



REFEREE SUPPORT INITIATIVES

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REFEREES are an essential part of our game, ensuring that matches are played safely, fairly, and in the true spirit of football. Despite their vital role, referees often go unnoticed and unsupported within the broader football community. Many of them - particularly those in the early stages of their journey - officiate without recognition, consistent support or encouragement, even though their contribution is fundamental to the success of every match.

This document outlines a range of simple yet meaningful initiatives your club can adopt to help foster a more inclusive and supportive football environment for match officials. By implementing these initiatives, your club can play a key role in improving referee retention, promoting respect across all levels of the game, and nurturing the next generation of confident, capable referees who feel valued as part of the football community.

MATCH DAY REFEREE SUPPORT PERSON

Sometimes, all a young referee needs is a familiar, reassuring presence to help them feel confident and supported. In youth football, junior referees are often highly capable of managing players on the field and facilitating an enjoyable game for everyone involved. However, where they can feel most vulnerable is when faced with poor behaviour from adult spectators or coaches on the sidelines.

At the grassroots level, the majority of matches are officiated by referees aged between **13 and 17 years old**. For someone so young, confronting adults - especially in moments of conflict - is an unfamiliar and intimidating experience. This is where the role of a **Match Day Referee Support Person** becomes invaluable. Having a calm, trusted adult present who is prepared to step in when needed can make a world of difference to a young referee's confidence and safety.

Importantly, the Match Day Referee Support Person's role isn't limited to stepping in during moments of conflict. They can also serve as a **mentor and source of encouragement**, offering positive feedback, reassurance, or simply being a friendly face on the sideline. Sometimes, a referee just needs someone to check in with - someone who listens, guides, and reminds them that they're not alone.

A Match Day Referee Support Person can take many forms, such as:

MATCH DAY REFEREE SUPPORT PERSON



- A club member with past refereeing experience
- An experienced football person who understands the flow and emotions of the game
- A senior or mentor referee willing to provide quiet guidance and advice
- A parent or guardian trained to support, not intervene
- A ground official



MATCH DAY REFEREE SUPPORT PERSON



TASKS INVOLVED:



- Wear a clearly identifiable vest
- Ensure clear signage is put up of any referee areas for the day (referee changeroom if applicable, referee only zones around the grounds)
- Move spectators away from referee only areas or to find a relevant Club Representative to do this
- Actively greet officials when they arrive at the venue and introduce themselves as a point of contact during the day
- Check in with officials periodically between games throughout the day
- Offer water
- Approach coaches and speak to them during the match if they are showing dissent or abuse towards match officials or to find a relevant Club Representative to do this
- Approach spectators and speak to them during the match if they are showing dissent or abuse towards match officials or to find a relevant Club Representative to do this
- Accompany referees to their car after matches if needed to ensure they are safe post game (particularly in cases where matches finish when it's dark, and the carpark is a walk from the field)

Above all, this person should embody the values of **respect, empathy, and leadership** - helping to create a match day environment where young referees feel safe, supported, and valued.

By introducing Match Day Referee Support Persons across grassroots football, clubs can play a key role in developing confident young referees and promoting a positive culture of respect across the game.

