

International Referee Development Program

Referee Confidence Guide



Foreword

Confidence is a very valuable trait for a referee. Typically, confident referees are questioned less by players and coaches and have a tighter hold on the match that they officiate. Being a confident referee is not something that is inherently teachable in and of itself. Instead, building confidence and being confident requires a number of traits as a foundation, all of which begin off the field. Not only can confidence be very difficult to establish, it can also be difficult to maintain. This guide will discuss the traits necessary for being confident, as well as offer suggestions for implementing and cultivating those traits in a way that can build a referee's confidence through off-field preparation, mentality, and motivation.

Off-Field Preparation

There are many things that can be done in advance of actually officiating a match that can, and will, boost a referee's confidence when they step on the field. The first and most important is to have a close, working knowledge of the current rules, exceptions, clarifications, and policy changes that will be relevant. Passing the tests that the IRDP offers are a bare minimum of what should be known in order to be an effective referee.

Anyone who wishes to become a better referee must be willing to continue to educate themselves on the rules, especially as the year goes by. One way to do this is to simply read and re-read the rules on a regular basis. Depending on what works best for the individual, the IRDP encourages everyone who has the potential to referee at a tournament or game to read the rules in the days leading up to or the night before the competition.

Another way to continue the education process is to utilize other referees' knowledge and interpretations. Anything can work, from asking questions to making flash cards to creating a mini-test that can be used as a refresher. If the answers are accurate and have a basis in the rules or other official documents, then this can be a simple, stress-free way of brushing up on rules knowledge.

Watching game footage of yourself and others is also a potential preparation procedure. While it's impossible to capture everything that occurs in a match on video, it's also true that no single referee can see everything on the field at once. Watching footage of other referees, especially ones that are well known within the IRDP as being good examples, (referees can contact their local IRDP representative for more information), can offer insight on what to look for when officiating a match. There are also things to be learned from less impressive refereeing displays. When watching video footage of a referee who is not having a particularly good game, ask yourself:

- "What could they have done better?"
- "What would I do in that situation?"
- "Do I share any shortcomings with this referee?"

Evaluation and self-evaluation is very important in the continued growth and preparation of a referee. The IRDP also provides the ability for referees to be evaluated by teams that they have officiated, fans, and other referees on the IRDP website. These reviews will only be visible to the referee who has been reviewed and to the IRDP staff members. When a referee's review is edited and approved by an IRDP member, (so that the final review that the referee sees is purely constructive,) they will receive an email notifying them of the new review. Referees are expected to check these reviews and to take the suggestions provided to heart in future matches. The IRDP also encourages referees who have earned IRDP certification to remind players and coaches immediately after a game about the review ability, as well as later via email, Facebook, etc.

Mentality

Remain Positive

Before ever stepping on the pitch in any capacity, a referee should take a moment to clear their mind and focus their thoughts on the game ahead. Beyond what occurs on the pitch that is under a referee's jurisdiction, nothing else should matter. This is a time to banish all other thoughts and concerns from their mind. If the referee has already officiated a match or matches, whether those were officiated poorly should be the furthest things from a referee's mind.

Having a positive mind set going into, during, and after any game can boost the confidence of any referee. Before refereeing a game, assuming that there is time, referees should take a moment and attempt to focus and steady themselves. Games that are high stakes, such the final match to determine the champion of a tournament, or games that have or will have high physicality levels can be stressful and cause nervousness to set in. While nerves are a part of refereeing, they cannot be allowed to rule a referee. Referees need to trust themselves and their abilities. A referee should never dwell on things that they have done wrong in the past, whether it happened 5 seconds ago or 5 days ago, but when they have down time, they should look at those shortcomings and think of ways to correct them. When mentally preparing for a match, referees should take some time to think about what they have done well and moments of strength that they can rely on. Simply put, the certification itself can be one of these instances.

Stay Tough

Additionally, having a mental toughness allow a referee to make difficult calls in the heat of the moment. Situations which require a red card in a very tight match that could swing either way are very typically devastating, but the referee who issued the card, assuming it is the right call, cannot and should not feel personally responsible for doing their job, regardless of the outcome of the game. Mental toughness also prevents referees from being swayed by the complaints or influence of players and coaches. The only people that a referee needs to listen to when discussing a call are the

other referees who are assisting a game. Role-playing with another referee is a great way to build a mental toughness. The IRDP suggests that this role-playing be done away from the eyes and ears of players or coaches that the referee will officiate, as it can seem unprofessional out of context.

It is very common for coaches and captains to have questions for a referee mid-match. In the role-playing scenario, one referee should play the part of the player, coach, or captain that has a concern and the other should act as a referee who has made a call that angered the player. The referee in the role-playing scenario should be open and receptive to the concerns of the player, coach or captain, but also should not be forced into making a decision. If the argument or concern is coming regarding a specific player or type of play on the other team, assure the coach or captain with a phrase like, "I'll keep an eye out for that." If the argument is regarding a call that they disagreed with, a phrase like, "That's not how I saw the play," followed by a brief explanation will usually address the concern.

Combatting Hostility

Unfortunately, referees will get a hostile player, coach, or captain from time to time and it is important to understand how to deal with them. Role-playing scenarios can also be adjusted for this. Simply have the player, coach, or captain in the scenario act more on edge, increase their volume, and make them harder to appease. If at anytime during the scenario, the referee says something that is a poor choice in a real life confrontation, pause the scenario and discuss a better way to address what was said. Referees need to show a strong, yet relaxed body posture, speaking at a normal level, and, when possible, looking at the other person in the eyes. If a referee cannot placate the hostile individual through reasoning and a brief discussion, there are rules in place to show a yellow card if necessary.

Motivation

Remaining motivated as a referee is vital to overall quality. While the IRDP accepts that no referee is infallible, referees must always try to improve each and every game. Those who have a desire and motivation to continue growing as a referee will almost always surpass those who lack that desire. This motivation, coupled with the mentality and off-field preparation will build the confidence of a referee in countless ways.

Earlier, we discussed not dwelling on bad or missed calls. This remains true, however, a motivated referee will aim to minimize those. When a referee has time to sit down and reflect on the calls they've made throughout the day, the IRDP encourages them to fill out a field test as a form of self evaluation. While doing this, they should begin to ask themselves things like:

- "What did I do poorly today?"
- "What can I do to prevent that in the future?"
- "Which rules do I need to brush up on?"
- "What did I do well today?"
- "What was my best call?"
- "What can I do to repeat that in the future?"

The IRDP suggests to start with the negatives and work towards the positives. This is so that the referee ends their evaluation on a positive note. Every referee should enjoy what they do because it helps the motivation come easier.

In general, reflection can motivate a referee to do better in the future as well as recognize and address any potential failings or shortcomings. After this period of self evaluation and when the referee's officiating duties have ended for the day, weekend, or week, the IRDP encourages referees to take some time to wind down and think about things not related to the stresses of officiating.

Conclusion

The traits mentioned above are important, but not necessarily the only traits for being a confident referee. Whatever traits a referee finds to be important in building their confidence are valuable, regardless of whether or not they are found within this guide. However, referees need to ensure that they are not becoming arrogant or over-confident when acting as a representative of the IRDP. Always remember, regardless of a referee's certification level, test scores, and resume, there is never a time when talking down to a coach, captain, player, or fellow referee is acceptable. If there are problems with any of those individuals, a referee should only offer constructive advice and never say anything that is rude or disrespectful. Referees are encouraged to contact an IRDP representative if they see consistent problems with one of their compatriots.

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