

# RAP Policy Update FAQ

## General Questions

### 1. What is the Referee Abuse Prevention Policy (531-9)?

The *Referee Abuse Prevention Policy 531-9* is a U.S. Soccer policy aimed at preventing misconduct toward referees in youth and amateur matches. It defines referee abuse, assault, outlines penalties, and establishes procedures for hearings and appeals.

### 2. Who does this policy apply to?

This policy applies to all participants involved in U.S. Soccer-affiliated amateur and youth matches, including players, coaches, managers, and club officials. It does not apply to participants in Professional League activities, who are covered under *U.S. Soccer Policy 202-2*. Nor does it apply to spectators; however, Member Organizations may apply this policy to a spectator.

### 4. Who is protected under this policy?

- All currently registered USSF Referees
- A non-licensed referee, if serving in an emergency capacity under USSF policy
- Person's serving in a referee support role at the venue ie Mentors, Referee Coaches, Assignor etc

### 3. When is a referee protected under this policy?

Referees are protected from the moment they arrive at the match venue (including the parking area) until they leave. The policy also extends to a referee's family, household members, and guests attending the match as well.

## Definitions and Violations

### 4. How has the policy changed?

Referee Abuse has been more readily defined and classified into 4 levels of Non Physical and 3 levels of Physical Abuse, with added clarification on the definitions and penalties for each level.

### 5. What is referee abuse vs referee assault?

Referee Abuse and Assault are both considered misconduct toward an official. Abuse is defined as extreme, deliberate, and non-contact behavior that causes a Referee or Protected Party significant harm. Assault is any deliberate physical action against a Referee or Protected Party.

### 6. What are the different levels of referee abuse and assault?

- Non Physical
  1. Insulting, Belittling, or Taunting Behavior
    - Actions that **undermine** a referee's authority.
  2. Harassment, Intimidation, Retaliation, or Abusive Language
    - Includes **threats**, intimidation, or retaliation that do not involve physical harm.
  3. Aggressive or Violent Threats (Including Cyberbullying and Doxing)
    - Using **derogatory language**, online harassment, or threats of violence.
  4. **Offensive or Discriminatory Acts**
    - **Hate speech** or discriminatory remarks based on race, gender, national origin, etc.
- Physical
  1. Minor or Slight Deliberate Touching
    - Examples: Light contact, such as a tap, minor shove, or slight push.
  2. Pushing, Grabbing, Slapping, or Property Damage
    - Examples: Grabbing, pulling, pinching, lightly slapping, or using an object in a **non-striking manner** (e.g., throwing but not hitting).
  3. **Striking, Hitting, Kicking, or Severe Physical Attack**
    - Examples: Punching, elbowing, kicking, spitting, choking, tackling, or **using an object or body part (e.g., head, knee, forearm) to strike**.

## Jurisdiction and Hearings

### **7. Who handles allegations of referee assault, abuse, or mistreatment?**

The *Member Organization* affiliated with the match has original jurisdiction over any alleged assault, abuse, or mistreatment. If they fail to hold a hearing within 30 days, jurisdiction transfers to the *U.S. Soccer Appeals Committee*.

### **8. What are the consequences of failing to hold a hearing?**

If a Member Organization does not hold a hearing within the required 30 days, the accused person remains suspended, and the case moves to the *U.S. Soccer Appeals Committee*.

### **9. Will a referee be informed of the outcome of any hearings?**

While the member organizations must investigate all submissions, they are not obligated to inform the referee of the outcome of any investigation or disciplinary actions.

### **10. How should I handle abuse from Spectators?**

If a referee experiences abuse from spectators or non participants, they should suspend the match and have a coach or club official deal with the removal of the spectator. If this does not happen in a timely or safe manner then the referee should abandon the match and leave. Referees do not have the authority to directly dismiss spectators, but can direct a team/club official to do so. The RAP policy does not specifically cover Spectators; however, this does not preclude a Member Organization from applying greater or equal penalties to them. As such, if there is abuse it should be included in the match report with as much detail as possible.

# Penalties and Suspensions

## 11. What are the penalties for referee misconduct?

In accordance with the updated policy, member organizations will follow the below matrix when guiding any consequences. Of note, Member Organizations will have some discretion in implementing a warning system for first offences, leniency with minor-age offenders, and multipliers for offenses against minor-age officials.

