

# Gil Weber's Pregame Discussion Points For Referees Working Games At Youth Recreational Level (All Ages) Or Competitive U-14 And Below

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These abbreviated pregame discussion points are intended for referees working youth recreational games of all ages, and competitive games U-14 and below. They are an age and level-specific edit of the full version of my pregame instructions first published in 1999 and regularly updated since then.

At the professional level two-hour pregame discussions are not out of the ordinary as the crew goes over the tactics typically employed by each team and the propensities of individual players. Obviously the youth games most of us work (or mentor) are nowhere near that level. And most referees doing youth games typically don't have the luxury of more than a few minutes before games for a conversation with their assistant referees, particularly at tournaments where one might be lucky to have ten minutes between games.

Thus choosing what to say and how to say it in a limited amount of time is critical. This is particularly important when you're working with very young or inexperienced ARs who still may be trying to get comfortable switching the flag from hand to hand. So **asking** combined with **telling** can be very effective. And that may mean first finding out who the ARs are, how long they've been officiating, and what they can do so you'll then know what to ask of them.

Don't expect to get in all of what you read here, especially in the time crunch between games. Too much too quickly may be information overload for young and/or inexperienced ARs. Instead, consider the points I've listed here as those I would hope to cover **if I had the time** when working with assistant referees at this level of competition. Be sure to take into consideration any special protocols of the league or association, for example AYSO or where the teams may be on opposite sides of the field and both ARs then will have bench, substitution, and spectator responsibilities and/or issues.

And then create your own pre-game discussion **addressing those points that meet the needs of the game level you're working that day, the experience levels of your assistant referees, and the time you have available**. Note: using a highlighter to mark the most important points will help you focus on what to discuss. You may find it helpful to write those key points on small cards for review with the ARs.

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### 1) Getting Off To A Good Start

Let's check-in the teams together. But if duties must be split then if you're on your own first collect a coach or manager's pass for each of the team personnel who will be on the bench. Then as you collect each player's pass check for shinguards and jewelry, and be certain that the jersey numbers on the team roster sheet are the same as the numbers on the shirts. Also verify that the goalkeeper's shirt color is clearly different from the field players. Please write in any changes on the team roster.

### 2) Having A Clear View Along The Touchline

It's essential that AR1 has a clear view all the way down the touchline to the far corner flag. So if a coach constantly stands at the line blocking the view **politely** ask the coach to step back at least three feet and remain close to the bench (that is, not wandering down the touchline toward the corner flag). If the coach repeatedly blocks your view or wanders far from the bench and you've tried without success then call me over to deal with it.

If you're the AR on the spectator you'll need a similar clear view and freedom to run. If spectators crowd the line making it hard to run or see past midfield to the far corner flag **politely** ask the spectators to move back at least five feet. If that request doesn't work call me over and I'll deal with the spectators.

### 3) Watch Each Other

Each time play is stopped we all should make eye contact. If necessary you can call me over with a hand signal or with a raised flag to let me know of any concerns important enough to hold the restart. **Please be prepared to give the team(s), jersey numbers, and specifics.** And let's have that conversation away from the benches and away from the spectators.

And at each stoppage it's also important that both ARs look across the field to the other AR. Make eye contact. If a flag is up behind my back, for example for a substitution, mirror it by making the same signal.

### 4) Offside

Offside is your most important responsibility. I will depend on you to be properly positioned to judge **offside position** and then to determine if there is an **offside offense**. Remember that before raising the flag for offside you're certain that the player in an offside position has become involved in play.

You should always apply the “*Wait and See*” principle learned in your entry level course to decide if a player really is offside. A second or two late and correct is better than a fast but, ultimately, wrong flag.

(Side note for your discussions: Please remember that in 2022 IFAB issued significant revised instructions differentiating “deliberate play” from “deflection.” In the event of a misplayed ball ARs need to be careful judging whether the defender had a reasonable chance to cleanly play or control the ball if it then inadvertently goes to an opponent who had been in an offside position.

