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The Many Benefits of Refereeing

By Randy Vogt

When I was asked to lead a discussion on "The Many Benefits of Refereeing" to help recruit refs at the recent Long Island Junior Soccer League Convention, it was easy to put together many talking points, such as:

Refereeing is fun. To some refs, the fun comes from running up and down a soccer field with the players and being outdoors. To others, the fun comes from controlling the game so the participants can play to their potential. Whatever floats your boat! I must be having a good deal of fun on the field as many spectators say to me, "It's nice to see a smiling ref," and I have such fond memories of the teams, players and coaches I officiated through the years.

Refereeing is very healthy. To reach your potential as a referee, you must eat right and train around your games. Partly because of this, I am very healthy and the fittest 50-year-old on my block. Which came in very handy during the Northeastern U.S. snowstorm last month. The two feet of snow was too much for some snow blowers, including mine. It took me most of the day but I shoveled a 50 yard x 5 yard driveway. My four surgeries from injuries -- two hernia operations, knee meniscus surgery and an operation to repair a chipped bone -- were relatively minor affairs and not the major operations that some others my age are facing. But no matter how many fruits, vegetables and egg whites I eat and how many hills that I run up and down, I can retard but certainly never halt the aging process. And it's important for a ref to dress appropriately to the weather to remain healthy.

Refereeing teaches discipline. In order to have time to referee and train for it, a ref needs to be very disciplined and organized to budget the time to devote to refereeing. All those weekends of waking up at 6 am and those days of driving hundreds of miles to attend clinics certainly teaches discipline. Some of the people who quit refereeing say that they did not realize how much time it takes. Plus there's a great deal of discipline -- and a twinge of sadness -- in sticking with an assignment after a much better game from another assignor to be played at the same time comes along.

Refereeing helps you in human relationships. After successfully managing a game with 22 players, running a department of a company could conceivably be easier. Many refs I know are quite successful in the business world.

Refereeing makes you cool, calm and collected. The referee can never lose his or her cool when everybody around the officials are losing theirs. Successful refs are cool, calm and collected and bring that approach to other aspects of their lives.

Refereeing helps you learn foreign languages. Unfortunately, English is the only language that I speak fluently. Yet I studied French and Italian in high school and college. Unlike most students who have forgotten just about everything, I can do relatively well with both languages today because of the French and Italian that I hear on soccer fields. I also understand some Spanish and Portuguese since they're also Romance languages and I've watched games being broadcast in those tongues. Before I refereed in what was the Soviet Union, I learned some basic Russian that I still remember. As some players and coaches have learned the hard way, don't think you can speak in a foreign language and expect me to understand nothing.

You are paid to referee. I used to call the money that I earned from refereeing on weekends "my lunch money" as it did not do much more than pay for lunch every day of the week. But soccer continued to grow and there were more games to referee. The money I earned from different organizations increased by roughly the inflation rate every year. Around the turn of the millennium, some college conferences increased game fees to recruit the best officials. Facing a referee shortage, other groups followed and the increase filtered down to the youth leagues. But I should point out that I'm not going to become rich from refereeing as it's simply an avocation and I'm paying close to \$1,000 every year in membership fees for different referee organizations as well as uniforms.

Part of what you earn is pride. Yes, I've refereed many games but I have more pride in the fact that I hustled in every game I officiated. Part of the pride that I feel about my officiating career now comes from the fact that some well-known athletes took shortcuts to maximize their performance and break records while my colleagues and I, far from the limelight, simply put on our uniforms to go out and referee and hopefully make a difference in the players' lives.

You meet wonderful people. Maybe the best part of officiating after doing it for the past 35 years is people greet me by name on the street and say they remember me decades after they stopped playing soccer. I've even been friended on Facebook by people who I officiated in foreign countries a generation ago.

My life would not be as happy, or nearly as full, if I didn't referee on weekends as soccer has been very, very good to me. I encourage anybody thinking about taking a referee course to sign up and keep an open mind of the many wonderful things that refereeing can bring to your life.

(Randy Vogt has officiated over 8,000 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 preventiveofficiating.com/)