POLICY 531-9 / YOUTH & AMATEUR

REFEREE ABUSE PREVENTION

OFFICIAL U.S. SOCCER POLICY

Policy 531-9 | Misconduct Toward Game Officials in Amateur Matches

EFFECTIVE MARCH 2025 Adopted by the U.S. Soccer Board of Directors on November 22, 2024

SECTION 1. GENERAL

Misconduct against Referees may occur before, during, and/or after the match, specifically when the Referee arrives at and/or departs the venue. Misconduct may occur also at later times when directly related to duties of a match affiliated with U.S. Soccer or its Organizational Members.

SECTION 2. RULE APPLICATION

(A) This policy shall supersede any inconsistent rules of Member Organizations that pertain to assault, abuse, or gross mistreatment upon Federation Game Officials (i.e., Referees) the manner and means of hearings, appeals, and rehearings in matters pertaining thereto. However, this policy does not supersede any codes of conduct, which may be enforced in addition to this policy.

(B) Nothing in this policy rule shall be construed to restrict or limit any league, event/tournament or Member Organization from applying equal or greater restrictions to anyone not listed in section 4(a)(1) of this policy (i.e., a spectator associated with a club or team).

(C) This policy shall not apply to players, coaches, managers, club officials, or league officials while participating in Professional League Member activities. U.S. Soccer Policy 202-2 covers participants in professional matches.

SECTION 3. TERMS AND REFERENCES

As used in this policy:

1. "Referee" includes the following:

(A) All currently registered USSF Referees, assistant Referees, fourth officials, match officials, or others duly appointed (i.e., by Member Organizations) to assist in officiating in a sanctioned match or a similar USSF-affiliated activity (e.g., scrimmage). A Referee who is not certified or registered with U.S. Soccer or Member Organization may not be covered by this policy. Refer to the below section for emergency situations.

(B) Any non-licensed, non-registered person serving in an emergency capacity as a Referee or any club assistant Referee under USSF policies.

(C) Any person serving in a Referee support function, such as Referee mentors, Referee coaches, and other Referee support staff at the venue.

(D) All references to "Referee" henceforth cover the above definition for all U.S. Soccer policies only.

2. "Hearing" means a meeting of at least three neutral members, one of whom is designated or elected to serve as chairperson. The hearing shall be comprised by and conducted pursuant to guidelines established by the Federation and followed by the Member Organization.

3. For the purposes of this policy, a Referee is protected by U.S. Soccer policy from the time they arrive at the venue (which shall include the parking area), until their departure from the venue. For the purposes of this policy, "Protected Party" means a member of the Referee's family or household, or a guest of the Referee at the match or match venue. All U.S. Soccer policies are in addition to the local, state, and Federal laws.

4. Referee assault is any deliberate physical action against a Referee. Referee abuse is extreme, deliberate, and non-contact behavior that causes a Referee or Protected Party significant harm. Actions in this category may be subject to an immediate suspension, meaning that the perpetrator cannot appear at the next sanctioned match. Assault and abuse include, but not limited to, the following actions or behavior committed against a Referee or Protected Parties:

(A) Imposing physical harm upon a Referee or a Protected Party, including by use of objects or equipment.
(B) Any act that endangers the Referee's physical wellbeing, whether deliberate or merely reckless.
(C) Any form of unwanted physical contact, including but not limited to pushing, hitting, striking, kicking, choking, or spitting at the Referee.
(D) Any behavior that constitutes a criminal offense under any applicable law.
(E) Threatening, either directly or in insinuation, physical harm, including by use of objects or equipment, to a Referee or a Protected Party or property. Threatening is defined as any statement or action that instills reasonable fear of acts of violence to a person's safety or property.
(F) Threats of harm or any retaliatory action against the Referee or their Protected Parties, including threat of exclusion from assignment or future participation opportunity.

5. Actions that do not meet above assault or abuse definitions, but cause a Referee or Protected Party harm, may be subject to U.S. Soccer's gross mistreatment framework. Gross mistreatment means any deliberate, non-contact behavior that is expected to cause harm to a Referee. Gross mistreatment includes, but not limited to, the following actions or behavior committed against a Referee or Protected Parties:

(A) Severe or repeated harassment, including hate speech or discriminatory remarks based on race, gender, national origin, sexual orientation, disabilities, or any other legally protected characteristic.
(B) Extreme verbal attacks that would cause emotional harm to a reasonable person.
(C) Approaching a Referee when they arrive or depart the venue with aggression (e.g., intimidation).
(D) Any form of cyberbullying, including spreading false information about the Referee, sharing the Referee's personal information (aka doxing), or publicly posting content that ridicules or mocks the Referee or uses hate speech.
(E) Questioning the Referee's character, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, or impartiality.
(F) Yelling insults, taunting, making, or expressing derogatory/belittling remarks towards a Referee.
(G) Pervasive action that belittles or undermines the Referee's authority or intended to cast doubt on the Referee.

