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Law 5



U.S. Soccer Federation Referee Program
Ask, Tell, Dismiss
May 2012

U.S. SOCCER FEDERATION REFEREE PROGRAM



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ASK-TELL-DISMISS

The Referee's Authority

- Players
- Substitutes
- Team Officials
- Spectators

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What is your authority over: players, substitutes, team officials, and everyone else (usually, spectators)?



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ASK-TELL-DISMISS

The Referee's Authority

- **Players**
 - Fouls
 - Misconduct
- Substitutes
- Team Officials
- Spectators

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Law 5 gives you direct authority over players. Players can commit fouls and misconduct.



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The Referee's Authority

- Players
- **Substitutes**
 - **Misconduct**
- Team Officials
- Spectators

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Law 5 gives you direct authority over substitutes. This includes “substituted players” -- persons who had been a player in the game but who had been substituted out and cannot return to the field. They are a special group which exists only if you are using strict Law 3 substitution rules – for purposes here, “substituted players” are treated as though they are substitutes.

Substitutes can only commit misconduct.



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The Referee's Authority

- Players
- Substitutes
- **Team Officials**
 - **Irresponsible Behavior**
- Spectators

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Law 5 (and places in Law 3 as well as a section on “The Technical Area”) gives you limited authority over team officials. USSF Guidelines state that anyone you permit to be in the bench or technical area is a team official, even if they don’t think they are. Usually, by “team official,” we mean “the coach” but it could include assistant coaches, a first aid provider, or even a team mother who has brought snacks for the midgame break. From here on, we’ll just use the term “team official.”

Team officials cannot commit a foul nor can they commit misconduct. Under the Law, a team official can only be guilty of “irresponsible behavior” and, if a team official’s behavior becomes irresponsible, he or she is not “sent off” but “dismissed” from the field. The practical effect of being dismissed is the same as a send-off – the team official has to leave the field and stay far enough away to be “out of sight and sound” but the person’s team is not required to “play down.”



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ASK-TELL-DISMISS

The Referee's Authority

- Players
- Substitutes
- Team Officials
- **Spectators**
 - **Work through coaches**
 - **Suspend or terminate**

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Spectators (and that includes anyone other than a player, substitute, or team official) are not mentioned anywhere in the Laws of the Game and, consequently, you do not have any direct authority over them. The most you can do is work through the coaches if spectator behavior is a problem or, ultimately, to suspend or terminate the match.



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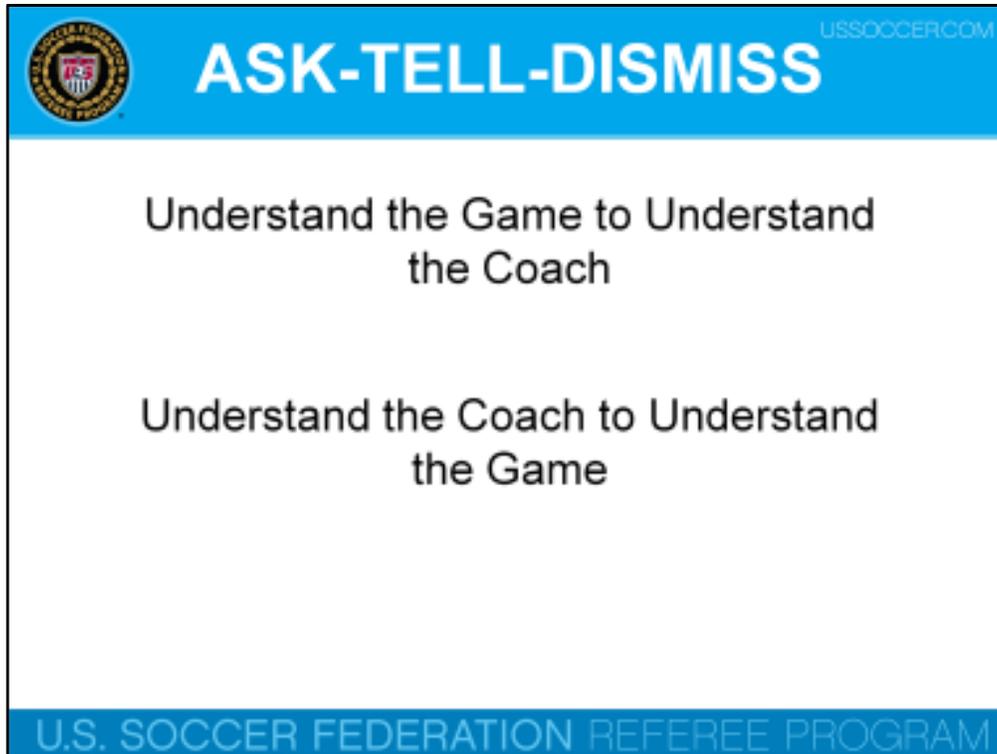
The Referee's Authority

