

Subject: Youth Soccer Insider: How Refs Make the Whistle Work For Them

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How Refs Make the Whistle Work For Them

By Randy Vogt

Soccer referees carry their whistles in their hands, not in their mouths. In raising the whistle to the mouth to blow it, a referee has a moment to analyze a foul to make certain that there is not an advantage situation developing.

When I spot a ref running down the field with the whistle in his or her mouth, I know that referee is inexperienced.

One of the better parts of officiating is when a foul occurs and a player or coach yells "Foull!" or "Ref!" -- yet I see an advantage situation developing so I yell and signal to "Play on!" If a goal is scored, I sometimes briefly look back at the person who yelled at me and he or she is apologetic or now says "Good call."

To emphasize the use of the whistle when it is necessary to blow it, such as for fouls, offside or close out-of-bounds, refrain from blowing the whistle some other times, such as when the ball was kicked so far off the field everybody can see that it is no longer in play. Or when a team has a kickoff after a goal, simply say, "Play."

If the ball clearly went into the goal, there is no need to blow the whistle; simply point to the kickoff circle. However, the ref always blows it for a goal and points to the kick-off circle on those rare occasions when the ball hits the post, goes over the goal line and then bounces out. You blow the whistle in this bang-bang case so that everyone understands that it's a goal.

In its Advice to Referees, U.S. Soccer instructs referees to restart play with a whistle after substitutions as "verbal signals are insufficient and should not be used by themselves." This is especially good advice for the new referee.



A generation ago, I was interviewed by Newsday and the article's author, **Anne Bratskeir**, correctly surmised that "blowing the whistle is an art form." Indeed it is. I often consider my whistle to be conducting a great symphony of players, coaches and assistant referees.

You blow the whistle at normal pitch for common fouls, offside and when the ball just goes over either the touchline or goal line.

You blow the whistle very hard for a bad foul as well as for a penalty kick foul or to disallow a goal. Blowing the whistle hard emphasizes to everybody that you have seen exactly what happened and are going to act decisively.

People speak with a range of emotions conveying joy, sadness, enthusiasm, etc. and you would be absolutely bored listening to a person speaking in the same monotone all day. So why do some refs blow the whistle exactly the same if the ball goes out of bounds or there is a penalty kick foul or sending off offense?

I was refereeing a boys U-15 game and blew the whistle very hard. The assignor, speaking to a ref with his back to the field 40 yards away, said, "Randy is going to give somebody a card."

He could tell just by the sound of the whistle. After blowing the whistle hard, I often hear the player who fouled immediately say "I'm sorry."

At the end of each half, you can use one long blow of the whistle or three short blasts in quick succession.

Summarizing, referees need to learn to use the pitch of their whistles for game control.

(Randy Vogt has officiated over 9,000 games during the past three decades, from professional matches in front of thousands to 6-year-olds being cheered on by very enthusiastic parents. In "[Preventive Officiating](#)," he shares his wisdom gleaned from thousands of games and hundreds of clinics to help referees not only survive but thrive on the soccer field. You can visit the book's website at www.preventiveofficiating.com.)

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