### **NON-PHYSICAL OFFENSES** of gross misconduct, abuse, and / or assault

<b>NON-PHYSICAL *</b>	<b>MIN. GAMES</b>	<b>TIME</b>
<b>Insulting, Belittling, Insinuating or Taunting Behavior Undermining Referee Authority</b>	2	
<b>Harassment, Intimidation, Retaliation, Abusive, or Threatening (Non Physical) Language</b>	4	
<b>Aggression, Attacking, Derogatory, Cyberbullying, Doxing or Threatening (Physical / Violence) Language</b>	6	6 - 24 Months
<b>Offensive or Discriminatory Act</b>	10	12 - 24 Months

### **PHYSICAL OFFENSES** of gross misconduct, abuse, and / or assault

<b>PHYSICAL *</b>	<b>MIN. GAMES</b>	<b>TIME</b>
<b>Minor or Slight Deliberate Touching</b>	3	1 - 6 Months
<b>Pushing, Grabbing, Pulling, Squeezing, Pinching, Lightly Slapping, Use of Object in Non Striking Manner, or Physical Property Damage</b>	10	6 - 24 Months
<b>Hitting, Punching, Elbowing, Kicking, Biting, Spiting, Choking, Tackling, Throwing or Use of Object or Any Part of Body (Forearm, Knee, Head) in a Striking Manner</b>		12 Months - Lifetime

(\* **Disclaimer:** These are only a few examples of abuse – other actions or statements may also fall into this category.

## Reporting and Appeals

### 12. How do I as an Arkansas Referee report?

Within 48 hours of the incident the Referee and if applicable any Referee Support person (ie Referee Coach, Mentor, Assignor etc) should submit a written report, using the format of the USSF Match Report and Supplemental Report, to the State Referee Administrator. For Arkansas, that is Matthew Peterson [matthew.peterson@arkansassoccer.org](mailto:matthew.peterson@arkansassoccer.org). This report should be sent to the SRA regardless if the incident happened in state or out of state, so long as the competition was sanctioned under USSF. In addition, a referee should submit the report to the designee of the Member Organization, Competition Authority, Tournament Chair, and Assignor as appropriate. In addition to a referee report, audio and video recordings if available may be submitted along with the report if available and unaltered.

### 13. What information should a report include?

- **Match details** (teams, age group, score, date)
- **A detailed description** of the incident
- **Relevant evidence** (e.g., video clips, witness statements)

### 14. Can penalties be appealed?

Yes. The accused person may appeal the decision to the *U.S. Soccer Appeals Committee* within 14 days under *Federation Bylaw 704*.

## Practical Implementation and Best Practices

### **15. As a referee, if I experience referee abuse what should my actions be?**

For any instances of referee abuse the sanction should be an ejection (red card).

### **16. The updated policy references any form of touching as referee abuse, should I eject anyone who touches me?**

The focus of this is unwanted physical contact, specifically any contact that may make you as an official feel uncomfortable or unsafe. It is up to you as a referee, to use your best judgement on if this threshold is crossed and defer to your judgment on if a situation can be handled with a verbal warning to respect personal space before escalating to an ejection.

### **17. With this being a new policy, what communication has been given to clubs, coaches, and players?**

All participants under USSF have been informed of the new policy updates; that being said it is good practice with this being the first season for you to incorporate a reminder of the expectations of this policy in your pregame communication you have with coaches, captains, and players.

### **18. I am a referee watching a match before my game is about to begin and I witness referee abuse on the match?**

In most instances we are relying upon the officials on the assigned match to report referee abuse against them. However, we recognize that we have a diverse referee population and many minor-age officials who may not feel empowered to deal with referee abuse during a match or report it. We encourage you to inform your assignor and the SRC if you witness an incident and submit your own report of what you saw to the State Referee Administrator.

### **19. I am a coach and a referee, if I am coaching a match and see referee abuse what should I do?**

We should all be good partners in ensuring the safety of officials. If you are coaching a match and witness referee abuse you should follow the procedures of reporting an incident as prescribed by your Member Organization and Competition in the role you are currently serving in.

## Additional Considerations

### **20. Is this document final?**

No. As with any new policy, implementation over the season will see unexpected challenges and as these are addressed the information in this document will be updated to stay current.

### **21. Where can I find more details on this policy?**

For more information from USSF, visit <https://www.ussoccer.com/rap>