SHARING MEDIA ON REFEREES

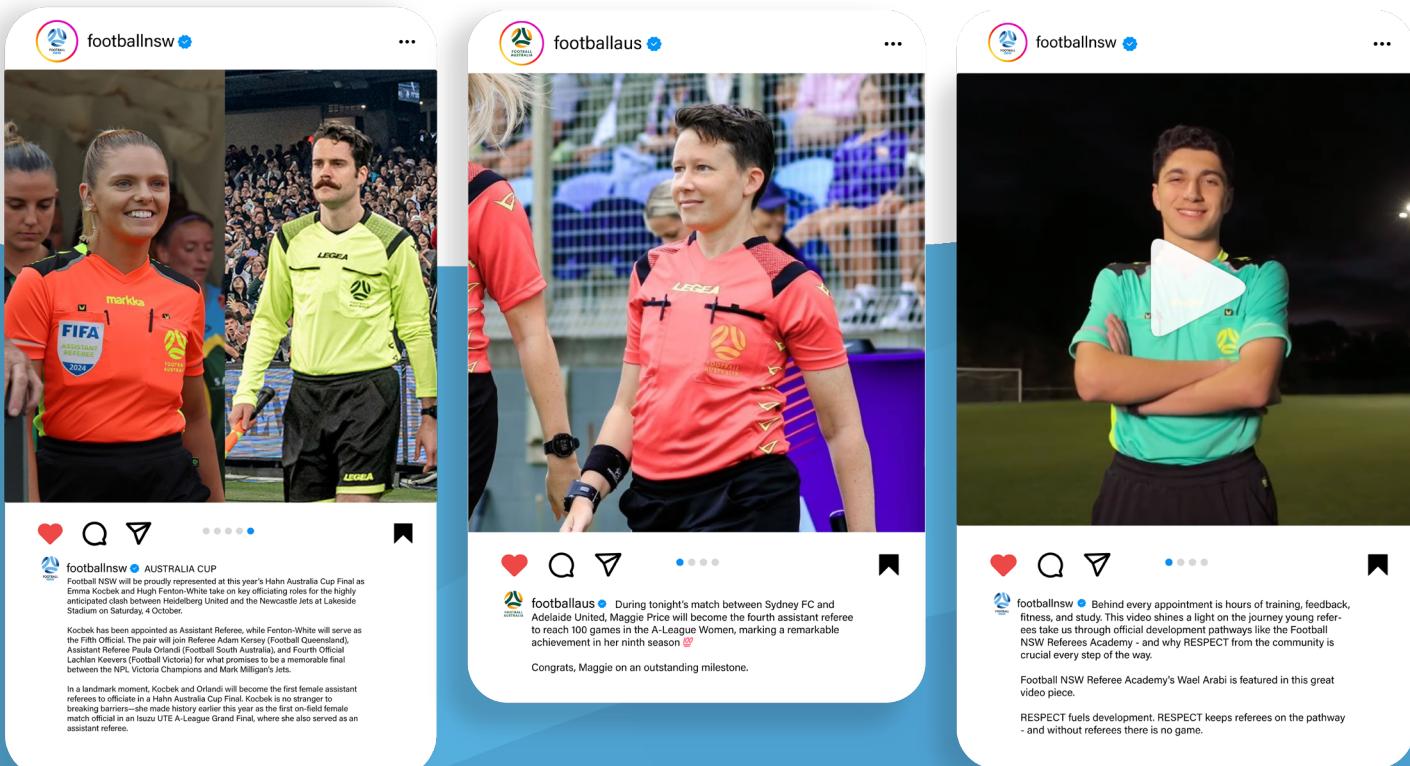


In the same way players and their pathways are celebrated, referee milestones and achievements can also be shared and promoted. This can make active officials feel valued and appreciated, whilst also highlighting the pathway and opportunities for others if they join the referee community.

By showcasing the journeys of referees - both emerging and established - we can highlight the opportunities and progression available within officiating. This not only inspires the next generation of referees but also helps players, parents, and coaches recognise that football offers multiple avenues to reach the highest levels of the game. For many young players, understanding that refereeing can be a rewarding alternative pathway to the top can open doors they may not have previously considered.

Our goal is to build a football community who are knowledgeable and understanding. By sharing accessible training content, match analysis, and practical tools, we aim to help the wider football community develop their knowledge, and a deeper understanding of the game. Certified educational content can be found and shared from the following sources:

- **The Laws of the Game and materials** via IFAB (theifab.com)
- **Football Rules** (Simplified Laws of the Game) via footballrules.com
- **Football New South Wales** via footballnsw.com.au/referees and socials
- **Football Australia** via footballaustralia.com.au
- **Local referee branch**



UPSKILLING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEAM MARSHALS

Team Marshals play a vital role in ensuring a safe, respectful, and enjoyable environment within community sport. Their primary responsibility is to maintain peace and order between spectators of their respective team, while supporting Ground Officials and referees in managing any issues that arise on the sidelines. When situations escalate, Marshals act as the first point of contact to help address inappropriate behaviour from individual spectators or groups before further intervention is required.

Clubs and associations can take proactive steps to educate and empower their Team Marshals. Offering short online training modules and encouraging attendance at local pre-season seminars provides Marshals with valuable guidance on conflict management, communication, and their specific duties. This training helps them understand not only what their role entails, but why it is so important for the culture and safety of the sport.

Associations can also promote accountability and structure by requiring Team Marshals to be officially registered in PlayFootball under a designated role. This allows clubs to maintain clear records and even implement team rosters to ensure fair and consistent coverage across the season.

