



Saskatchewan Soccer Association

Referee Development Best Practices

Table of Contents

1.0 Overview

- 1.1 Objectives**
- 1.2 The Member Organization**
- 1.3 Key Areas**

2.0 Referee Recruitment

- 2.1 General**
- 2.2 The Recruiter**
- 2.3 Advertising**
- 2.4 Recruiting Program**
- 2.5 Entry Level Referee Clinics**

3.0 Referee Retention

- 3.1 Retention Basics**
- 3.2 Support & Communication**
- 3.3 Access to Training**
- 3.4 Assigning**
- 3.5 Specific Challenges**

4.0 Referee Development

- 4.1 Development Basics**
- 4.2 Personnel**
- 4.3 Accountability & Transparency**
- 4.4 Education Sessions**
- 4.5 SERP (Saskatchewan Elite Referee Program) & Candidates Program**
- 4.6 Fitness – Raising the Standard**

1. OVERVIEW

1.1 Objectives

Saskatchewan Soccer Association (SSA) considers referee development a fundamental pillar in developing soccer in Saskatchewan. SSA has identified long term objectives aligned to the SSA Strategic Plan and has compiled a number of recommendations and Best Practices for local Member Organizations.

Together we can accomplish the following objectives:

- Create a unified coordinated vertical system for referee development
- Increase the Volume of certified referees
- Reduce Barriers to Referee Development in SK
- Drive referee support across SK
- Support the development of the SK top referees
- Create a respectful game-time environment for ALL

Metrics

Vertical unified Referee System:

- **Alignment to Best Practices and SSA Referee Pathway**
- **Identify a Referee Development Coordinator/Manager – Technical Director responsibility**
- **Approve a Referee Development Budget**
- **Creation of a Development Plan (Paul Varian Workshop for Writing a Technical Plan at AGM)**

1.2 The Member Organization

Member Organizations (MOs) serve an integral role for the referee initiatives in Saskatchewan. At the Grassroots and Community levels, Member Organizations are the primary agent for growing and supporting referee development in their communities. SSA recognizes this vital role and aims to work in partnership with Member Organizations to serve the game of soccer and the development of soccer referees.

1.3 Key Areas

There are many important factors that contribute to a successful referee program. SSA has identified the following three areas of focus:

- 1) **Referee Recruitment**
- 2) **Referee Retention**

3) Referee Development

By focusing on these areas, Member Organizations will meet their current needs while laying the groundwork to meet long term objectives and develop Saskatchewan referees. The document explores these 3 areas of focus and includes guidelines, recommendations, and metrics to measure success.

2. REFEREE RECRUITMENT

2.1 General:

- Recruiting is about taking in genuine interest in the person and their potential future success.
- Perception of your Member Organization program is key for attracting new recruits: If the prospective official hears good things and sees good things (as a player/coach), they are more likely to want to be involved.
- Benefits of being an official must be clearly communicated

Benefits to being an official:

In addition to competitive pay, being a referee provides many benefits, such as:

- Enjoy meeting challenges with each game.
- Develop your understanding and appreciation for the game.
- Meet new people and find new networks.
- Earn respect; feel good about yourself and your role.
- Healthy lifestyle choice

2.2 The Recruiter:

- Recruiters knowledgeable about the game, about the structure of the organization and about being a referee.
- It is helpful for recruiters to be of similar age and/or of the same gender as the potential candidates; to have current/prior referee experience or be a trusted figure in the community.
- Be familiar with the common excuses (of not becoming a referee), be encouraging and offer insights into training/support initiatives.
- Common Excuses
- The best recruiters are personable and enthusiastic ambassadors for the referee role.

2.3 Advertising - Where/when to recruit:

Recruitment is an ongoing and continuous process; recruitment strategies could include a focused approach:

- During registration periods, or in person at registrations
- During games/practices
- In public advertisements – at schools, websites, job boards, etc.
- Social media posts

2.4 Recruiting programs:

- Establish the potential for a recruitment and mentorship program.
- Make a proposal to the Member Organization Board of Directors to secure support for recruitment/retention programming & referee management.
- **-MO/BOD must understand the value of referee programs vs. the inherent cost**
- Establish constant communication and avenues of support.
- Explore opportunities with various local organizations focusing on inclusion, diversity, new Canadians.
- Promote opportunities for further training and mentorship.

