

Dealing with Referee Abuse

Spotting it

Abuse is anything that undermines your credibility. Quiet or quick emotional outbursts of frustration are normal, but when a player, coach or spectators make comments that are:

- Public
- Personal
- Provocative
- Persistent

They must be dealt with right away.

- If a comment is sexist, racist or discriminatory – you should immediately send off/dismiss the offender

Deal with it the first time and every time

Letting “little ones” go will reset the “Richter scale”, and the next one will be even bigger. Keep the little ones in check.

- If the abuse is minor – e.g. a mid-volume “come on ref, call it both ways”—wait until the next natural stoppage. (We have all heard this before, and let it go, but this statement is accusing you of bias and cannot be allowed).
- If you hear a more corrosive statement – a loud “You suck ref!” or “Are you blind?”—lean toward stopping play immediately (if not an obvious goal scoring opportunity).

How to deal with it

- always be:
 - Calm
 - Respectful
 - Courteous
 - Firm
- explain the problem
- outline the repercussions
- make it clear, make it their decision
- always check for understanding (and wait for affirmation)
- always say “thank you”
- do not add more emotion to the situation

Coach behavior (say this to coaches)

This is virtually all you should ever have to say to coaches (memorize these words).

[Ask] “Coach, your behavior right now is irresponsible. Please stop. Do you understand?” Wait for some affirmation, and then follow with “Thank you”.

[Tell] “Coach, your behavior right now is irresponsible. If it continues, you will be dismissed from this match. Do you understand?” Wait for some affirmation, and then follow with “Thank you”.

[Dismiss] “Coach, you need to leave the area. The game will not restart until you have left”. (No good will come from more discussion than this. If they do not have an assistant coach, terminate the match at this time. If they will not leave in a reasonable time—e.g. 3 minutes—terminate the match).

Don't ever explain what they are doing that is irresponsible. If you tell them, they may stop doing THAT specific thing, but then do something else. If they ask "What am I doing?" or want to have any other dialog, just keep repeating the original [ask] or [tell] statement, and wait for affirmation. The game may be delayed for an uncomfortable amount of time, but it will be more uncomfortable for them. They are there to play, and that is your leverage. Do not restart the game until you get affirmation.

Spectator behavior (say this to coaches)

Never deal with spectators yourself – that is the coach's responsibility.

[Ask] "Coach, your spectator's behavior right now is irresponsible. It needs to stop. The game will not restart until it is dealt with." Wait for it to be dealt with, and then follow with "Thank you".

[Tell] "Coach, your spectator's behavior right now is irresponsible. If it continues, they will be dismissed from this match. The game will not restart until it is dealt with." Wait for it to be dealt with, and then follow with "Thank you."

[Dismiss] "Coach, the gentlemen in the blue shirt has been behaving irresponsibly and needs to leave the field. The game will not restart until he is gone." Or, if you do not know who the offender is, "Coach, two [insert number] of your parents have been behaving irresponsibly, I'm not certain who they are, but the game will not restart until at least two [number] people leave the field". Wait for it to be dealt with, and then follow with "Thank you."

If the coach says "They are not my spectators", you may respond with "I'm sorry, we cannot restart this game until that problem is addressed." And then wait as long as it takes. If the coach doesn't want to deal with it, a player may end up taking care of it, and that's fine.

If the coach is the losing coach, any delay will waste their game time, and they will be motivated to deal with bad behavior right away.

If the coach is the winning coach, they may be inclined to let the clock drain. Consider mentioning to the losing coach that you will add time (if you are able to add time) to put their mind at ease, and then say to the winning coach "Ok, coach, now YOU are behaving irresponsibly. If you do not deal with it, you will be dismissed from the match."

AR interactions

It is the Referee's responsibility to deal with sideline issues, so the clearest way to deal with issues as an AR is to call the Referee over, explain what happened, and ask them to deal with it. The Referee may decide to give the AR more discretion in dealing with coach behavior directly, especially if the AR is more senior, and the Referee is more junior (ideally this would have been discussed in the pregame). Here are some words that an AR may use (hopefully discussed in the pregame).

[Ask] "Coach, you may have a valid argument but your behavior right now is irresponsible. Please stop. Can you do that?" You may not have time to wait for affirmation, so you may end the interaction there.

[Tell] "Coach, your behavior right now is irresponsible. If it continues, I will call the referee over and ask her to dismiss you." It may be difficult to complete this conversation if play moves on.

If the AR calls the Referee over to deal with abuse, the Referee must deal with it. If the Referee will not deal with it after two requests by the AR, then the AR should set their flag down and leave.