

How to Ref Boring Games

By Randy Vogt

Not every game that a referee is assigned will be for teams whose ability is comparable to Barcelona or Manchester United. Over the course of a referee career, an official will be assigned games where the teams struggle to put three passes together. Many times, I have spoken to my officiating colleagues at halftime and the first words out of their mouths is, "This game is awful!"

Recently, I was to referee a boys under-16 game and my assistant referee was already at the field officiating another boys U-16 game but of lower division teams. He look very bored as he was slouching, with his flag behind his back and not paying total attention to the game. He put himself in the precarious position of something developing during the run of play and him needing to make an important decision but he was totally unprepared should this have occurred.

After the game, the referee said to me in front of the AR, "Randy, my assistant referee did not pay attention to the game."

And the AR responded, "That's because it was so boring!"

In the game we officiated together, the teams were of a higher quality and he did pay attention to what he was doing. Yet this AR is developing a reputation of not giving 100% for every game. I cannot see him advancing through the ranks, especially since the refs grade the ARs after every game in this league. He certainly is not making a positive contribution to many of the games he officiates.

So how do you officiate a game that is not nearly as exciting as others? The same way that you work at a job that you do not like. You think of the positive qualities of that job to put you in a better frame of mind. Regarding officiating during poorly played soccer games, you think of all the good things occurring for you at the game: You are engaged in a wonderful cardiovascular exercise of running up and down a soccer field, you are meeting new people and making new friendships plus you are getting paid.

What could be better than that?

With relatively unskilled players, there is even some acceleration of play in spurts. And although lower division games might not have as high a standard of play as other games, there is a moment or two of brilliance in every game. If you are sleeping, you will miss it but more importantly, you could miss an important call and the game could spiral out of control. Your body language should convey total concentration on the match. Instead of being bored, work on a part of your game that you are weak in such as positioning, mechanics, etc.

No matter what the level of the game -- whether it's intramurals, travel team, premier, school soccer, amateur or professional soccer -- people talk. Officials who work as hard for lower division games as much as they do for Division 1 games plus work as hard for girls and women's matches as much as boys and men's games get good reputations. Officials who take off from a game or two do not. After all, whether it's Division 1 or Division 6, that game is important to those players.

Many leagues encourage their coaches to rate the referee after every game. Coaches have a much easier time determining if the referee worked hard than if the referee made the right decisions. Refs who take off games do so at their own peril.

Since becoming an official more than three decades ago, I have heard complaints from my referee colleagues about favoritism of certain officials by assignors, referee organizations and leagues. These "favored" officials seem to get many of the so-called top assignments in addition to being assigned games on days when there's little activity. I am certain that organizations and assignors have found these officials to be reliable, to hustle at every game they are assigned and to have forged a good or great reputation. Their hard work is being rewarded.

(Randy Vogt has officiated over 8,000 games during the past three decades, from professional matches in front of thousands to six-year-olds being cheered on by very enthusiastic parents. In "[Preventive Officiating](http://www.preventiveofficiating.com/)," 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 <http://www.preventiveofficiating.com/>)