SECTION 4. JURISDICTION AND HEARINGS

1. General

(A) When any amateur or professional player, coach, manager, club official or game official assaults, abuses or grossly mistreats a Referee, the original jurisdiction to adjudicate the matter shall vest immediately in the responsible Member Organization which is affiliated with the Federation.
(B) When an allegation of assault or abuse is verified by the Member Organization the accused person is automatically suspended until the hearing on the assault or abuse.
(C) The Member Organization must hold a hearing within thirty (30) days of the verification by the Member of the gross mistreatment, assault, or abuse or, if applicable, the thirty-day period provided by subsection (B)(3) of this section. If the Member does not adjudicate the matter within that period of time, original jurisdiction shall immediately vest in the Federation's Appeals Committee to adjudicate the matter, to which the same provisions as to the term of suspension shall apply.
(D) Failure to hold the initial hearing shall not rescind an automatic suspension for assault or abuse.

2. Events and Tournaments

(A) In the event of assault, abuse, or gross mistreatment of a Referee occurs in an event outside the alleged offender's home state, the Referee shall (A) immediately notify the State Referee Administrator in his/her home state, and/or (B) forward a copy of the game report and his/her comments on the incident to the Event/Tournament Chairman.
(B) The Event/Tournament Chairperson shall have the right to immediately convene a hearing at the site of the Event/Tournament, at which the alleged offender, the coach of the alleged offender when the offender is a player, and the game official should be present. Information presented at this hearing shall promptly be relayed to the alleged offender's Member Organization by the Event/Tournament Chairperson, both

orally and in writing; however, failure to provide written information shall not restrict the offender's home Member Organization from taking action with regard to any Referee gross mistreatment, assault, or abuse.

(C) Final jurisdiction shall vest with the alleged offender's home Member Organization. A hearing shall be held by that Member Organization within thirty (30) days of the receipt of the initial report of the gross mistreatment, assault, or abuse on a Referee.

SECTION 5. PENALTIES AND SUSPENSIONS

Penalties for violation of this policy shall be assigned according to the Penalties Matrix in effect at the time the misconduct allegedly occurred, available on page 4. The Penalties Matrix will be managed by U.S. Soccer Staff and Secretary General and may be amended and updated at any time by U.S. Soccer's Technical Development Committee.[1]

SECTION 6. APPEALS

A person who is found to have committed gross mistreatment, assault, and/or abuse may appeal to the Appeals Committee by following the procedures of Federation Bylaw 704 within fourteen (14) days from receipt of the decision of the Member Organization.

SECTION 7. PROCEDURE FOR REPORTING ASSAULT, ABUSE, AND GROSS MISTREATMENT

1. Procedures for reporting of Referee assault, abuse, and/or gross mistreatment shall be developed and disseminated by the U.S. Soccer's Technical Development Committee.
2. Referees shall transmit a written report of the alleged assault, abuse, or gross mistreatment, or both, within 48 hours of the incident (unless there is a valid reason for later reporting) to the designee of the Member Organization and/or the State Referee Administrator.
3. For tournaments or special events, the Referee shall transmit a written report to the tournament director on the day of the incident and/or to the referee's home state SRA, if applicable, within 72 hours of the incident.
4. The Referee should include the following information in the report:
   - **(A)** Match details, including but not limited to team information, age group, score, and date.
   - **(B)** Detailed statement about the incident, including the definition of the behavior or action (i.e., assault, abuse, mistreatment).

The Competition Authority shall submit the following information to the Member Organization or SRA:

1. All documents, exhibits and other evidence in the case.
2. Copies of all rules, procedures, and bylaws used to support the charges and to conduct the hearing.
3. The notice of charges and/or hearing provided the defendant/appellant.
4. The decision of the hearing body and any appeals decisions.

If audio or video clips are made part of the record, there must be copies of any such video or audio delivered to the Federation without any editing.

If a written transcript has been prepared, it shall be included as part of the record.

The record must be in English. If Members accept documents in other languages, then the Member shall be responsible for providing English translations of the documents prepared by a neutral translator agreed to by the parties.

If the record is not submitted in accordance with this policy, the appeal timetable may be put on hold pending the completion of the record or the appeal may be dismissed. If the appeals timetable is put on hold, the appealing party may apply to the Federation to have their penalty suspended until the case is decided.

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[1] *Mandatory reporters under the Safe Sport Act must also report child abuse to law enforcement and to the U.S. Center for SafeSport ("SafeSport"), and must report any sexual misconduct, regardless of the age of involved.*

PENALTIES MATRIX

RESPECT THE CALL

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

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

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**

Please follow your current reporting structure – updated reporting procedure will be a part of Phase 3..