

Mentoring for Youth Referee Development with the DSC

Introduction:

Unlike an instructor, assignor or referee assessor, all of whom provide a resource to help referees master their craft, find work, and gauge their progress, a referee's mentor(s) are people who help develop their courage, confidence, character and individual style. Rather than impart, a mentor's primary role is to share, because not so long ago, they were in the same boat themselves.

While we do have existing mentoring programs structured around single middles, where the mentee begins by observing the mentor doing a match, then goes on the field to shadow the mentor, then is shadowed by the mentor on the field, and finally officiates solo with the mentor on the sideline, the DSC approach puts the mentee in the game, right from the start, as an assistant referee in a 3 person referee crew using the Diagonal System of Control (DSC). The mentor and mentee are part of a team right from the beginning.

Mentor Qualifications:

Beyond a few years of experience as a referee, the key qualifications are not how good a referee you are, but more, your attitude, ability to share your knowledge and experience, and most important, your ability to listen and empathize. You have been there, you know what it is like when a coach yells at you, a player complains, when you totally blow a call, do your first middle, pop a flag for offside, deal with an injury on the field or screw up the clock. There is no substitute for experience, particularly when it is reasonably fresh on your mind.

You are uniquely qualified to help others make it through their first year and, maybe, help them for years to come.

Three is probably a manageable minimum number of mentees for each mentor. More than six would get cumbersome. Initially, we will have the referees and mentors self select by meeting up at games. To balance things out, once things get rolling, some mentee/mentor match ups will be assigned. Finally, if there are issues, we can always make adjustments and changes.

How to Mentor:

Here there are no instructions. You get to work out your own style. How this works is up to you and your mentee. The relationship can be a close friendship or distant and professional. **How** is your call, but **what** is expected of you is very specific.

What is expected of you:

Beyond the ongoing expectation that you will be available to support and guide your mentees, it is anticipated that you will accomplish the following:

Pre-game:

You will work with your mentees so that they fully integrate into the referee crew.

You will help them refine their pre-game procedures including:

- field inspection,
- player safety inspection,
- roster and passcard procedures
- substitution instructions
- pre-game to the crew

Here is a link to a paper with an example of a pre-game:

<http://massref.net/instruction/pregame.pdf>

You will instruct your mentees on proper mechanics

- AR/positioning and flag signaling mechanics
- CR/positioning and signaling mechanics

Here is a link to the Guide to Procedures:

<http://massref.net/ussfpublications/guidestoprocedures.pdf>

Nothing is learned fully in one sitting. It will take several sessions. As you teach, you will also be learning stuff. If you have questions, call your assignor, an experienced official, an assessor or an instructor for advice.

Halftime:

When the crew meets in the center for the half, if you are an AR and your mentee is the center, help them develop their halftime chat (ie. Did I miss anything in your end? Any problems out there? Etc.) Then, provide any relevant feedback to the center and other AR. If you are the center. Do your chat, guide them on mechanics, assess their performance (ie. Make sure you stay with the 2LD or keep and eye out for subs). Then, take some time if there were any interesting calls, or non-calls, to share your thought processes with them.

Post game:

After the match, get together again to discuss mechanics, calls, and help the referee identify those skills which need work. Compliment that which they do well. Make sure they know how to get in contact with you. In your discussions, it is better to ask them how they think they should handle a situation than tell them how to do it. You might share how you would approach it, but even as their mentor, we cannot dictate.

Progress:

You are expected to monitor the progress of these referees and help them focus on both their proficiency and their confidence as referees. You want to help them advance and become better with every game. Even more important, you want to help them have fun. If they are not having fun, we need to find out why and come up with an appropriate solution.

For some, you may find that your mentees are just not cut out to be refs. That is to be expected. It is not your job to push them where they do not belong, but you can help them address this, even explain it to their parents, and realize that there is nothing to be ashamed of. Refing is not for everyone. Sometimes it just takes time, too, so let the ref go, at their own pace, and make their own decision.

What to Report to the Assignor:

You are not there as an assessor or instructor. Your conversations, evaluations and guidance are between you and the mentee and you are expected to honor this confidence. There are no progress reports or grades. You are there to help them.

This said, there are two areas where you are asked to report. The first is if the referee feels he is unsuited and no longer wants assignments, and if they do not want to tell me directly, you can help by letting me know. The second is when your mentees are ready for their first middle. Initially most mentees will be grade 9's who have never done a middle and will initially be assigned only lines.

When they are ready for their middle, let me know and I will make sure you will be there as their AR1 to help out and let them know how they did after the game.

Any questions, e-mail me at ShermWhipple@MassRef.net or call me at 508-265-7730