See here: IFAB Circular 26, July 2022 *Clarification of the guidelines to distinguish between ‘deliberate play’ and ‘deflection’*  
<https://downloads.theifab.com/downloads/circular-26-new?l=en>

Applying these new directives is proving to be a challenge for some experienced ARs. Frankly I am not sure it’s beneficial to get into these subtleties with very young or inexperienced ARs. It may confuse things to open this can of worms. Your mileage may vary.

If I miss a flag raised for offside **don’t drop the flag simply because I did not see it.** Stay there with the flag raised. **But simply raising the flag and standing like the Statue of Liberty is not enough.** If I miss a flag you must quickly get my attention. Shout loudly, “*Flag up! Offside!*” or shout my name and, “*Flag, offside!*”

### 5) ***Ball Out Of Play***

If the ball goes over the touchline or the goal line and then comes back into the field you should raise the flag and stand there until I blow the whistle or until the attack breaks down and there is no longer a threat on goal. If there is no eye contact then shout to get my attention.

### 6) ***Get To The Goal Lines***

You’ll help me the most throughout the game by focusing on goal line responsibilities every time play moves into the penalty area. When play goes deep into your half of the field you’ll be my eyes at the goal lines since I can’t be perfectly positioned every minute of the game, especially when the ball is going end-to-end.

So when the ball is headed into the penalty area you should be moving with play and thinking about quickly getting to the goal line remembering, of course, your responsibility for offside. When the ball is in the penalty area you should be moving with urgency toward the goal line, again while maintaining proper position to judge offside. And when the ball is in the goal area you should be at or within a yard or two of the goal line prepared to assist with a critical goal line decision.

## 7) *Goal Or No Goal*

If the ball goes in the goal and, in your opinion, it's a good goal make eye contact first and then, if I point to the center circle, run **slowly** up the touchline while keeping an eye on the players in the penalty area. On the other hand, if in your opinion it's not a good goal then stand still, at attention, and raise the flag **only** if the goal-scorer was offside. I should look over at you and realize something was not right.

If I come over to you please be ready with specifics.

Finally, if the ball goes into the goal and comes back out, and if I did not realize it and play continues, you **must raise the flag to signal ball out of play, and stand there**. You **must** get my attention, shouting if necessary, **so the flag should not be dropped**. Once I see you then it's OK to drop the flag and sprint up the touchline. This is a game-changing incident and the crew must get it right.

## 8) *Fouls Near or In The Penalty Area*

**Note! Be careful how much responsibility you put on young and/or inexperienced ARs. This goes to the opening statement about evaluating an AR's experience.**

**We are supposed to be a team everywhere on the field including the penalty area.** If you see what you think is a foul in favor of the attacking team, and it's near or in the penalty area, make eye contact first. If you're absolutely certain that I did not have a good view of the incident and would have called whatever you think I have not seen, then signal by wiggling a raised flag in the **right hand**.

If I whistle and the foul was outside the penalty area then please stand at attention and use your voice if necessary to confirm "*outside*." On the other hand, if it's inside the penalty area then after the whistle you should hold the flag horizontally below the waist (the "skirt") confirming to me the location and severity of the foul. You should then take up a position just off the field at the intersection of the penalty area and goal lines and act as a goal judge. I will watch the goalkeeper and the other players.

**Note: the "skirt" is an unofficial signal US-Soccer allows with the referee's instruction to the AR though it's not IFAB-approved. And other referees, certainly those from other countries, may not know the "skirt" and/or may tell ARs in their pregame discussions not use it.**

## 9) *Deal With What's Important. Don't Look For Problems.*

Let's deal with what's important, not with little things that really don't impact on the game. Example: on free kicks far from goal don't worry about the exact blade

of grass. Same for offside restarts or throw-ins. If the player is close let play resume.

**Now, do you have any questions on what I've covered? Do you have any questions on something I did not cover? OK, let's go out and have fun!**

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