- Players
- Substitutes
- Team Officials 
- Spectators

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This presentation is focused on team officials.

A huge majority of team officials do not and never do behave irresponsibly. They are passionate, they are invested in the players, they become excited when their team plays well ... and they also become excited when their team doesn't play well. Like all of us at one time or another, they sometimes look for someone else to blame when things don't go their way. Unfortunately, that "someone else" can be you and other members of the officiating team.



In order to evaluate the behavior of the coach, it is helpful for you to understand the game – meaning this game, today, against this opponent, what is at stake, the past history, and the personalities involved.

At the same time, you also need to understand the ways a coach affects the game to which you have been assigned. Much of that influence is out of sight because it comes from what the coach did in prior games, in practices, at the last team meeting, and while the team was warming up for the game. Some of it is very much “in sight” because it involves the behavior of the coach on the sideline during the match ... and that is where you may need to become involved.

It is only the “in sight” behavior that can concern you.



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Levels of Coach Behavior

- Positive, sporting, supportive
- Acceptable
- Borderline unacceptable
- Unacceptable
- Blatantly irresponsible

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These categories are not official in the sense that they have any accepted definition you can follow. Their purpose is simply to remind us that, in most cases, behavior has to be judged in its context. Just like “dissent” as a cautionable offense or “abusive, insulting, or offensive language” as a send-off offense, the irresponsibility of a coach’s behavior has to be measured in terms of the extent to which it improperly interferes with the game on the field or with your ability to manage the game within the Law.

Most of the time, the actions of the coach are commendable. Sometimes they may be questionable but acceptable under the circumstances. Occasionally, they may enter the gray area where the decision could go either way. Then there are unfortunate instances when the behavior is clearly unacceptable but does not present a “clear and present danger” requiring an immediate, strong response. Finally, and rarest of all, the behavior is blatantly disruptive and your reaction must be swift and sure in order to keep the game under control.



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ASK-TELL-DISMISS

Ask, Tell, Dismiss is an Approach
Not a Mandate or a Rigid Scheme

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Given the range of behavior a coach may exhibit on the sideline and the variation in the degree to which that behavior may or may not be inappropriate based on its impact on the match, US Soccer developed the “Ask, Tell, Dismiss” approach as a practical, flexible tool for responding effectively to disruptive actions. Its intention is to provide a ladder-like method of escalating the seriousness of your response to a similarly escalating pattern of sideline behavior by a coach.



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ASK-TELL-DISMISS

Borderline unacceptable
Or
Unacceptable with extenuating
circumstances
=
ASK

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When a team official's actions are borderline unacceptable, or if they are unacceptable but the circumstances indicate a "word" may be all that is needed to obtain proper behavior, ASK the coach to modify his or her behavior. In other words, let the coach know that you are aware of the inappropriate action, that it is unwelcome, and that the coach needs to behave responsibly. It doesn't hurt – even with ASK – to include the word "responsible" or "irresponsible" in your ASKing because often, if the coach is knowledgeable, this should trigger concern that you are serious.



