Ask, Tell, Dismiss: How to deal with irresponsible behavior

Ask, Tell, Dismiss supports the powers and duties outlined in Law 5 that require the referee to act against team officials who fail to conduct themselves in a responsible manner.

The bench areas, or technical areas if they exist, can be the scene of irresponsible behavior that impacts what is happening on the field. In these cases, U.S. Soccer recommends that referees use the ***Ask, Tell, Dismiss*** approach when dealing with coaches or other team officials.

Most of the time, coaches behave appropriately. In extreme circumstances, however, a coach, or anyone in the technical area, should be dismissed when their actions and/or language become unacceptable. We, as referees, don't want to react to every comment a coach makes about calls or non-calls but should act when the coach's conduct is not acceptable.

So, what is considered unacceptable?

Identifying Dissent – The Five P's

"Personal"

- "You're the worst referee I've ever seen."
- "Hey, Lino, what kind of call was that!"

"Public"

- You're standing near the coach for a throw-in and he asks you "Hey, what was that last call?" If it's asked respectfully then it's acceptable BUT **…….**
- You're 90 yards away from a coach and he or she screams across the field, "WHAT WAS THAT"? That is NOT acceptable.

"Persistent"

- Nearly every call is questioned.
- Constant small comments detract from your attention to the game.

Provocative"

- Anything referring to gender, race, sexuality.
- "Girls shouldn't be doing boys' games."
- "You're only calling that because they look like you".

"Profane"

- Any form of profane language.

Actions that exceed the boundaries.

1. **ASK >>> Firstly**, when irresponsible behavior arises, the referee should **ASK** the person to modify his or her behavior. Irresponsible behavior can include, but is not limited to:

- **Minor or low-level disagreement (by word or action) with a decision.**
- **Sarcastic remarks.**
- **Actions such as constantly raising an arm for offside or both arms appealing for a foul.**

- **Occasionally leaving the technical area without committing another offence.**

2. **TELL >>> Secondly**, if this type of behavior continues, the referee should inform the person that their actions will not be tolerated and **TELL** him or her to stop. **Display the yellow card by holding it aloft.**

   Examples of actions that do not warrant a warning prior to issuing a yellow card are:

- **Clearly or persistently not respecting the confines of their team's technical area.**
- **Delaying the restart of play by their team.**
- **Deliberately entering the technical area of the opposing team (non-confrontational).**
- **Dissent by word or action including throwing or kicking drinks bottles, or other objects (but not onto field).**
- **Gestures which show a clear lack of respect for the match officials, e.g. sarcastic clapping.**
- **Excessively or persistently gesturing for a red or yellow card.**
- **Gesturing or acting in a provocative or inflammatory manner.**
- **Persistent unacceptable behavior (including receiving repeated warnings).**
- **Showing a lack of respect for the game.**

3. **DISMISS >>> Thirdly**, if the unacceptable conduct continues, the referee should take the final step in the process and **DISMISS** the person from the field of play and its immediate surroundings (out of sight and sound). **Display the red card by holding it aloft.**

   Examples of actions that do not warrant a warning prior to issuing a red card are:

- **Delaying the restart of play by the opposing team e.g. holding onto the ball, kicking the ball away, obstructing the movement of a player.**
- **Deliberately leaving the technical area to: Show dissent towards, or remonstrate with, a match official including entering the field of play.**
- **Acts in a provocative or inflammatory manner or uses violent conduct.**
- **Uses offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or action(s).**
- **Entering the opposing technical area in an aggressive or confrontational manner**.
- **Deliberately throwing/kicking an object onto the field of play.**

Can't we just ignore it or does ignoring dissent lead to further dissent and other problems?

Consequences of dissent or inappropriate behavior if not dealt with

- If dissent continues it will escalate in your game and undermine your authority as a match official.

- Coaches dictate the tone of the match for players.

- Dissent from coaches drives dissent from spectators.

It is not easy for a young referee to deal with an adult coach who acts inappropriately. If you feel intimidated doing this, seek out an adult referee or a mentor (if available), who will support you.

If the mentor on site is dealing with inappropriate behavior from the technical / bench area, he or she may call you over to issue a yellow or red card. Only the center referee has the power to take such action.

If you have reason to discipline any participant (players, coaches or other bench personnel) then you must report it to your assignor, chief mentor and Director of Coaching. This is NOT optional as Law 5 is clear.

REFEREE ABUSE PREVENTION

POLICY 531-9 PENALTY OVERVIEW / YOUTH & AMATEUR

The Penalties Matrix defines consequences associated with physical and non-physical offenses against Referees.

NON-PHYSICAL OFFENSES of gross misconduct, abuse, and / or assault

NON-PHYSICAL*	MIN. GAMES	TIME
Insulting, Belittling, Insinuating or Taunting Behavior Undermining Referee Authority	2	
Harassment, Intimidation, Retaliation, Abusive, or Threatening (Non Physical) Language	4	
Aggression, Attacking, Derogatory, Cyberbullying, Doxing or Threatening (Physical / Violence) Language	6	6 - 24 Months
Offensive or Discriminatory Act	10	12 - 24 Months

PHYSICAL OFFENSES of gross misconduct, abuse, and / or assault

PHYSICAL*	MIN. GAMES	TIME
Minor or Slight Deliberate Touching	3	1 - 6 Months
Pushing, Grabbing, Pulling, Squeezing, Pinching, Lightly Slapping, Use of Object in Non Striking Manner, or Physical Property Damage	10	6 - 24 Months
Hitting, Punching, Elbowing, Kicking, Biting, Spiting, Choking, Tackling, Throwing or Use of Object or Any Part of Body (Forearm, Knee, Head) in a Striking Manner		12 Months - Lifetime

*(*) **Disclaimer:** These are only a few examples of abuse – other actions or statements may also fall into this category.*

KEY PENALTY FACTORS

- Single offenses are at **minimum the prescribed game penalty or time penalty** for non red zone offenses
- Penalties can be **both game and time depending on severity** / circumstances
- Second time offenders receive **double punishment**
- Third time offenders receive a **lifetime ban**
- More than one offense at the same time is **at least the punishment for the most serious offense**
- Offenses against minors are automatically subject to **a "minor multiplier" resulting in triple punishment**
- **One offense warning per league** to be managed by states and leagues collaboratively
- Game consequences are **inclusive of 1 game penalty for any red cards given**
- Optionality for **50% penalty for first offense from a minor**

Effective March 2025

For more information, visit: **USSOCCER.COM/RAP**

RESPECT THE CALL