

## Policy 531-9—Misconduct Toward Game Officials in Amateur Matches

### Section 1. General

Misconduct against Referees may occur before, during, and/or after the match, specifically when the Referee arrives at and 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. For the purposes of this policy, all sections that follow apply to matches not involving professional teams participating in professional leagues sanctioned by U.S. Soccer.

### Section 2. Rule Application

(A) This policy shall supersede any inconsistent rules of Organization Members that pertain to assault, abuse, or gross mistreatment upon Federation Game Officials (i.e., Referees) the manner and means of hearings, appeals, and rehearing's 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 Organization Member 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).
  - (b) any non-licensed, non-registered person serving in an emergency capacity as a Referee or any club assistant Referee under USSF policies.

(c) 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 Organization Member.

(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.

- (a) 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:
- (i) Imposing physical harm upon a Referee or a Protected Party, including by use of objects or equipment.
  - (ii) Any act that endangers the Referee's physical wellbeing, whether deliberate or merely reckless.
  - (iii) Any form of unwanted physical contact, including pushing, hitting, or spitting.
  - (iv) Any behavior that constitutes a criminal offense under any applicable law.
  - (v) 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.
  - (vi) Threats of harm or any retaliatory action against the Referee or their Protected Parties, including threat of exclusion from assignment or future participation opportunity.

(4) 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:

- (i) 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.
- (ii) Extreme verbal attacks that would cause emotional harm to a reasonable person. This means actions or behaviors that would cause emotional harm to a reasonable person.
- (iii) Approaching a Referee when they arrive or depart the venue with aggression (e.g., intimidation).
- (iv) 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.
- (v) Questioning the Referee's character, integrity, honesty, truthfulness, or impartiality.
- (vi) Yelling insults, taunting, making, or expressing derogatory/belittling remarks towards a Referee.
- (vii) Pervasive action that belittles or undermines the Referee's authority or intended to cast doubt on the Referee.

#### Section 4. Jurisdiction and Hearings

##### (A) General

- (1) 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 Organization Member which is affiliated with the Federation.
- (2) When an allegation of assault or abuse is verified by the Organization Member the accused person is automatically suspended until the hearing on the assault or abuse.
- (3) The Organization Member 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.
- (4) Failure to hold the initial hearing shall not rescind an automatic suspension for assault or abuse.

##### (B) Events and Tournaments

- (1) 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 (B) forward a copy of the game report and his/her comments on the incident to the Event/Tournament Chairman.
- (2) 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 Organization Member President by the Event/Tournament Chairperson, both orally and in writing; however, failure to provide written information shall not restrict the offender's home Organization Member from taking action with regard to any Referee gross mistreatment, assault, or abuse.
- (3) Final jurisdiction shall vest with the alleged offender's home Organization Member. A hearing shall be held by that Organization Member 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

### (A) Assault and Abuse

- (1) The person committing the Referee assault must be suspended as follows:
  - (a) for a minor or slight touching of the Referee or the Referee's uniform or personal property, at least three months from the time of the assault;
  - (b) except as provided in clause (i) or (ii), for any other assault, at least six months from the time of the assault:
    - (i) for an assault committed by an adult and the Referee is 17 years of age or younger, at least three years; or
    - (ii) for an assault when serious injuries are inflicted, at least five years.
- (2) For actions categorized as abuse, the person must be suspended for the next affiliated match, at minimum.
- (3) A Member Organization adjudicating the matter may not provide shorter period of suspension but, if circumstances warrant, may provide a longer period of suspension.

### (B) Gross Mistreatment

The minimum suspension period for Referee gross mistreatment shall be prescribed by the gross mistreatment framework. The Federation and/or Organization Member adjudicating the matter may provide a longer period of suspension when circumstances warrant (e.g., habitual offenders). The gross mistreatment framework provides additional suspension periods based on the extent and impact of the incident.

## 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 Organization Member.

## Section 7. Procedure for Reporting Assault, Abuse, and Gross Mistreatment

(A) 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.

(B) 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 Organization Member and/or the State Referee Administrator.

(C) For tournaments or special events, the Referee shall transmit a written report to the tournament director on the day of the incident and to the referee's home state SRA, if applicable, within 72 hours of the incident.

(D) The Referee should include the following information in the report:

1. Match details, including but not limited to team information, age group, score, and date.
2. 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 Organization Member 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 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.

### **Index of Documents Contained in the Certified Appeal Record**

Case: \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_ Index Page: \_\_\_\_\_

Record # \_\_\_\_\_ Date: \_\_\_\_\_

Description of Document: \_\_\_\_\_  
(attach additional sheets as required)

Certificate:

I certify that each party to this appeal was given the opportunity to present documentation before the record was closed and that the above documentation is the entire record considered in connection with this matter.

Dated: \_\_\_\_\_

\_\_\_\_\_  
Appeals Committee Chairperson