

## **An open letter to all Parents and Coaches of Youth Soccer Teams.**

Ever wonder what it is like to be a teenager in the middle of a field being criticized loudly, with foul language to boot, over your performance, when you're doing your best? Would you yell at your child like that over a missed kick, a missed goal? Would you put up with a coach who continually berated your child's lack of decisiveness, drive, decision-making, and ability as a soccer player?

As a coach, would you like to have the parents on your team yelling at you over the team roster, tactics, performance, win / loss record?

### **The answer is probably not.**

Then why is it open season on youth referees? Ever wonder what that brutal comment, so easily shouted across 50 yards of grass will do to their confidence? It may be humorous, but stinging. It may be absolutely right, but does nothing for their self-esteem. We probably train about 800 referees each year in the Edmonton area, but we still have a shortage. We have a huge dropout rate, probably around 98%. Most of it due to the abuse heaped on the kids' heads. Those that survive are the hardened lot, who don the body armour each time they venture out to officiate in a game, who become so shell shocked that no amount of mentoring or coaching is ever going to change their view of the world.

Those of us that try and help them improve their knowledge and skills find it tough penetrating the outer shells, to try and have them put a more human face to their referee skills. It really bothers me that when I do games involving problem coaches and parents, I have fewer problems, probably because I'm an adult. It is strange that we put so much effort into coaching our kids to play the game, yet so little effort into coaching our officials. But then, it wouldn't be much fun to actually work to help the referee, when we could stand on the side and heckle.

Maybe it's time that just once, in one game this season, we back off, maybe take the time to go to the youngster after the game and say thanks. Maybe we offer a little help to those organizations trying to retain, improve and mentor these youngsters to become better at what they do. Hey, if we can do it at one game, let's try for more. Maybe we will start enjoying the games, seeing more youngsters getting better at the job of refereeing the games.

### **Give the kids a break - they are doing their best.**

Shaun Hammond  
ASA Referee, Instructor & Assessor

***If you are 14 years of age or older and would like to join the Greenfield Referee team, please contact Jan Hicks @ [jjhicks@shaw.ca](mailto:jjhicks@shaw.ca) for information on referee courses and the fees paid to referees & linesmen.***