For clubs seeking a simpler approach, smaller initiatives can still make a big difference. Providing Marshals with printed reminder cards outlining their responsibilities reinforces expectations, builds confidence, and ensures they feel supported in carrying out their role.

Visibility is also essential. Ensuring Marshals are easily identifiable - typically through wearing their orange jackets - allows referees, Ground Officials, and other volunteers to quickly locate and communicate with them if an issue arises.



By taking the appointment and development of Team Marshals seriously, clubs and associations can significantly strengthen the match-day environment, reduce incidents of poor behaviour, and ensure community sport remains enjoyable for everyone involved.

Football NSW encourages clubs to provide education to their Marshalls such as conflict management or deescalation training.

UPSKILLING OPPORTUNITIES FOR TEAM MARSHALS



eLearning material available here: <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/elearning-scenarios>



Play by the Rules provides free eLearning courses that will help you learn about inclusive, safe, and fair sport. Our courses are for anyone involved in sport and recreation, including coaches, administrators, officials, players, parents, and spectators.

The courses have been developed in consultation with sports experts who work in these areas. They are short, user-friendly and feature the latest interactive technology, including case studies, practical scenarios, and a quiz. The modules may be done in part, or all at once.



COMPLIMENTARY WATER & SHADED AREAS

Across community football, referees often dedicate long hours to ensure every match can go ahead. It's not uncommon for referees to officiate between two and five games a day over the weekend - sometimes including full 90-minute senior matches, and occasionally without the support of assistant referees. This workload can be physically and mentally demanding, especially in hot or challenging conditions.

Something as simple as offering complimentary water can make a real difference. Small gestures like this help referees **feel valued** and **appreciated** by the clubs and teams they serve. It's a **low-cost, high-impact** way to show respect and recognition for the vital role they play.

While not every venue has the luxury of a dedicated referees' room - and most Associations don't require one - a simple, thoughtful alternative can make a big difference. Setting up a small marquee or shaded area gives referees a place to store their belongings, rest between games, and escape the sun at half-time. Ideally, this area should be positioned close to the field for convenience but located in a neutral section of the ground to maintain professionalism and impartiality.

For clubs planning future upgrades or new facilities, considering referees in the design process is a great step forward. Including a designated referees' room in development plans shows genuine commitment to referee welfare, professionalism, and the overall match-day experience.

When referees feel supported and respected, they are more likely to return, perform at their best, and contribute positively to the spirit of the game. Supporting referees doesn't require major investment - just small, consistent efforts that go a long way in building a stronger football community for everyone.



**COMPLIMENTARY
WATER IS A SMALL
GESTURE OF
APPRECIATION. IT'S
LOW COST, HIGH
IMPACT**



**SHADE AREAS
GIVES REFEREES
STORAGE SPACE,
REST AND ESCAPE
FROM THE HEAT**



INCLUSIVE CLUB VALUES: WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT

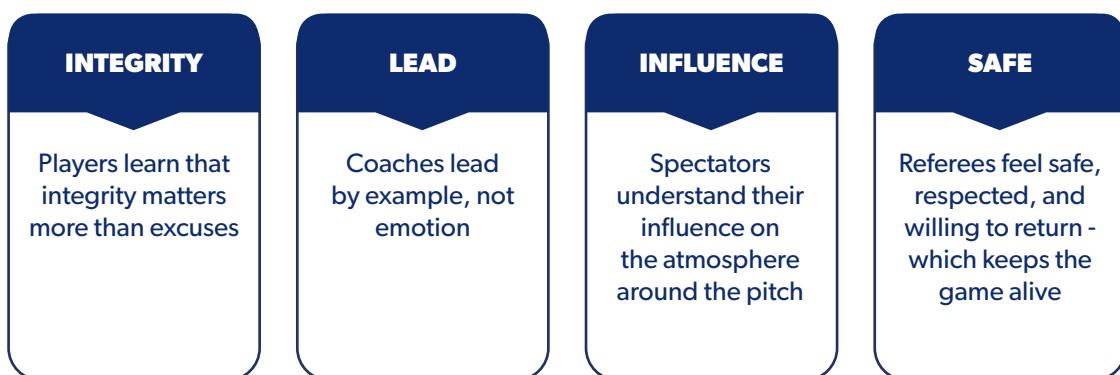
Football isn't just about skill, results, or reputation - it's about how people are treated. Club values exist to make sure that every player, coach, referee, volunteer, and supporter experiences the game in a safe, respectful, and fair environment.