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ASK-TELL-DISMISS

Borderline unacceptable continues
Or
Unacceptable without extenuating
circumstances
Or
Unacceptable continues
=
TELL

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If the borderline irresponsibility continues or if the circumstances become less forgiving (for example, the temperature of the match heats up more) or if the clearly unacceptable behavior continues despite your warning, you can TELL the coach that the actions must stop. ASKing merely lets the coach know you are unhappy without getting any more specific. TELLing identifies the behavior and includes a clear requirement that the behavior must change.



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ASK-TELL-DISMISS

TELL is ignored
Or
Unacceptable behavior continues
Or
Irresponsibility has become dangerous
=
DISMISS

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If the TELL warning is ignored or there is no longer any gray area or the behavior of the coach is having serious consequences for your game management or for the honor of the sport, then the coach must be dismissed from the field. Remember, no red card is shown unless the local rules of competition clearly require it. Either way, the dismissal (with all relevant facts) must be included in your game report. Furthermore, the dismissed person must leave – meaning, gone from the field and its surrounding area with no ability to play any further part in the remainder of the match (sometimes referred to as “out of sight and sound”). If the dismissed person is the only responsible adult connected with a youth team (under 16), then the match must be terminated.



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ASK-TELL-DISMISS

Involvement of the members of the officiating team:

- Established in the pre-game
- Fourth official
- Benchside assistant referee
- You

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One purpose of having a team of officials (the “three man system”) is so that other members of the officiating team can assist you in implementing the “Ask” and “Tell” elements of this approach, if you choose to authorize their involvement. Some referees encourage the 4th official (if there is one) and/or the assistant referee on a side of the field on which either or both teams are located to monitor the behavior of team officials and to take responsibility for “Asking” and/or “Telling”. Other referees prefer to handle these matters themselves with only supporting information provided by the 4th official and/or the ARs. Still other referees find flexible mixtures of these approaches.

Either way, two basic principles remain. First, only the referee can implement the dismissal of a team official. Second, whatever your preferences as the referee, you need to discuss the degree of involvement by other members of the officiating team before the game begins – i.e., in the pregame. There is no “standard” guideline on your instructions regarding this topic. You need to have your preferences clearly in mind (based at least in part on the extent of the experience and training of the other members of the officiating team) and you need to make sure that your message is clearly received.



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ASK-TELL-DISSMISS

Irresponsible behavior includes but is not limited to:

- Offensive or insulting language or gestures
- Persistent questioning of decisions – yours as well as those of the ARs
- Kicking or throwing items
- Refusing to remain in the bench or technical area (particularly if this interferes with play)

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These are examples only – though of the more common varieties of irresponsible behavior. Think about each of them. Go back to [Slide 9 – Levels of Coach Behavior] and discuss or think about what specific actions might be included, why the behavior would be generally termed “irresponsible,” and what elements of the behavior or the circumstances in which the behavior occurs that might make it borderline unacceptable versus clearly unacceptable versus blatantly unacceptable. Why does anyone engaging in this behavior need to be dismissed from the field?



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ASK-TELL-DISMISS

ONE LAST, IMPORTANT POINT

Depending on the specific behavior, you do not have to **Ask**, then **Tell**, before you can **Dismiss**

- **Blatantly obvious**
- **Clearly disruptive**
- **Seriously dangerous**

Go Straight to Dismiss

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The approach is pragmatic and flexible. The Ask, Tell, Dismiss approach is an easily understandable escalation of response to increasingly improper behavior by a team official. But sometimes the unacceptable behavior itself doesn't escalate -- it starts high ... and is most likely only going to get worse. Where a team official's actions are immediately recognizable as blatantly obvious, clearly disruptive, or seriously dangerous (where "dangerous" means for the players, the sportsmanship of the play, or for members of the officiating team), there is no need to take the more measured approach of asking and then telling – for the good of the game, go straight to dismiss.