Recruiting Female officials:

Female referees bring unique traits and skills to the game of soccer. It is strongly suggested to host Female Only Referee Clinics alone or in collaboration with other Member Organizations. There are benefits to the organization, to the players, and to the referee herself when joining your referee team:

- Great role models for young players, especially female players.
- Good communication and teamwork
- Female referees bring diverse skillsets and knowledge.
- Better representation for females enhances soccer.

2.5 Entry Level Referee Clinics

Recommendation: Member Organizations be prepared host referee clinics year-round (at a minimum in advance of each season).

To increase accessibility and reduce barriers, the Online Theory Module is available year-round, with access from any Member Organization registration site. This will produce On-Line Theory “graduates” constantly, fueling the pool of referees ready for the In Person Classroom/Practical session.

To become a referee and officiate SSA sanctioned games in Saskatchewan, participants must take the appropriate SSA Entry Level Referee Course:

Entry Level Referee Clinic (8 hours online, 7 hours classroom, practical) – The standard clinic for refereeing soccer in Saskatchewan. The course covers the IFAB Laws of the Game online, in the classroom and on the field. The graduating participants will be able to officiate as referees and assistant referees at the Grassroots and Community levels. Registrants must be 14+ years of age and pass an exam based on the course material.

Small-Sided Referee Clinic (6 hours online, 2 hours classroom, practical) – This clinic is generally geared towards younger officials who seek accreditation to referee small-sided youth games. This clinic is catered specifically to the small-sided version of the game. The clinic follows CSA material, has specific rules related to the Small Sided game (most Free Kicks are indirect) and does not cover the Laws of the

Game in the same depth as the standard Entry Level Referee Clinic (For example, Law 11 – Offside is completely omitted from the Small-Sided Clinic). For this reason, the Small-Sided Clinic does not qualify referees to Referee or Assistant Referee in the standard 11 aside format of the game. Individuals who have completed the Small-Sided Clinic must still attend the Entry Level Referee Clinic if they wish to officiate in addition to the small-sided format.

Entry Level FUTSAL Referee Clinic (8 hours online, 4 hours classroom, practical) – The standard clinic for refereeing futsal in Saskatchewan. The course covers the Futsal Laws of the Game online, in the classroom and on the field. The graduating participants will be able to officiate at the Grassroots and Community levels. Registrants must be 14+ years of age and pass an exam based on the course material.

Information on booking referee clinics can be found on the Saskatchewan Soccer Association [website](#).

METRICS:

Increase # of Certified Referees:

- **Recruitment plan for referees – tied into Referee development plan.**
- **# Referee Courses per Year (Entry Level or Small Sided)**
- **Retention Rates for previous 3 years (2017,2018, 2019 etc)**
- **Replacement Rates for previous 3 years (2017, 2018, 2019 etc)**
- **% Referee Population in specific age brackets (12-13, 14-18, 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 66-75+)**

Increase # of Certified Female Referees:

- **Recruitment plan for female referees – tied into Referee Development Plan.**
- **Planning Female Only referee clinics**
- **Retention Rates for previous 3 years (2017, 2018, 2019)**
- **Replacement Rates for previous 3 years (2017, 2018, 2019)**
- **% of Referee Population in specific age brackets (12-13, 14-18, 18-25, 26-35, 36-45, 46-55, 56-65, 66-75+)**

3. Referee Retention

3.1 Retention Basics:

There are a number of important factors that contribute to the retention of officials, including:

- Support & Communication
- Access to training & development initiatives
- Fair and proper assigning of games
- Encouragement/Mentorship; receiving appreciation and recognition
- Addressing specific challenges
- Retention is more natural when participation is fun and rewarding.
- Visibility of role models (particularly for female referees)

Member Organization should align and develop initiatives that promote keeping referees registered and active.

