



3-12-16 Kick-off

John Corbett

1. ENCOURAGE ATTACKING PLAY

In competitive games:

I hear many referees say they do not want to affect play (or the outcome of the game), and that they want to "let the kids play". I also hear players and coaches say the referees should "let the kids play".

What does it mean when a referee "lets the kids play"?

During the game, referees tell players to "let go" of a jersey and "watch the push". I hear a whistle for an ongoing foul, just outside the penalty area (rather than letting the foul continue into the PA and awarding a PK). In a few instances I saw play stopped for a foul just inside the 18, and the restart being made just outside the 18 (no PK and time given to the defense to defend).

In all those examples, what is the referee doing?

INFLUENCING PLAYERS!

The referee is rewarding sloppy (or no) defense by offering assistance to the defenders.

The referee is not acting neutral. The attackers do not receive the same level assistance. (Applying advantage is a type of assistance.)

Let's make no mistake about it- **YOU ARE SUPPOSED TO INFLUENCE PLAYERS!** Successfully influence players and "play" will take care of itself.

Your demeanor and professionalism with the coaches prior to check-in, players and coaches at check-in, how you take the field, how confidently you announce and signal your decisions (call vs no-call), whether you look players in the eye, whether you have the backbone to be on the field- (NEED I GO ON?) are how you manage. Players and coaches should believe that you will step when needed, but only to the extent needed. They are supposed to believe anarchy and retribution will not be the standard in their game.

When you tell players "let go", "watch the push", restart outside the penalty area when the foul was inside the PA, and avoid a PK by whistling just outside the PA- you are helping, not managing, players. Not as a referee, but as extra player. When you stop play outside the PA, or move the restart outside the PA- you are rewarding the defense for a failed defense and subsequent foul. The attacking team loses a great scoring opportunity (the PK), the defense gets to regroup and defend (which they could not do during play and that is why the foul was committed), and the defenders know they will have many opportunities to foul and not be punished because the referee tells them to let go rather penalize a hold. If play is stopped for a foul, defenders have every expectation the restart will not have a significant impact on them.

When referees engage in that type of behavior, they are **DISCOURAGING ATTACKING PLAY**, because they are encouraging defense- no matter how shoddy it is.

The emphasis is on encouraging attacking play. In a competitive game, you can encourage attacking play (or at least not discourage attacking play):

- **DO NOT COACH.** If it is a hold, trip, push that rises to the level of a successful foul- call it. Give the attacker every opportunity to play through- signal advantage with arms and/or voice. Rather than tell the defender to "let go" when the foul is ongoing, **DO NOT TALK.** Why not tell the attacker that you thought she was going to play through as the ball is brought back to the restart spot. (If she played through, you would not be chatting with her...)
- When you apply the advantage, remember that it is a team event- not just an opportunity for the fouled attacker. You are giving 10 attackers the opportunity to get involved.
- When the coach tells you he wants the whistle not the advantage, remember it is the players' event, not the coach's. If skill, temperament and foul type justify the advantage, apply it. Our job as referees is to preserve and promote the good of the game. Just about every player on our country's national team began playing in games and leagues like ours. With referees like you.
- As a matter of fact, just about all our national referees began working games in leagues like ours. So if you want to move up the ladder, choose the ladder that leads you to the skill sets national referees have.
- **FIELD PRESENCE.** Handle what you see, anticipate what happens next and where you should be. **DO NOT WORRY.** Do not be more afraid seeing a foul than players fear you will see their foul.

In summary: what do players and coaches mean when they tell you to "let us/them play"?

They mean encourage players to continue attacking play. Let them make mistakes and handle consequences.

When a referee says he wants to let them play, the same meaning should apply.