

ALBERTA SOCCER  
REFEREE  
DEVELOPMENT  
PROGRAM -  
MENTORING  
PROGRAM PLAN

# Introduction

The Alberta Soccer Association recognizes the importance of developing its referees for the betterment of the game of soccer. In support of ASA's Referee Retention and Recruitment Program, a mentoring program for referees addresses the long-term development of a referee and provides benefits to players, the referee and the organizations who manage the sport. Mentorship is an important concept, that if administered properly, can improve the quality of all referees and the overall sport experience for all participants. It is a very important key concept to the Referee Recruitment & Retention Program.

The purpose of this Guide is to assist ASA and its district members in developing mentoring programs for all referees. One of the greatest frustrations for newly qualified referees is that they are not able to differentiate between what they are doing well versus what needs to be improved. Absent that skill (differentiation), the door is left wide open to underperformance until someone provides feedback, such as the pivotal service provided by mentors. Once it is provided, referee development is no longer delayed.

Mentoring programs are not just for new referees. They can also play a very important role in a referee's career development as they pursue more challenging assignments or respond to areas for improvement noted by an assessor.

## What is a Mentor?

A mentor is a trusted advisor that is often used to transfer knowledge and experience from one person to another. A referee mentor will:

- Guide, coach, and train referees throughout their soccer refereeing career, especially in the first few years of refereeing, as well as mentoring senior officials wanting to improve.
- Observe referees while they referee and offer suggestions, comments and instructions in a positive manner.
- Be a resource person for all referees to ask questions and seek guidance.

## Resources and References

There are several resources available to organizations, mentors, and mentees in the public domain. The following resources were used in the development of this guide.

- Alberta Soccer Association RDC - Mentor Orientation Guide, 1999
- Nova Scotia Soccer Association (<http://www.soccerns.ns.ca/wp-content/uploads/2011/11/Mentor-Program-Primer-20141.pdf> )
- Vienna Youth Soccer ([http://www.vys.org/Referees/Mentors/index\\_E.html](http://www.vys.org/Referees/Mentors/index_E.html) )
- SMYS Referee Mentor Program Guidelines (<http://www.stmaryssoccer.org/docs/forms/Referee%20Mentor%20Program%20Guidelines.pdf> )
- Calgary United Soccer Association (<http://www.cusa.ab.ca/doclib/MentorshipProgram-About.pdf> )
- Port Coquitlam Euro-Rite FC (<http://www.pocosoccer.com/referees/development-2/> )
- Tommy O'Brian (<http://www.soccerrefereementors.com/mission.html> )
- [http://www.stcharles-soccer.com/clientuploads/\\_pdf/SCSA\\_Referee\\_Mentorship\\_Program.pdf](http://www.stcharles-soccer.com/clientuploads/_pdf/SCSA_Referee_Mentorship_Program.pdf)

## The Importance of Mentoring

Every season many referees will leave the referee program for a variety of reasons. Not surprisingly, one of the common reasons cited is a lack of training, support and mentoring. Our response to this should be to develop a program that will encourage a high return. This can be accomplished with a referee program that offers positive support to all referees, especially new and less experienced referees, and provide teaching opportunities to build strong character and leadership.

### Value to the Organization

By establishing a deep pool of experienced, confident and competent referees that continue to return season after season, the quality of the referees will improve. The ability to ensure that all games are assigned with appropriately qualified referees will benefit the assignor and reduce their workload. The coaching staff, parents, administrators and spectators will value knowing that qualified and experienced referees and assistant referees are managing the game as fairly and consistently as possible.

### Value to the Mentored

The soccer referee will ultimately benefit the most. The mentored will build experience, confidence and character while delivering a service for monetary pay. Perhaps the mentored will one day become the mentor and continue the cycle of mentoring.

### Value to the Mentor

By sharing their wisdom and experience, mentors can contribute to building an overall stronger soccer program and support a critical area of need. Through their positive leadership, they can make a difference to the entire soccer community.

### Value to the Players

Players of all ages and abilities, who commit to years of training will benefit from a fair and well-managed competition. A competent and confident referee will experience less dissension and will contribute to an improved overall playing experience.

