

Referee Notes for the Under 8 Game

Fall 2004

Montclair Soccer Club

Midseason

Some Words about Refereeing from Matt Corley, October 13, 2004

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These are the second Under 8 Referee Notes for the Fall 2004 season. These U8 Referee Notes are designed to address some questions we receive. The parent referees that are officiating the U8 games are usually just beginning as referees. These volunteer parents are trying hard to get it right, and keep it fair and safe. At this introductory level to the game mistakes about the rules are bound to occur. Roll with it during the games. And, let us know afterward if there's a problem that we can address here or in some other format.

Midseason: Slide Tackles and Referee Cheering

Slide Tackles in U8s?

Lately we've observed an unusual event in this division: 7-year olds sliding in to get the ball. We've seen players flinging themselves sideways to the ground feet first, sliding in from the side in physically skilled and cunning displays to "liberate" the ball from the opposition. Courageous and entertaining as this may be, it is very dangerous at this level and it is strictly prohibited in U8 soccer.

We're talking about slide tackles. For those of you just starting out, a tackle in soccer is when a player strips the ball away from an opposing player (with the feet) by "tackling the ball." A slide tackle is when a player slides in feet first in an attempt to "tackle" the ball.

A properly executed slide tackle is indeed a marvel of timing and skill. It takes many years to perfect the tackle to the extent that possession of the ball is gained (or an attack is thwarted) and a foul is not committed. An improperly executed slide tackle is a very dangerous proposition: it is one of the greatest sources of injuries in soccer.

If you see an attempt in one of your games please stop the game for a "dangerous play" violation (indirect kick) whether or not contact with the ball or a player was made. Verbally advise all of the players that slide tackling is not allowed (until they get older). The game should only need to be stopped once to get the message across.

In general slide tackling must be carefully controlled until the proper skills are learned, even at higher age levels. At the Class 4 recreational level it usually is not performed well until at least the U14 level or even higher.

Things to look out for later in your refereeing/coaching/observing careers include: making sure that contact is made with the ball first - not with any part of the player, the slide must be executed with the studs (cleats) flat or pointed down - never up toward the player, and the legs must stay generally together - never flailing up toward the player. A tackle made from anywhere outside of the field of vision of the offensive player is rarely executed without a serious foul being committed. A slide tackle from the rear is very

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serious indeed and can warrant an automatic red card at the U10 and above levels. This is all way beyond 6 and 7 year olds, so at the U8 level let's work hard to keep slide tackles out of U8 games and keep the game safe.

Should Referees Cheer?

Hopefully you've been able to observe referees at the highest level of the game, moving effortlessly throughout the pitch - always on the spot when they need to be yet never taking up some space that a player (or the ball) may want to use. They appear to be the ultimate source of objectivity. But, would they be the same -- just as unbiased -- if they were refereeing their own children's U-8 games?

Even for a professional referee the experience can be vastly different. The job the referee performs at the U-8 level is very unique in it's application in that it is also a direct source of learning for the players. Receiving technical advice on throw-in's, kick-offs, goal or goalie kicks, etc., during a game is an important part of the learning experience for the kids at this level. Another experience that is also important is for the players to think of the referee as an objective participant in the game.

Yes, it's someone's Mom or Dad or sibling, but during the game the referee should think of all of the kids on the pitch as belonging to their own tribe. Treat them all with the same care and consideration. As we strive for team parity and balance, it's really quite likely that the pushes and elbows and trips that happen are probably happening at about the same level for each side. If there are 13 angels and 1 rascal out there - by all means have a word with the rascal. But remember the rest of them are still likely to be just nice kids that occasionally commit fouls during the course of a game.

Should a referee cheer on players? All referees have their own "style" regarding player communication - which can include comments on great play. But when you leave the sidelines behind to referee, you have to leave the sideline cheering behind as well. Cheering is important, but as a referee you're committed to a different and important role.