3.2 Support & Communication

Recommendation: Member Organizations have a designated Referee Liaison / Referee Committee and provide an avenue of communication for referees with the league administrators.

Retaining referees increases with access to support and/or information. Open avenues of communication also help to improve the relationship between officials and the organizations they serve. Outside regular communications regarding referee matters, Member Organizations are encouraged to adopt mechanisms of receiving feedback through surveys / Team Conduct forms (see Appendix F **Team Evaluation and Fair Play Report Form**), requesting Team Fair Play Scores and/or by designating liaisons or other specific avenues of reporting within the organization.

***Referee Team Evaluation & Fair Play Report Form** – In an effort to increase communication between referees and their member organizations, SSA has developed a sample Team Evaluation Form (Appendix F). Much like how 'referee evaluations allow league members to provide feedback on referees, the goal of this form is to provide referees with an avenue to provide feedback about fair play & own match experiences. In addition to surveys, this can lead to valuable information for the Member Organization. The long-term goal is to foster positive working relationships between referees, players, and Member Organizations.*

3.3 Access to Training/Mentorship

Recommendation: Member Organizations connect with referees and promote development opportunities within the organization.

The development initiatives mentioned (4.0 Referee Development) should be promoted so that referees understand what is available to them. When referees have access to training and development initiatives, they will improve, have a longer and more enjoyable career, increase the quality of their performance in games, and improve the perception of your Member Organization program for current and future participants. Just like players do, the referees will have the opportunity to pursue their dreams.

3.4 Assigning

Recommendation: Member Organizations should develop/implement a system for administering their referees' qualifications/skill levels. Referees should be assigned matches based on their qualifications. This ensures that assigning is done fairly, and that officials are given matches suitable to their development level.

The SSA has developed a set of recommended systems to manage and administer referee qualifications. These can be found in [Appendix A](#).

These systems for managing referee qualifications are to be administered at the Member Organization level and can be altered/adapted/customized to meet the needs of the organization.

Based on referee performances, Member Organizations may choose to reassess referee's qualifications and make changes as appropriate. Administration of the qualifications system is ongoing and continuous, closely related to the local mentorship program and the referee performances. Member Organizations must inform the referee of qualification changes and have a Dispute resolution process as needed.

Example: The system presented in Appendix A-1 is based on a 10-level grading system. SSA Member Organizations do have specific needs that sometime change over the course of time – therefore these recommendations should be seen as adaptable guidelines and not as a strict rule.

Standardized officiating levels will assist with games being assigned reasonably and fairly. Fair and appropriate game assigning is one of the factors identified for increasing retention of registered referees.

3.5 Specific Challenges:

There are several specific challenges to overcome when retaining referees.

1) Referee Image

- There are several traits for the ideal referee. Unfortunately, many coaches, parents, and members of the public have their own preconceived image of what a good referee looks like.
- This perception/image can change participants' behavior towards referees when referee mistakes happen; this does affect future recruitment & retention; potential referees may avoid involvement because they do not fit their own idea of a good referee, and existing good referees are questioned or not given the appropriate respect simply because they do not meet the public's expectation of what a referee should be like.

2) Referee Abuse

- Abuse takes a variety of forms: physical, verbal, emotional.
- Emotional abuse encompasses any form of verbal abuse (or perception of)
- Verbal abuse is still common under the excuse that "the referee was wrong", "the player was emotional" or "this is an emotional game."
- When referees are abused, the game is neither fun nor rewarding for them.
- Administrators and Discipline Committees must be empowered to act in support of this effort by adopting the Make it Official campaign and a Zero Tolerance for Abuse approach.
- Member Organizations must adhere and strive to implement a Zero Tolerance for Abuse policy

Metrics Referee Retention

Drive Referee Support:

- # Mentors active, # of Mentors used (how many mentorships per mentor)
- Fair assignment process in line with qualifications
- # Referees receiving Mentorship reports (how many mentorship reports per referee & frequency of)
- # Mentors/Assessors active, # of Mentors/Assessors used (how many mentorship reports per mentor)
- # Referees that are 'Mentors/Assessors in Training'
- # Informal Education Sessions delivered
- # Total Participants for all Education Sessions, # of Participants per Education Session
- % Referees that are progressing through MO Specific Sub-Designations/ Assigning Matrix

Create a Positive Game Time Environment:

- Coordinated seasonal communication regarding expectations of conduct towards Officials (all MO)
- Make it Official alignment.
- Zero Tolerance for Abuse!
- Increased penalties in discipline (alignment with [SSA Section 5 - Discipline](#))
- Coordinated and supporting messages consistently communicated.
- # Games abandoned due to referee abuse
- # Coaches/Players suspended due to referee abuse or harassment
- Support and promote SSA Referee Surveys to help understand and track abuse as well as developing longitudinal data.

4.0 REFEREE DEVELOPMENT

4.1 Development Basics

Recommendation: Development begins as soon as a referee has taken the course and is an ongoing and continuous process. It is highly recommended that all Member Organizations have a Referee Development Plan included in the Technical Director Plan.

Process:

- When a referee completes the entry level clinic they will be awarded the entry level qualification as determined by the local Member Organization.
- The Member Organizations will be responsible to assign the new referees matches and assign mentors as deemed required (suggested minimum 2 mentorships per newly graduated referee).
- Member Organizations develop and manage mentorship programs as per their specific needs at the organization/association level, supported by the appropriate budget.
- Referee qualifications are updated constantly, in sync with the mentorship process, so that referees can officiate games suitable to their development level (See Appendix A).

Metrics:

- **Member Organizations have a Referee Development Plan.**
- **The Referee Development Plan is aligned to the Provincial Strategic Plan**

4.2 Personnel

Recommendation: In collaboration with SSA, MOs identify individuals to lead the referee development initiative. These individuals will have a variety of responsibilities geared towards development & administration of the mentorship plan and for bringing about the recommended practices within this document. For example:

- Main point of contact with SSA for referee development
- In charge of identification and recruitment of referees
- If required, assist the MO with the internal administration of the annual referee registration
- Administer fitness testing for the area and submitting fitness test results,
- Organize Refresher Courses
- Develop plans/processes for mentoring, managing qualifications, fitness testing, etc.
- Identify referees for provincial competitions and SSA Programs (Candidates Program)
- Review mentorship reports and makes recommendations to the local Referee Committee for updates to the referee qualifications
- **Plan Education Sessions**

Having passionate individuals responsible for carrying out the mentorship plan ensures that goals are being worked towards, and the expertise of these individuals will grow over time.

Metrics:

- **Identify a Referee Development Coordinator**

- **Host mentor development clinics**
- **Number of mentors**
- **Identify individuals with potential to move towards becoming an SSA Instructor/ Assessor**

4.3 Accountability & Transparency:

Recommendation: Member Organizations should adopt SSA guidelines for mentorship, which are presented via standardized mentorship/assessment report forms.

Standardized mentorship and assessment forms, based on Canada Soccer standards, have been attached in [Appendix B](#).

- Local Member Organizations may use the appropriate SSA Referee Mentorship Report Form ([Appendix B](#)) or one of the additional Full/Short Assessment Forms
- Any referee in the promotion pathway will be assessed as a referee or assistant referee through the Canada Soccer Assessment forms

Standardized mentorship forms promote transparency for the mentorship process as well as accountability for the referees, who are able to clearly identify areas of strength and improvement.

Metrics:

- **Each Youth/District local referee must have a minimum of 1 mentorship per season.**
- **New referees a minimum of 2 mentorships within the first 4 games**
- **# of Referees receiving Mentorship reports (how many mentorship reports per referee & frequency of)**
- **# of Mentors/Assessors active, # of Mentors/Assessors used (how many mentorship reports per mentor)**
- **# of Referees that are 'Mentors/Assessors in Training'**

4.4 Education Sessions

Member Organizations must recognize the value of a good referee program by investing time/resources in educational programming for the referees, and/or the other individuals (assignors, mentors, liaisons, etc.) involved in Referee Development.