## Developing a Mentoring Program

This guide has been developed into two categories based on the size and varying needs of the ASA districts. These categories consider different strategies based on the resources available and the desired outcome of the program. Each category is further divided into practices for mini, youth and adult referees. It is very important to consider our obligation to protect the mental and physical health of all our referees, especially our youth referees who are often more vulnerable.

Category 1) Districts with less than 100 referees - This category is targeted at clubs and small districts.

Category 2) Districts with greater than 100 referees - This category is targeted at major centres and large districts.

**What the program is not:** The mentoring program is not intended to be used to assess a referee's performance for the purpose of assignments, upgrading or disciplinary action.

**Special considerations for mentoring Minors (youth under the age of 18):** Similar to how sporting organizations in Alberta have created policies to protect children, the same policies should apply to a mentoring program. For example, but not limited to:

- Mentors will require having completed a criminal record and work with vulnerable persons check and shown to be “cleared”
- Parental consent should be required for participation in the program. Whenever possible the parent should be present during pre and post-game discussion.
- Consideration should be made for assigning mentors of the same gender. Should the mentor and mentee be of different genders, an adult of the same gender of the mentee should be present during any discussions and meetings that do not occur at the field of play.
- Video or audio recording of referees while officiating the games is not permitted without parental consent of the minor.

### Creating a Pilot Program

Before engaging in a full-scale program, it is important to develop a pilot to ensure the structure of the Mentoring program is properly developed and the goals of the program can be accomplished with the available resources and desired outcomes. Consistent with both categories of mentoring programs, the following activities will need to be considered:

1. Purpose statement and goal setting
2. Organization structure (by board, committee, paid director or volunteer)
3. Implementation plan
4. Communication and documentation plan

## **Category 1) Districts with less than 100 referees -**

Districts or clubs with less than 100 referees may have unique needs and resource restrictions not experienced by larger districts. For this reason, mentoring programs should be kept small and manageable.

### Program Coordination

The program coordinator’s role is to assign mentors with mentees. They work with Assignor to ensure the mentor and mentored are connected and understand their roles in the mentoring process. They coordinate and manage the paperwork for the organization and provide feedback and statistics to the Association.

The program can be managed by the referee assignor. We suggest to first run a pilot program with a minimum of 2 mentors, each with 3 mentees. Having 3 mentors is small enough to manage and large enough that they can all get together and share ideas and experiences on execution. Having 3 mentees per mentor is manageable and reasonable on the mentor’s time and also provides a large enough sample size to provide meaningful data.

The recommended number of games to evaluate per mentored per season should be 5. That’s a total of 30 mentoring evaluation sheets per program.

It is our opinion mentors should be paid as if they are an official in the game, however smaller districts may be limited in funds. If so, you may choose this to be a volunteer’s position or one that pays an honorarium for service. In any case, recognition is important for the mentor. In most cases there will be more value and

commitment from a paid person due to their obligation to accountability. A long-term mentoring program can include other compensation schemes (mentor clothing e.g.).

### Selection of Mentor

Mentors should have several years of experience refereeing at various levels of competition. Above all else, the successful mentor should be willing to commit their time and energy to improving the skills of the mentees and the overall game experience. Mentors should apply for the position when posted or be invited to participate based on the District or Association's needs and predetermined mentor selection criteria. Summarized below are some characteristics to consider in selecting a mentor:

- Excellent communication skills
- Understands teaching methodology
- Age appropriate pairing based on the needs of the mentee

### Selection of Mentee

Depending on the number of referees needing mentoring, and the number of mentors available, you may require potential mentees to apply to be mentored. Should this be required, criteria will need to be developed based on the desired outcome of the program.

### Measuring Success and holding the gains

Surveying the mentors and mentored for improvements to the pilot will be very important. A year-end pilot summary meeting to include all mentors and mentees should be conducted.

## **Category 2) Districts with more than 100 referees**

Districts with more than 100 referees such as the cities of Calgary or Edmonton will have Referee Management Operation Committees or a Referee Director who manages the programs and initiatives of the districts. This level of coordination is ideal for managing a mentoring program. Based on the available resources, it is recommended that a committee structure is developed to manage the mentoring program. The needs of larger districts may include the introduction of 50 or more new referees to the program every year.

Some districts in Alberta have referee associations whose objective is to improve the quality of standards of soccer officiating, strengthen the skills of referees and form mutually beneficial partnerships with other soccer associations. It is recommended that these associations be active participants in the development and execution of mentoring programs.

