

Oregon School Activities Association

Soccer SRI Bulletin #3

2022

I want to extend my apologies for my comments in the original September 20 Soccer SRI Bulletin #3. The NFHS Soccer Rule book does not differentiate between levels of play or those playing the game. The comments I made unnecessarily segmented populations. My goal was not to compare, contrast or rank soccer between boys and girls. My goal was to describe the nuances that go into each game, but I failed in the attempt to communicate that. I realize now that my comments were hurtful to some and shed a negative light upon the OSAA, the sport of soccer, officiating and myself. I will work diligently to regain the trust of the Association, schools, players, and officials around the state.

I want to revise my previous SRI Bulletin, specifically with regard to my statements about referees managing high school girls' games.

Referees are there to manage the game, so that the game can be played in a safe and fair manner. The rules create the overall structure of the contest but the referees then have to apply those rules to each game they do. The teams will have different skill levels, different attitudes and different expectations in each game. All of their personal history with life, sports in general and soccer specifically comes into play. Most teams, certainly successful teams, develop their own implicit team beliefs and practices about how the game should be played, what is fair, what is sporting and how they expect their opponents will act.

Sometimes, those expectations and beliefs match up very well with those of the other team in today's game. Those games are easy for referees to officiate. And when that is how the teams are today, officials should not try to impose some other expectations that they may bring to the game. It is the players' game, and not the officials'.

On the other hand, sometimes the expectations and beliefs of the two teams do not match up well. One team wants to play a hard, fast, physical game.

The other team wants to play a more technical, tactical game with less physical play. These games are more difficult, sometimes much more difficult, to officiate. These are the games where the game ends with one team complaining that the referee wasn't calling anything, and the other team is complaining that the referee wouldn't let them play. It just goes with the territory of being a referee.

Referees have to be attuned to understand the expectations and beliefs of the teams in this game, between these two teams, on this field, today. When they have widely different attitudes and styles, the referee has to use their best judgment, as always, based on their experience with this level of game. What's normal for, say, a 5A JV boys' game? Compared to that, is one team here trying to be way more physical than the norm? Or maybe way less physical? Referees will also run across a wide variety of not only skill levels but also degrees of knowledge of the rules.

We have had a very unusual number of fighting incidents in high school games this year. In my experience, many, but not all, of these situations could be prevented by tighter control of the game from the beginning. It is much easier to start out tight and then loosen up than to try to tighten up later on, when you see that the players can't handle more physical play. But I'm not saying that referees should start out with a standard of 'somebody fell down so there must be a foul there.' We are long past that in high school soccer in Oregon.

Player reactions to foul or no foul decisions can tell the referee a lot about the expectations of the players about today's game. For example, a player may thank the referee for calling the foul that was just committed against that player. Sometimes, not always, that carries with it a suggestion that maybe the player didn't have confidence that the referee was actually going to call what they knew was a foul. We absolutely do not want players to think we are not going to control the game to their level of expectations. If the players start to think that, bad things happen, including, but not limited to fights, because the players will take justice into their own hands (and feet) if we referees don't.