

Assignor Workshop – Round Table Discussion – July 9, 2022

Topic – RETAIN & RECRUIT

Over 40 associations were represented at this workshop. Attendees divided into 6 groups. Each group was facilitated by an assignor who has 70% or more of their referees recertifying for multiple years.

The question posed to everyone – *What is working for you?* How are you getting your referees to recertify?

Referees come back when they are:

1. Supported
2. Valued & Appreciated
3. Given opportunities
4. Having fun

Support

Getting younger, newer referees off to a solid start -

1. Shadow method. Having an experienced referee on the field with a brand-new referee on an entry level game(s). Coaches are aware of this practice and are on board knowing that the goal is REFEREE training to ensure a solid start.
2. Having an experienced referee right next to the field to monitor and ensure that all is well.
3. Having experienced referees' team up with brand new on their first few middles of entry level games (U9/10). The goal is to put the new referee at ease with some positive reinforcement from the experienced referees.

Bottom line – invest some time at the beginning of their referee season, get them off to a solid start from game one.

Prepare them for success –

1. Have pre-season referee meetings with relevant, helpful information.
2. Have mid-season or monthly training for current referees.
3. Some associations are incentivizing participation by increasing referee pay for those that attend on a regular basis.

The thing to keep in mind about meetings/trainings. Do not expect to cover A – Z in topics. Rather, keep the training relevant to 2 -3 relevant topics that will benefit many attendees. Make the training FUN – interactive HANDS-ON LEARNING. Do this at the fields as much as possible. **Respect their time. Give them something of value** within a 60 (school night)–90-minute time frame and send them home, leaving them with a feeling of – This was well worth my time. They will likely attend your next one if they feel it was worth their time.

Working with Coaches -

Communicate to your Coaches the mindset of the newest referee. Some are doing in-person training, some have had success with an email to coaches, sent through your coaching director or the President of the league

1. Let the coaches know that you have a team of awesome referees. You have brand new referees that need a SAFE, FUN environment to get started. **(a template of what this communication looks like is available upon request)** Several associations are being pro-active, taking the message to the coach and it's working.
2. Strong, actionable enforcement of the Zero Tolerance Policy

Valued

Referee Appreciation –

1. End of season THANK YOU parties. Getting local businesses to provide food, prizes.
 - a. Centered around a fun event/activity
2. Pre-season – Kick off the season with a Welcome back party.
 - a. Reminders of how to get games
3. Evaluations – several associations have provided a simple evaluation form. When referees get a certain number of points, based on good to excellent feedback – they get a monetary bonus.
4. Keep it fun for all. Create an environment – This is the place to be on Saturdays – at the fields with my fellow referees.

OPPORTUNITIES

Mix it up and move them up -

1. Mix it up a bit when you can. Be sure to listen to your referees – when they want to move up to the next level (a U9 line to U11) a 4 v 4 middle to a 7 v 7 middle. Give them the opportunity to step it up.
2. Same is true with listening. If they do not want middles, do not force them to do middles. We always have more AR slots to offer.

Move them up when they are ready.
3. If you only have games until 12 noon and you have refs that want more opportunity – let them know that there is a league 20 miles away that plays until 4pm or later.
4. For your All-Stars – the naturals, those that ask, “how can I move up” please let them know. Every recreation association has referees that are more than capable of working the competitive games, the state sponsored tournaments. **Provide opportunities when you can.**

Referees will stay in the program longer if we can keep them busy.

Once our referees become 16 they have more options to make money. We lose referees to typical entry level jobs (fast food) because they provide opportunities 7 days a week.

Don't worry about losing “your” referees. Treat them well and they will work for you.

Topic – Recruitment

1. Team up with your ISD, work within the school system to promote the awesomeness of becoming a referee.
2. Incentivize your current referees in promoting the referee opportunity to their friends. Give a monetary bonus to those who have recruited a friend who stayed in the program for a certain amount of time or recertified.

3. Some associations are offsetting the costs with clinic fees/uniforms. Based on number of games they referee.
Keep in mind – referees that make it through season one & two with support, appreciation, opportunities, and that have fun at the field are likely to return. If you consider the monetary incentives, get them to put some time in before thinking about offsetting their costs.
4. Take the message direct to the teams. For years, we rely on the North Texas site and association’s websites with a generic message. This year, North Texas has enlisted some current high school age referees to be North Texas Referee Ambassadors and we are taking the message to the high school team’s practices. An ambassador will share the awesome referee opportunity with peers their own age. I expect to see great results with this new tactic.
5. The use of promotional materials – passing them out at the fields. (a generic template is available upon request). If you weren’t in attendance at the workshop and would like the **NTX Referee recruitment postcard** with the QR code on it – please email me. I believe we have some in stock and we will be ordering more.
6. Always be prepared to recruit.
7. Test drive – one association is allowing kids to practice (test drive). I suggest you create scrimmage match ups for this tool. 9/10U scrimmage matches for ARs, & middles. This gives them an indication of what’s in store before they pay a clinic fee and uniform kit.

Things to keep in mind. Smaller associations can try things that will not work for bigger associations, and vice versa.

Continue to think outside the box. If we all work on retaining, this will be beneficial for ALL.

I appreciate everyone that attended the workshops. I heard NEW ideas, practices and everyone appreciated what was brought to the table.

The A+ Referee recap with Power Point (8 slides) is available upon request.

Ann Hicks
North Texas State Director of Instruction
Ahicks.sdi.ntx@gmail.com