### Program Coordination

The program can be managed by a designated referee mentor assignor as determined by the Committee or Director. Whenever possible it is recommended that the mentor assignor be a different person than the game assignor. This is to reduce the burden of trying to assign games and match these games with a mentors with mentees. Once the game is assigned, the mentor assignor can then seek the appropriate mentor for booking. These two individuals should work together. We suggest to first run a pilot program with a minimum of 10 mentors, each with 3 mentees. Having 3 mentors is small enough to manage and large enough that they can all get together and share ideas and experiences on execution. Having 3 Mentees per mentor is manageable and reasonable on the mentor's time and also provides a large enough sample size to provide meaningful data.

The recommended number of games to evaluate per mentored per season should be 5. That's a total of 150 mentoring evaluation sheets per program.

It is our opinion mentors should be paid as if they are an official in the game. In most cases, there will be more value and commitment from a paid person due to their obligation to accountability. A long-term mentoring program can include other compensation schemes (mentor clothing e.g.).

### Selection of Mentor

Mentors should have several years of experience refereeing at various levels of competition. Above all else, the successful mentor should be willing to commit their time and energy to improving the skills of the mentees and the overall game experience. Mentors should apply for the position when posted or be invited to participate based on the District or Association's needs and predetermined mentor selection criteria. Summarized below are some characteristics to consider in selecting a mentor:

- Excellent communication skills
- Understands teaching methodology
- Age appropriate pairing based on the needs of the mentee

### Selection of Mentee

For large districts, it is recommended that as many new referees as possible be assigned a mentor during their first season (indoor or outdoor). In some cases, where the number of mentors is a limiting factor, more mature youth or adults that may not require immediate mentoring can be postponed. The needs of the mentee can be assessed before the beginning of each season through direct communication.

### Measuring Success and holding the gains

Surveying the mentors and mentored for improvements to the pilot will be very important. A year end program summary meeting to include all mentors and mentees should be conducted.

## The Mechanics of a Mentoring Session

After much consultation with ASA member districts and the review of existing mentoring programs throughout Alberta, it is clear that the mechanics of mentoring may vary depending on the goals and objectives of the program. For example, a new referee entering the Mini Referee program at age 12 will have different needs compared to an adult referee looking for guidance to improve their performance. We have therefore developed 3 categories of mentees and recommend different mechanics for each.

### Considerations of game influence

It is very important that the mentoring program communicates clearly to the mentor that interfering with referee decisions can be harmful to the game and potentially influence the outcome. We must avoid this. We must also remember that the role of the mentor is to reinforce good practices and correct bad practices. Consistent with current teaching methodologies, it may be appropriate to provide an encouraging positive signal to a new or young referee when something is done correctly at the time it is done correctly. Conversely, negative gestures can be damaging and can affect the outcome of the game. In some situations, it may be inappropriate for more experienced mentors and mentee to make any such gesture, positive or negative.

## Mentoring Mini Referees

The goals and objectives of mentoring mini referees are to provide them an opportunity to learn how to apply the laws of the game with confidence. For many of them, this will be their first introduction to refereeing and keeping the experience positive and fun is very important. The mentor's role should be communicated to the coaches so they understand the purpose of the activity. A mentor may focus on 1 or 2 referees, and if adjacent to another field, could split time between them.

### Pre-game discussion

- The mentor usually meets with the referee before the game, to discuss the mentoring session that is about to take place. This will be done without interfering with the mentee's own pre-game duties and preparations.

### Where the Mentor will be during the session

- The mentor should be in a good position to observe the mentee during the game, away from the team bench areas and other distractions.
- The mentor should not enter the field during the game.
- The mentor should remain on his/her feet during the game.
- The mentor should not communicate with the team officials and spectators during the game.

### Communication during the game (including half time)

- Regular non-verbal communication may occur during stoppages of play (ball not in play).
- Keep the non-verbal signals simple and uncomplicated, so they provide immediate feedback and instructions for improvement.
- Verbal communication at this level may occur during a stoppage of play, during substitutions, or in cases where the referee is struggling to effectively manage the game.
- **What is not permissible** - any communication, real or perceived, that has the potential to influence referee decisions during the game.

