



Pre-Game Meeting and Only the Captain Procedure



Pre-Game Meeting - Coaches, Captains and Referees

20 minutes* prior to the scheduled kick off, Referees, Coaches, Captains, and Team Managers will meet between the technical areas at midfield. This meeting will serve as an introduction of all parties to each other as well as an opportunity to review league specific rules and give rosters to the referees prior to check in.

- Introductions
- Roster Exchange
 - Update Referee on any number changes or potential roster issues
- League Rules Confirmation - subs, timing, concussion subs, etc.
- Jersey Color Confirmation

*20 minutes is the desired pre-match meeting time. It is understood that referees may be finishing a scheduled game prior to your match and will conduct this meeting as close to 20 minutes prior as their schedule allows.

Objectives of the Pre-Game Meeting

- Open lines of communication and build relationships between referees, coaches, and captains prior to the match.
- Ensure League Specific Rules are enforced. Referees often work in multiple leagues with different league rules from one day or one game to the next. While it is the referee's responsibility to know the league rules, it is understood that referees and coaches work together to ensure correct application of league rules during the match.
- Explanation of Only The Captain Procedure
- Review of major Law changes
- Build trust and cooperation to aid in the enjoyment of soccer for all participants.

Why is this meeting necessary in addition to the "only the captain" procedure?

This will help referees have a positive first interaction with coaches. For young referees this can take away some of the fear or timidity of interacting with an adult coach. The interaction will humanize the coach to the referee and the referee to the coach.

The number of leagues that North Carolina Clubs participate in grows every year and referees work multiple leagues in a weekend. Oftentimes the major frustration of a coach is that a sub rule, drop back rule, temporary sub or other league specific rule is not followed, not an issue with a decision. This will aid in preventing some of those frustrations.

Suggested Implementation

NCYSA is in full support of the implementation of this effort. We suggest that this be an NCSRA adopted standard for referees in addition to NCYSA. This will encourage use on all Youth matches in North Carolina.



Only the Captain



Referees will implement the Only The Captain signal and procedure in matches as outlined by US Soccer in the **“Only the Captain - Implementation and Use”** presentation provided below. In addition to communicating with the captain, referees will communicate with coaches as outlined for age groups up to U14 and U15 - U19.

North Carolina specific adjustments to the Only the Captain procedure:

U8 - U14 Age Groups**

Based on the age, experience, and comfort level of the referee and the age of the team captain, the referee will have three options when enacting the Only the Captain procedure for U14 and younger games:

1. Enact the Only the Captain procedure used for U15 and older games.
2. Bring the requested team's captain over to their coach and give the explanation of the decision or necessary behavior change to the coach and the captain at the same time.

When communicating with the coach it is best practice to have the assistant referee (AR1) with the referee while communicating with the coaches. This communication must only be with the head coach and may be done either at mid field or below the technical area in line with the Penalty Area, if space is needed away from the team bench. If the referee feels that the best option for match control is to communicate ONLY with the captain and allow the captain to communicate with their coach they may do so.

3. Signal that the Only the Captain procedure is enacted and that communication with the referee by anyone other than the captain must stop.

U15 - U19 Age Groups**

Referees will give the explanation to the requested team's captain on the field. The referee may give the coach an explanation to the coach if they feel it will aid in match control. The referee will give time for the captain to explain the decision or necessary behavior change to their coach and / or teammates. When communicating with the coach **it is best practice to have the assistant referee (AR1) with the referee while communicating with the coaches.**

Why Communicate with Coaches on U14 and Below and Not U15 and Above?

Youth players are learning how to communicate with referees and adults as they develop their interpersonal skills in addition to soccer skills. To ensure accurate explanations from the referee and aid in the responsible development of younger captains the explanation with the coach present is necessary. Players in the U15 age group and up have had two years of experience on 11v11 matches and should have a degree of extra responsibility to communicate to their coach and teammates as they develop leadership skills of a captain.

Additionally, In youth soccer the problem with dissent or abuse of referees often comes from frustration with communication on the coaches side and a need for regained match control on the referee's side. Having this extra communication will aid in both aspects by communicating with coaches and giving a few moments for the game to calm down before it restarts.



