providing all our U6 & U7 coaches with the detailed rules that they will need to observe during their matches. In many parts throughout Washington and the US most programs have coaches/parents referee these entry level ages of U6 & U7.

With these changes and increases in referee fees WCYSA will be making changes in our registration fees beginning for our Spring 2017 Season. When WCYSA registration opens January 1st the fees for our Under 6 and Under 7 players will be adjusted down to \$65.00 for early registration and for U8 and up the registration fees will see a slight increase to \$70 for early registration.

The WCYSA Board believes that this increased commitment to support our referees with increased pay can help bring in and retain referees. However the most important contribution to help increase the number of referees is for all of us on the sidelines, both coaches and parents, to keep our focus on the fun and skills that our children are exhibiting on the field and to positively cheer them on. Lets support our referees that are on our children's games and keep in mind that everyone-players, coaches and referees- on the field will make a mistake but for everyone that is part of the learning process. Lets all keep this in mind as we enjoy watching our kids play.