

And just when I thought we were safely out of the woods, referee-harassing spectators reared their ugly heads...

For those of you who haven't noticed, I have recently added yet another soccer related responsibility as part of this soccer club – refereeing. My wonderful wife asked why, with all of time and effort I put into running this soccer club would I then want to spend what little free time I have taking verbal abuse from coaches, spectators and at times, players, while standing in the middle of a soccer field during a game. Wasn't I content to simply watch our boys play soccer? Couldn't I just do my job as President and leave it at that? No...I wanted to get MORE involved in the game of soccer.

So, I went to the referee class, got my Grade 8 badge and headed out to the Sports Park to referee some soccer games. And you know what, it is a blast! It really is, despite the fact that can be difficult times managing spectators and coaches, especially during hotly contested games with cross-town rivals. But overall, I am really enjoying myself and I am getting to experience the game from a totally different perspective.

I think what gave me solace in signing up to referee games here in town, both recreational and competitive alike, was knowing that we have been successful as a soccer club in getting the message across to our membership and coaches – that being that at no time will we tolerate harassing, negative or abusive comments to be directed at any game officials. Period.

Unfortunately, my son and I were the subject of abuse from a visiting coach during a competitive match. I normally can laugh off comments and criticism from these individuals, mainly because I know rules of the game and as a life-long player can recognize rule violations. But this past Sunday, I had to listen to this coach moan and whine, and complain about what a horrible job my son and I were doing. He didn't know the young boy running the line on the other side of the field was my son, but I don't think it would have mattered even if he had known. Now mind you, there hadn't been any rough play, no goal scoring opportunities denied, no missed handballs in the box and no calls made or missed that would have changed the outcome of the game. Yet, the way the abuse poured out of his mouth one would have thought I had just prevented his team from qualifying for the 2010 World Cup.

Up until last weekend, I was proud to say that I have witnessed or heard practically no abusive sideline conduct from our club membership. In fact, I was prepared to stick my chest out and boldly say at the monthly District 3 meeting in front of all the club presidents and District officials that BUSC did not have a problem this year with sideline behavior. Well, good thing I sat quietly and simply listened to the discussion about why there have been so many red cards and coach send offs this season for other club's in the District.

This past weekend, some parents from one of our Division 1 teams thought it was acceptable to loudly question a referees call, and then to suggest that the referee was more suitable to officiating a baseball game rather than a soccer game (an unfair slight on

baseball to boot). One parent even attempted to show of the playback of video to an assistant referee of an attacking play that the parent thought was clearly offsides and that the referee missed, long after the play had ended mind you. Why? Like the referee would say “oh, ok, do over.” What was the purpose of such an act, other then to berate the referee. Folks, in case you do not know, none of these actions is permissible behavior!

Now that I have been on the receiving end of spectator and coach abuse, I gotta tell you...it ain't fun. Oh, I have pretty thick skin and can ignore it, but why does it have to happen in the first place? It amazes me how little spectators, and might I dare to say coaches, know about the rules of soccer and how they are applied to the game. Oh, they think they know, but they really don't. When the comments start to flow, and the negativity comes raining down on the field like grenades, you got to ask yourself, why? Why all the hostility? Why is there such an expectation that game officials be perfect? They're not. It amazes me that players, who constantly make various mistakes throughout a match will often be the first to criticize a referee for what they perceive to a mistaken call. And that parent yelling at the referee about the terrible job he or she is doing, I suppose that individual has never made a mistake while engaged in any type of sporting event or recreational activity in his or her life, right?

The message I would like to impart in this article is as follows: Go to the game, sit down, relax and watch your favorite player or team play soccer. That's it. Cheer when something good happens, and shut the mouth when something bad purportedly happens. It is that simple.

The next time you hear or see verbal abuse of any kind being directed toward a referee by a player, coach or spectator, please kindly remind the person that such behavior is simply uncalled for. If the abuse continues, please inform a club official of the unwarranted conduct so that appropriate action can be taken. We don't want to have to ban parents from watching a match, or relieving coaches of their coaching responsibilities, but we will if it comes to that. Of course, all of this can be avoided if we all simply ask ourselves while we are out at the soccer field “What kind of example am I as the spectator or coach setting?” After all, the children who witness this conduct will most likely grow up and repeat these mistakes as adults because the behavior will have been learned and tolerated. I know these notions never crossed the mind of the coach who abused my son and I – if they had, he would have probably acted differently. Lets see if we can set an example here at BUSC and eliminate any future need for such a discussion of this topic. I would much rather tell you how much fun I am having blowing my whistle!

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