SSA suggests that educational sessions be held at a minimum 2-6 times/year for larger centers, and twice/year for smaller centers. Additional education material creation or education sessions hosting are highly encouraged, as time and resources allow.

As a member of SSA, MOs may have access to specific educational tools or be eligible for grants to assist with costs of hosting educational sessions.

Metrics:

- **# Informal Education Sessions delivered**

- **# Total Participants for all Education Sessions, # of Participants per Education Session**
- **# Instructors/Local Education Session Facilitators**

4.5 Referee Promotion pathway:

Aspiring referees who consistently exceed expectations may be identified by SSA, or recommended by members of their MO/Referee liaison for selection to SSA development programs and competitions. These officials may continue to improve their skill level with the goal of being appointed to provincial, national, and international matches.

More information regarding the promotion pathway can be found in the [SSA Referee Pathway to Success](#)

Referees successfully involved in the promotion pathway are expected to be fully qualified locally; however, at times exceptions may be required (Example: youth regional referees who may not be ready to referee high level adult games.)

Referees that are not within the promotion pathway may still request assessments. SSA will review the request for assessment and assign a qualified assessor if appropriate. The referee will bear all costs associated with the assessment, including their own meals, travel, and accommodation costs.

SSA is responsible for managing the qualifications of all referees at the Regional & Provincial level, usually via the promotion pathway. A Regional referee is graded as an 8 in Appendix A while Provincial Referees are graded 9-10. SSA will appoint all referees to SSA Competitions and may request support to the local Member Organizations for development opportunities should local referees are interested in advancement.

Metrics

Support access to SSA Referee Development Programs and SSA Competitions (SK Top Referees):

- **Recommend referees for the Candidate Programs.**
- **Develop referees for inclusion in SSA Competitions.**
- **# Of referees involved in Provincial Competitions**
- **# Of Regional Referees**
- **# Of Provincial Referees**
- **# Of National / FIFA Referees**
- **% Of Referees Male/Female**
- **% Of SERP Referees**
- **% Of Referees in SERP that are Male/Female**
- **% Of Candidate Program Referees**
- **% Of Referees in Candidates that are Male/Female**
- **# Of Instructors/Assessors/Mentors/Education Session Facilitators**

4.6 Fitness - Bridge to Performance

Recommendation: Member Organizations continue to implement fitness testing as required by Canada Soccer standards.

Canada Soccer expects that **all** referees in the promotion scheme and those nominated for National Competitions will have successfully completed a fitness test to the minimum standard as outlined in the chart below on an at least an annual basis (High Intensity Test). Those tests will be administered by SSA.

Interested referees that are not in the promotion scheme should not be denied and may be offered the opportunity to take a fitness test at the discretion of each Member Organization.

Member Organizations are encouraged to organize fitness tests for all or interested local referees. To accommodate large groups, it is recommended that MOs use the Beep Test.

If a referee passes a fitness test ran by a governing association (SSA or Canada Soccer) they do not need to run the local MO fitness test.

Referees seeking promotion will be expected to meet the fitness test standard for the promotion level.

Fitness Test Standards – [Canada Soccer](#)

Category	High Intensity Test		Cooper Test			Beep Test
	Sprints 6 x 40 m	Interval Run (4000 m)	50m sprint	200m sprint	12' run	Shuttles
Men						
Provincial	6.4 sec	15/20 sec	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Regional	6.6 sec	17/22 sec	8.5 sec	37 sec	2200 m	8
District	N/A	N/A	10.5 sec	50 sec	1700 m	6
Women						
Provincial	6.6 sec	17/22 sec	N/A	N/A	N/A	
Regional	6.8 sec	17/24 sec	10.5 sec	46 sec	2100 m	7
District	N/A	N/A	12 sec	60 sec	1600 m	6

More information regarding fitness test policies and procedures can be obtained by contacting Saskatchewan Soccer.

Instructions on how to organize each of the tests are outlined in [Appendix C-E](#).