

Subject: Youth Soccer Insider: Ref Watch: Why three is so much better than one

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Ref Watch: Why three is so much better than one

By Randy Vogt

When I moved to Florida for business 27 years ago, I lived and worked in Orlando and also worked in the state capital of Tallahassee, 250 miles away. So I officiated in both cities.

What I remember over a quarter-century later is the beautiful grass fields as well as all games U-13 and above having three officials. And thought that it's going to be more challenging when I return home to New York as I was refereeing nearly all games here, senior and youth, by myself. Just a handful of games that I refereed in New York annually had assistant referees, which were then called linesmen.

As I kept a very brief note on every game that I officiated, I knew that the number of cards that I distributed were much higher per game in matches officiated by myself than with the help of assistant referees. Which makes sense as the players are aware of two more sets of eyes watching so they should be more fearful of getting caught for misconduct -- plus the ref with assistant referees is concentrating on fouls instead of having to always be aware of the position of attackers and defenders for the offside call.

In New York, there has been a gradual progression to three officials per game for nearly all matches played U-13 and above during the past two decades. Some leagues were much more enthusiastic than others about putting their financial resources toward three officials but now all have made that commitment. I remember reffing a girls U-16 game with two other officials where the number of fouls roughly equaled the number of cards distributed by the lone official refereeing a men's over-30 game on an adjacent field. Those players even approached me and asked why the girls have three officials and they have only one.

By the time a player has turned 12 years old, he or she has generally graduated to a large field after playing small-sided



soccer as a young child. I realize that given the referee shortage in many parts of the United States, most areas would not be able to have three officials for every game. But if not, maybe every game on a large field could have three officials.

Three officials for every game from U-12 on up would certainly help develop referees. The most experienced ref could be in the middle for what is perceived to be the most challenging match of the day with the other officials being ARs while the other two could move to the middle for other games that day with the most experienced ref being the AR. The experienced ref could give helpful suggestions to the others in their performance as both ref and AR.

Certainly, we have to move away from officials being in the middle for 3-4 games per day. I've noticed that my performance tends to suffer by my third game as a referee since fatigue is certainly starting to set in.

For Soccer Americans wondering why referees would want to be in the middle for several games per day or be on fields from 9 am to 5 pm, most of us do not want this heavy workload. But assignors need to get the games covered. It would not be this way if most refs did not quit within their first two years of starting. As verbal abuse by adults is the No. 1 reason that refs quit, remember that when you yell at a ref, you could be contributing to our referee shortage.

(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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