Only the Captain



Coaches Expectations

During the Only The Captain talk only the head coach should be involved. Head coaches must not use this time as an opportunity to yell at, dissent towards or otherwise remonstrate with the referee. This is a time to gain an explanation of why the referee has made a critical decision. Exhibiting behavior in these moments that shows dissent or a lack of respect towards the referee will be included in the decision making process for post match discipline.

****Is this procedure to be used for Spectator Issues?**

Yes. In cases of spectator misconduct or issues referees must talk with the coach to explain what behavior must stop or if a spectator must be removed. Referees are not to engage with spectators.

Does this replace Yellow or Red Cards for Dissent or other actions?

No. Referees may use this procedure after giving out misconduct. This procedure is meant to improve cooperation between Captains and the Referee, and coaches when necessary, after critical decisions or moments when emotions have risen in the match. Referees must still manage dissent and does not replace misconduct outlined in The Laws of The Game.

Effective August 25, 2025



Only the Captain

Implementation and Use

Revision 2

U.S. REFEREEING WAY

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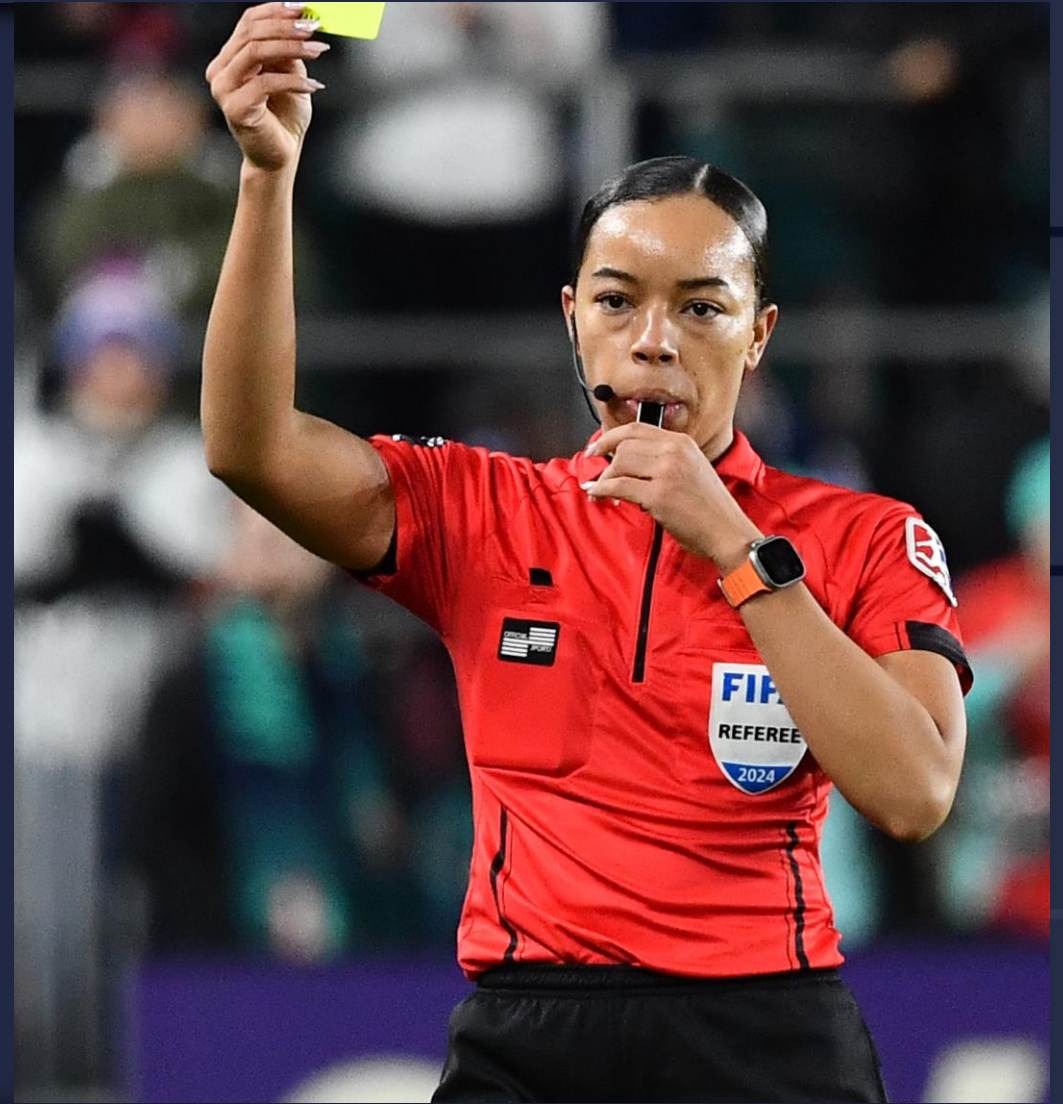
Protecting the Image of the Game

