

Oregon School Activities Association

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We recently had an unusual game. It is very rare, but sometimes a game has to be terminated due to extensive misconduct by players, coaches and/or spectators. (We are not talking about games where the weather or field conditions prevent the game from starting or continuing to full time.) When we have a situation that requires termination of the game, the referees should be prepared to take the necessary actions expected of them. This is not criticism of the officials involved in this game. But we want you prepared for the time that it happens in your game.

Before any varsity game starts, the home school's game manager is supposed to identify themselves to the referees. If they don't, the referees should ask the home team head coach who is the game manager. When you talk to the game manager, please ask them to escort you to your cars if the game was heated. In other words, ask for the escort just in case. If it's a mercy rule game, you won't need it, I hope, but most games in this part of the season are league matches. Some of them can be with long time rival schools and that calls for extra caution. You should check the standings for the league before the game, to see how significant this game is to each team. For example, a first-place team may be cruising into the playoffs, but the third-place team may need to win in order to get to the playoffs. Many coaches will respond positively if you simply ask them before the game how their season has been going.

During the game, if you hear or see signs that some players are getting frustrated with how the game is going for them, they are more likely to try to do more than they are physically capable of doing. That demands that the referee(s) be closer to play and pay more attention to what happens after the ball is kicked away from that area. Get the late contact. You may also need to allow advantage less and, if you do allow advantage, be sure to go back to deal with what happened. Some players simply do not understand the concept of advantage. In short, run more, call more fouls.

If there is a foul and a player comes up swinging or it looks like they might, quickly hit the whistle repeatedly and very loudly. You want to get them to pay attention to you rather than the opponent. You want them to think, "Okay, okay. The ref called the foul." These situations could be a case of clear retaliation so, especially in a heated game, notice who is committing fouls and who is getting fouled. I have seen quite a few referees giving cards this year for persistent infringement. That is a very good sign that the referee is thinking about more than just 'is that a foul or not?' but rather also the big picture of why that foul was committed.

Sometimes, you will see two players square up with the opponent, giving them their death stare. In my experience, those players don't want to fight but they don't want to be the one who backs down, either. If you can, get between them, without touching them. If there is a confrontation between two players and a third player comes in to join the fracas, you absolutely need to remember the third player. They get penalized at least as much as the other two, because they had no reason to get involved.

And sometimes that turns the situation into a mass confrontation. If there are four or more players involved, you should get far enough away that you won't get hit and you can see the bigger picture. Do not attempt to separate the players at this point. AR1 should attempt verbally to keep the players on the bench from entering the field. And if they do anyway, be sure to get their numbers. This is a red card offense, by rule, 12.6.1.h, even if all they did was stand around on the field. The referee should ask the coaches to come on the field and deal with their players. A very loud "coaches!" should suffice.

If, in the opinion of the referee, after all cards have been issued and both head coaches informed, the atmosphere is still very volatile, the referee should consider whether to restart the game. Of course, if one or both teams now have less than seven players, the game has to be terminated. Safety of the players comes first. The referee may also, depending on the circumstances, want to discuss with both coaches and/or the game manager whether the game should be terminated. The agreement of the coaches or game manager is not required, however.

When a game is terminated, the referee crew should immediately leave the area. Don't walk to your bags, jog over there. Don't stop to change your shoes, get a drink of water, etc. Grab your stuff and go. OSAA's policy is that officials for all sports are to leave immediately after the end of the game. If the crew needs to discuss who did what for purposes of the game report, they should agree on a place to meet away from the host school's campus or the park where the game was held.

Rarely, there could be players and/or coaches, or spectators, who want to talk to the referees as they are leaving. That is inappropriate. Do not respond to them, just leave and don't issue additional red cards unless they absolutely get up so close to you that they cannot be ignored. If you feel physically threatened by them, you do not have to show a red card, but remember their number for your game report and include full details in the report. You should call your commissioner (assignor) as soon as possible after any game like this!

We hope that this will never happen in any of your games. It is not normal. But you need these tools if it happens to you.

Patrick Duffy
OSAA State Soccer Rules Interpreter