

NISL Members,

We have received an email from an NISL Assignor recently that we feel raises an important issue and suggests a positive solution to the problem.

The attached email details the Assignor's direct experience involving the current referee shortage in our community. He makes a very important point that we feel deserves to be shared and emphasized:

**The current referee shortage is not just due to a lack of certified officials. Many officials are simply refusing to referee games because of the overwhelmingly negative experience they are having due to hostile and aggressive coaches/parents.**

As a solution the Assignor suggests instituting “**Silent Weekends**” in which parents and coaches are instructed that yelling or screaming during games will not be permitted and the parents' reactions during the game will be limited to cheering or clapping in the event of a goal. He suggests this for the following reasons:

- This will prevent dissent from the sidelines and other hostility to our community's officials, many of which are young and should not be discouraged from officiating.
- It will allow players the quiet they need to concentrate and focus on the game without distractions from the sidelines.
- It will keep parents from coaching their children from the sidelines and inserting themselves into the game in an attempt to override referee decisions and official coach instruction.

The NISL whole-heartedly endorses these actions and requests that all clubs begin implementing these behavioral guidelines within their organizations to help the NISL maintain Sportsmanship and Respect in Youth Soccer Development.

Now that the league is using Bonzi/Game Officials technology, the referees will now have the ability to start instituting “**Fair Play Points**” at NISL games. The referees will be able to rate the quality of the game and the behavior of each team's coaching staff and their parents.

Clubs who are supportive and display excellent Sportsmanship will be rewarded.

Clubs who are unsupportive and do not respect the game will be penalized.

Please take the time to read the Assignor's message below as we feel it offers an important perspective that will help improve our soccer community.

- Peter Richardson, NISL President

---

“Hello Club Reps-

This is rather time sensitive and important to read. I hope you will take this to heart.

I know you're all aware that the referee situation in Illinois is not great. It has been extremely hard to get referees into my group, get them to take matches and keep them taking matches. I have about 260 in my assigning group/site that have taken matches from me in 2016. As of Thursday morning about 80 of them had not taken a match this season and only 100 were signed up to take a match this weekend. My wife and I have been calling and trying to get an understanding of why referees may not be taking matches and what we can do to have them take more matches. I sent out a lengthy email to all 260 referees pleading/begging for some of them to pick up some matches this weekend and beyond. As I stated in the attached, if only 60 of the 160 were to pick up one match as an AR I would have almost all of my matches covered. There are some excuses given, but one huge reason that referees are not coming back is the environment. I have heard from several that they can't stand the screaming from the sideline coming from the parents and coaches. **I would like to suggest to you that we start having silent weekends of soccer starting THIS WEEKEND.** The reasons for this are not just to keep referees coming back, but also to help the players focus on their game, keep them improving and also wanting to play next weekend.

I had a very enlightening and encouraging experience last weekend that I would like to share to hopefully demonstrate why silent soccer would not just be better for the referees. I worked a match for another assignor in Naperville two weeks ago. The match was very lopsided and the team (Club X) that was defeated had some "fans" on the side that were a bit unruly. The match was loud. Parents and coaches were complaining about calls and the parents were not very constructive in their "coaching" from their side. The ARs were new to the game, but 14 and 16 years old and with my help were able to manage. Ironically, I was to assign the referees to the same two teams the very next weekend. I had a very difficult time getting all three referees. I got lucky and got a center referee very late because of a cancellation and then had two 12 year old girls step up to AR. One would need to be 15 minutes late so I decided to go to the match to step in and AR until she arrived. The night before I decided that before the match started I would speak to all of the "fans". I thought long and hard about my experiences as a coach, referee and parent about what I would say. I was VERY concerned about how it may go over with the parents. I think what I said was fairly concise and to the point. I asked all of the parents to come over to the half-way line and they were reluctant with one parent jokingly stating, "We're already getting a lecture?" I told them I'd prefer it to be a discussion, but because we were within 3 minutes of the match it was going to be a lecture. I got them all in very close so I wouldn't need to shout. It went about like this:

Some of you may recognize me from centering your match last weekend. Most, if not all, of you from club X likely don't know that I'm your referee assignor. It was very difficult to get all 3 referees for this match and the two ARs are the same age as your children playing today. Your children are at the age that they could be referees and they could all go to a clinic this winter to referee starting next spring. You as parents could do the same. Because the two ARs on this match are very new to being referees (one her second weekend) I need to make sure that they have a good experience and want to come back. I can't have you questioning any of the referees'

calls or yelling at any of the three referees. I'm going to tell the center referee that if you do either of these he will issue you a yellow card. If it happens again he will ask you to leave. I would also like to suggest that we have a silent match today. When my son (now 14) was in rec soccer in kindergarten through 2nd grade the organization he played through often had "silent Saturdays" on which none of the parents or coaches were aloud to speak. They could only clap and then could cheer if a goal was scored. I suggest that we do the same today for this match for multiple reasons. One, it will keep anyone from yelling at or questioning the referees. Two, it will allow the players to concentrate and think about what they are doing on the field. Three, it will keep the parents from coaching the players, which is really the coach's job. My son came off of the field on one of those silent days, commenting on how amazing it was that he could concentrate. If you ask your players after the match how they felt I guarantee you they will have enjoyed the experience.

I then passed out my business cards for anyone interested in getting more information about being a referee because we do need more referees. The match started and it felt like you could have heard a pin drop. The entire match was this way other than the coaches coaching, the players talking and when the players scored the cheering commenced. This match was completely different than the first. The match was very close all the way up until the final quarter if I recall correctly. Club X ended up on the short end, but they played so much better than the first week. During the match about 20 minutes in I was sitting behind 4 subs from club W waiting to sub in. I heard one state, "This is the quietest match I've ever played in." I had him go over and repeat that to his coach. The coach knew what was going on, but the players didn't realize. However, they did take notice and found it more enjoyable. As I stated, I was very concerned how this may be taken by the parents. I was quite happy when after the match as I was leaving two different parents from club X came over to me independently and said that they really appreciated what I had done and said. They found some of the other parents over the top all season and didn't know how to speak up. One had coached youth hockey for years and struggled with the same things. Best of all, all three referees walked away smiling, happy and wanting to come back again.

I need your help as club reps in more ways than one. I need for your club to help make the environment at the field one that will keep referees coming back. If we need to have silent soccer then I think this should be an easy thing to make happen. Your coaches should inform the visiting coach and both should inform their parents before the match starts of the plans to stay silent. Another way I could use your help is to reach out to the referees you know of in your area (whether club players or not) and ask them to step up and take a match or two for your club each weekend. I can only do so much until winter when we can push to bring in new referees from your clubs, but until then the boat is starting to sink and we need to bail some water fast!"