### Post-game discussion

- Keep the feedback positive and encouraging.
- Be aware of how over criticism can affect self-esteem and confidence.
- Review the written evaluation with the mentored and make sure they understand the contents.
- Provide a written evaluation for the referee to take home

## Mentoring Youth Referees

The goals and objectives of mentoring youth referees are to provide them an opportunity to learn how to apply the laws of the game with confidence using various game management techniques. Referees in this category may have none or very few years of experience. Keeping the experience positive and fun is very important. Their role as a mentor should be communicated to the coaches so they understand the purpose of the activity. A mentor may evaluate more than one mentee as a crew of officials in the same match.

Special Considerations – it is possible that a youth referee can be mentored by an AR of the same match at an appropriate level of competition. Should you consider assigning an AR with the additional responsibility of mentoring, care should be taken to not overburden the AR with this additional responsibility. This could lead to real or perceived influence of the game and not allow the mentor to conduct the activities outlined below.

#### Pre-game discussion

- The mentor usually meets with the officiating team before game, to discuss the mentoring session that is about to take place. This will be done without interfering with the mentee's pre-game duties and preparations.

#### Where the Mentor will be during the session

- The mentor should be in a good position to observe the mentee during the game, away from the team bench areas and other distractions.
- The mentor should not enter the field during the game.
- The mentor should remain on his/her feet during the game.
- The mentor should not communicate with the team officials and spectators during the game.

#### Communication during the game (including half time)

- Regular non-verbal communication may occur during stoppages of play (ball not in play)
- Keep the non-verbal signals simple and uncomplicated, so they provide immediate feedback and instructions for improvement.
- Verbal communication at this level is discouraged; however, exceptions can be made in cases where the referee is significantly struggling to effectively manage the game. In situations like this, the mentor may call over the referee and provide some guidance.
- **What is not permissible** - any communication, real or perceived, that has the potential to influence referee decisions during the game.

#### Post-game discussion

- Keep the feedback positive and encouraging.
- Be aware of how over criticism can affect self-esteem and confidence.
- Review the written evaluation with the mentored and make sure they understand the contents.
- Provide a written evaluation for the referee to take home

### **Mentoring Adult Referees**

The goals and objectives of mentoring adult referees are much broader than mini and youth referees. In some situations, mentees may wish to receive feedback to improve their technique for higher level competitions or upgrade their certifications. A referee that has been struggling with game management may be assigned to a mentoring program by their association to provide guidance and feedback for improvement. Learning how to apply game management techniques becomes a strong focus for Adult referees.

Referees in this category may have none or several years of experience. Keeping the mentoring experience positive and constructive for an adult referee is very important. A mentor may evaluate more than one mentee as a crew of officials in the same match.

#### Pre-game discussion

- The mentor usually meets with the officiating team before the game, to discuss the mentoring session that is about to take place. This will be done without interfering with the mentee's own pre-game duties and preparations.

#### Where the Mentor will be during the session

- The mentor should be in a good position to observe the mentee during the game, away from the team bench areas and other distractions.
- The mentor should not enter the field during the game.



- The mentor should remain on his/her feet during the game.
- The mentor should not communicate with the team officials and spectators during the game.

Communication during the game (including half time)

- At this level, communication (verbal or non-verbal) during the game is not recommended, unless it is obvious that the referee is significantly struggling to effectively manage the game.
- Communication at halftime may take place if needed.
- **What is not permissible** - any communication, real or perceived, that has the potential to influence referee decisions during the game.

Post-game discussion

- Keep the feedback positive and encouraging.
- Be aware of how over criticism can affect self-esteem and confidence.
- Review the written evaluation with the mentored and make sure they understand the contents.  
Provide a written evaluation for the referee to take home

Evaluation Forms

Sample evaluation forms for the three age groups of referees (mini, youth, adult) will be provided.

The use of communication devices for mentoring

Currently, ASA is evaluating a policy on the use of headsets for mentoring. The main consideration is that any communication using headsets should be done during a stoppage in play, and that there should be no communication, real or perceived, that influences referee decisions during the game.

## Summary

An effective and well-organized mentoring program is essential to the growth of the referee program. All districts should seek out and encourage individuals with the experience in the game and appropriate mentoring skills to participate in such a program. This will not only improve our referee retention rates from year to year, but should also improve our recruitment rates with the knowledge that new referees will receive good support and encouragement early in their referee experience.