Values are the difference between a club that just runs games and a club that represents something.

They define identity, how they act when things don't go a certain way, and what a club stand for when the whistle blows. Without clear, enforced values, culture rots from the inside.

Without values, disrespect toward referees becomes normal. Arguments replace accountability. Volunteers burn out. Young officials quit before they grow. And the reputation of the club - and the image of the game takes a hit.

WHEN A CLUB COMMITS TO LIVING ITS VALUES, NOT JUST WRITING THEM:



Holding people to these values isn't about punishment - it's about **protecting the standard** expected from anyone wearing a club's colours.

Club values only matter when they're actively practiced. For them to shape real culture, they must be taught, acted upon by, and reinforced every week. Embedding values into daily operations creates consistency, accountability, and respect across players, coaches, referees, and supporters.



INCLUSIVE CLUB VALUES: WHY THEY ARE IMPORTANT



EDUCATE EARLY:

Introduce and explain club values during registration, preseason briefings, and inductions so all members understand expectations



REINFORCE IMPORTANCE:

Make the club values a theme among club members, and a point of focus alongside football education



KEEP THEM VISIBLE:

Display values in changerooms, newsletters, and social media. Use short, consistent reminders



MODEL THE BEHAVIOUR

Coaches, captains, and managers must demonstrate the standards they expect, especially under pressure



RECOGNISE AND REWARD:

Highlight teams or individuals who show fairness and respect - public recognition reinforces good behaviour



ACT ON BREACHES:

Address disrespect or referee abuse quickly and consistently under the code of conduct. Swift action proves the values are taken seriously

THIS COMBINATION OF EDUCATION, VISIBILITY, RECOGNITION, AND ACCOUNTABILITY IS WHAT TURNS WRITTEN VALUES INTO REAL CLUB CULTURE.

ROPED OFF REFEREE AREA: SPECTATOR FREE

Many clubs have the ability to section off a space, or even a whole side of a field for referees. This is common for clubs who have a small space between fields, or a cricket green between fields. This space can be utilized for referees, ensuring only jacketed officials and referees are in that area, with signs actively warning spectators against entering.

Establishing a designated referee-only area within a club can lead to a range of positive outcomes that benefit both referees and the wider game-day environment. By clearly defining a safe and professional space for officials, clubs can improve operations, foster respect, and create a more supportive atmosphere for everyone involved.



separating referees from spectators, players, and coaches.



reinforces the importance of referees within the club environment.



by giving referees a consistent space to prepare and rest.



by creating a safe, welcoming, and respectful atmosphere.