Why Only the Captain ?

- Improve cooperation between the captain and the referee
 - Structured conversation and exchange
 - Uninterrupted line of dialogue
 - Provides opportunity for the referee to give information to the captain on key decisions
- Prevention + Increase of respect between the teams and the referee
 - Prevents escalation
 - Reduces the need for further disciplinary action by the referee = reduced yellow cards for dissent
- Reduce swarming and surrounding a match official
- Provides “responsibilities” to the captain
 - Represent the team
 - Communicate to the team
- *Optional use in all competitions starting July 1, 2025*

Dissent

- When a yellow card will be issued:
 - Dissent by word or action
 - Player runs form a distance to the match official
 - Confronting in an aggressive manner
 - Excessive waving of arm(s) at a match official including:
 - Disrespectful actions/gestures
 - Throwing/kicking ball away in protest
 - When 3 or more players confront a match official = potential for at least 1 player to be issued a yellow card
- A second yellow card can be expected if dissents continues after the first yellow card is issued





When?

- Key or critical decision resulting in exaggerated player reaction
- Players surround, swarm, or mob the referee
- One-on-one dialogue with the captain will help manage or lower the temperature of the game

How Will it Work?

- Referees are still encouraged to communicate with **ALL PLAYERS**
- Referees will be expected to issue yellow cards to any player (including the captain) that they feel exhibit clear dissent
- After key decisions, *Only the Captain* should approach the referee in a respectful manner
- If multiple players approach the referee, after a key decision, the referee will blow the whistle, step back, and gesture that *Only the Captain* is permitted to communicate with the referee



How Will it Work?

- Once the referee signals, all other players must remain 4-meters from the referee
- The captain has a degree of responsibility for encouraging their teammates to respect the “captain-only zone”
 - The captain must be professional, in-control and respectful
 - Must “listen”
- A player who enters the “captain-only zone,” after it has been established by the referee, will be issued a yellow card for dissent
- If more than one player from a team enters the captain-only zone, at least one player must be issued a yellow card – this will usually be the first unauthorized player to enter the zone or the player whose approach is most aggressive



How Will it Work?

Delaying the Restart

- After the interaction with the captain, the referee may decide to delay the restart of play to give the captain time to explain the decision or require their proper conduct



How Will it Work?

The Captain

- **Goalkeeper as captain**
 - If a club designates their goalkeeper as the captain, they will be required to designate a “vice-captain” and provide visual confirmation of this designation by issuing them an arm-band for the match. In cases where either the captain or vice-captain are substituted, a new player should be designated during the substitution process and wear the respective arm-band.
- **Field Player as Captain**
 - Prior to the game, each team will designate a “vice captain” – they are designated but not required to wear an armband
 - Vice captains will participate in the Only the Captain process when the first captain is off-the-field injured and when the first captain is issued a red card preceding the creation of the *captains only zone*



The *Only the Captain* Gesture / Signal

- Blow the whistle
- Raise both arms above the head and cross them at the wrists
- Uncross the arms and move them in front of the body with palms open in a forward pushing motion
 - This indicates that the players must not approach and remain 4-meters away



Summary

- Tool to protect the image of the game
- Allows the captain and the referee to have uninterrupted conversation/exchange
- Selective tool – for key, emotional decisions (involving multiple players) in which communication will act as a tool to bring the temperature down
- Use it to help you and help the game





THANK YOU

Credit: Professional Referee Organization