

Professionalism - Taking the Lead

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February 1, 2002 - Referees need to raise their level of professionalism in all their interactions with coaches, players, spectators, league officials, and other game officials. This is the message that has been given to all referees at the 2002 recertification clinics, and a message that needs continuous focus. Even a small dose of care and forethought by a referee will go a long way.

What is meant by "professionalism" for referees? I use this term as reference to several related concepts: respect, courtesy, honesty, integrity, humility, to name a few. A referee needs to constantly emanate an image that is considerate of others. When this image does not come naturally, the referee must be conscious to work at it.

Why is professionalism important? Soccer officiating is a job of managing people. Knowledge of the rules and signalling mechanics are tools in the kit to be used in the effort of this management. Given that it is natural for people to take direction from those that they respect more readily than from those that they do not, the more deserving of respect one can appear to be, the better. By focusing on a referee's level of "professionalism", the referee will be in a strong position to manage people effectively.

How can referees improve? Each interaction that a referee has with a person related to the game is an opportunity to address one's level of professionalism. All of the following are examples: wearing the referee uniform properly, greeting both coaches with a smile, completing game report information completely and accurately for leagues and accountants, answering questions of players in a pleasant tone, submitting paperwork on time, starting games on time, arriving at clinics and other events on time, honoring confirmed assignments. Again, every time a referee communicates with a player, coach, spectator, and official, a referee can make a positive statement about professionalism.

We should be mindful to make our difficult job easier by raising our own level of professionalism. We need to take care of ourselves first by being as respectful of others as possible. Such behavior is contagious and our beautiful game will be the better when the positive messages spread. Referees must take the lead.