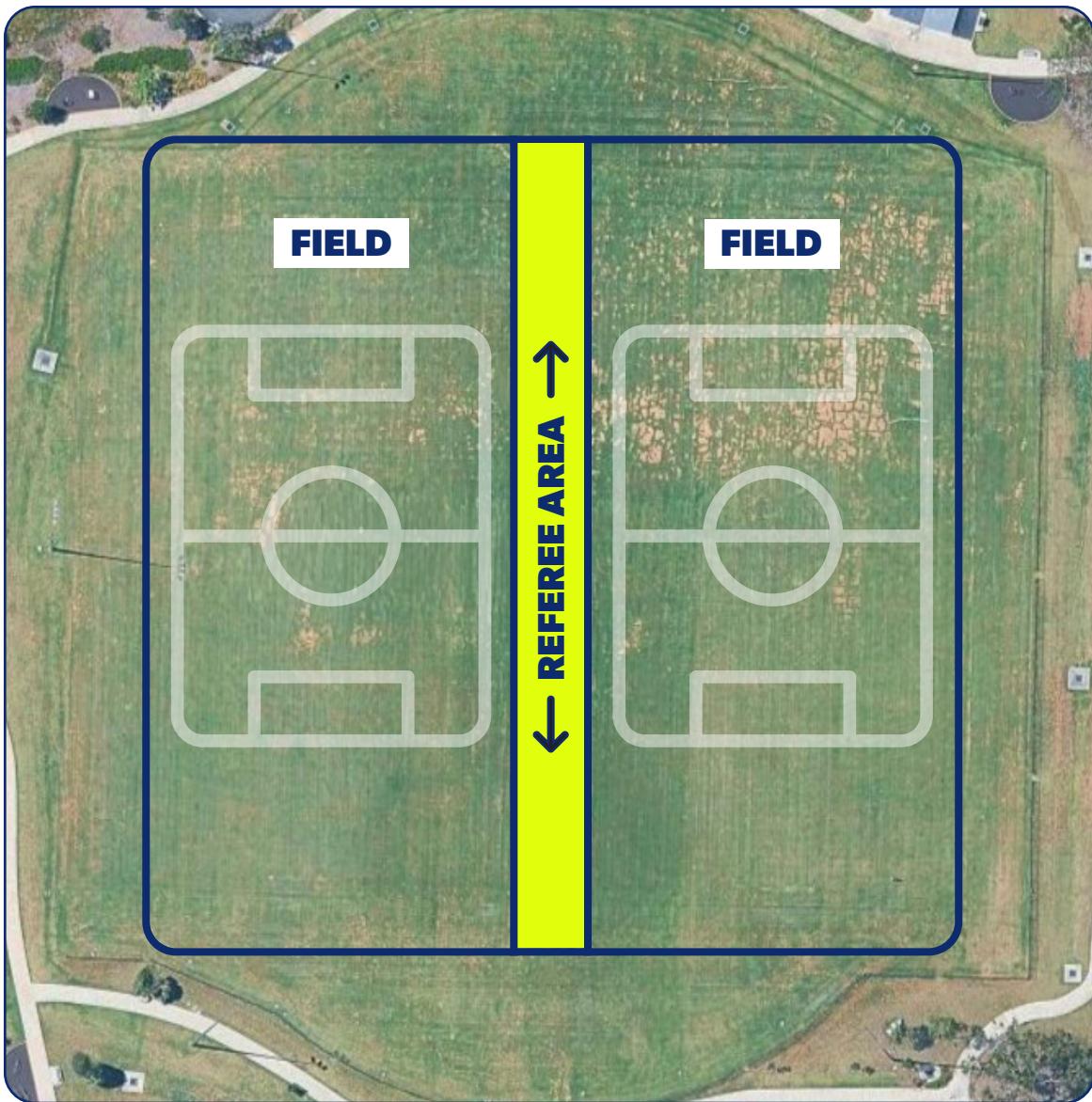


as an organised and referee-friendly environment.



reducing the likelihood of conflicts or inappropriate behaviour.

ROPED OFF REFEREE AREA: SPECTATOR FREE



MATERIALS REQUIRED:



4 pigtail posts



Length of rope



"Officials Only" signage

CLUB REFEREE MENTOR PROGRAM

Referee Mentor Programs provide clubs with a proactive way to support refereeing while strengthening the wider football ecosystem. Under this model, clubs actively recruit players or community members interested in refereeing and subsidise the cost of their entry level referee course. This removes a financial barrier, positions refereeing as a valued role within the club, and encourages players to sign up to the course alongside their teammates. By investing early, clubs demonstrate a clear commitment to respect, development, and the long-term sustainability of the game.

By working closely with the local referee branch on this kind of program, club sponsored referees can be appointed specifically to appropriate matches at their Club's home ground or surrounding grounds, around their own playing commitments.

Club Referee Mentor Programs benefit everyone involved. Clubs help foster respect for officials and contribute directly to referee retention, while referee branches gain new, supported officials entering the pathway with strong foundations. For the referees themselves, the program provides clarity, confidence, and a genuine pathway into branch football and beyond. Over time, these initiatives strengthen relationships between clubs and referee branches and create a healthier, more sustainable refereeing culture across the game.





CASE STUDY

BEROWRA FC

Cost	Berowra Football Club covers the cost of the first year referee course and kit costs (cost will vary between associations but can range between \$50 - \$200 per participant)
Participants	3 - 5 a season
Criteria	Aged 13-18 and currently playing for the club
Recruitment	An expression of interest is published via the Club socials. No other selection criteria or minimum requirements imposed on the scholars.
Administration	Berowra Football Club appoints a referee liaison officer (RLO) who communicates directly with the referee branch and also acts as a mentor on the day to the club referees. This is a volunteer role on the committee, usually held as a standalone role.

Berowra FC has discovered that junior club members who engage with multiple roles within a club whether that be coaching, refereeing and playing, tend to stay in the game through their junior years and transition into seniors. In 2024, one of Berowra FC's junior referee scholars was named by the Northern Suburbs Football Referees Association as Assistant Referee of the Year, and is now a part of the FNSW Referee Development Panel (RDP).





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