

*These observations were compiled from actual mentor programs that operated in Region 3.*

## **How the Program is Organized – A Formal Program at Regionals**

### **Before the Tournament**

#### **1. Nomination of Potential Mentors**

National referees from Region 3 who were present at the National camp were surveyed to identify those who were interested in participating in the program. They were further evaluated to determine their ability to work with and relate to younger referees who would be working at the tournament. After the camp, program administrators reviewed the promising mentor candidates and contacted each of their state's SRA to request their candidate's participation during the southern regional tournament. Getting ten to twelve mentors committed to participate in the tournament has been the goal for each year.

#### **2. Solicitation of Mentees**

Each state is asked to nominate up to three potential mentees. The first year the request for nominations was for promising referees in the following grades: one grade 07, one grade 06, and one grade 05. These guidelines have been eased somewhat with respect to grade, with a greater emphasis on the newer/younger referee who could benefit from the program. Last year, referees started making requests themselves to be participants in the program before the tournament.

#### **3. Scheduling/Arranging Meeting Times**

During the pre tournament preparation, time slots are arranged for mentoring activities. Two meetings are planned the day before the tournament begins. The first involves an organizational meeting for the mentors where the ground rules for the program are presented by the program coordinators, tournament schedules are reviewed, and there is a general Q & A session. Special mentor pins designed for USYSA were given to each participating mentor.

The second organizational meeting involves the mentees themselves. Mentees are alerted to the meeting by their SRA and this first meeting occurs before the general instructional meeting for the tournament. The mentor coordinators introduce themselves, and explain the learning objectives for a successful experience. Then the mentors introduce themselves, and provide a brief bio of their refereeing and soccer experience. Once the introductions are complete, each mentee is asked to select a mentor to work with through a process designed by the regional referee staff. The only ground rule is that a mentee work with a mentor from another state or someone they have not worked with previously. Based on the number of mentors and mentees, each mentor is limited to a certain number of mentees. The coordinators have found that the optimum ratio is between three to five referees per mentor.

At this point, the mentor and mentees arrange informal meeting times on their own with their mentor/mentee groups. Some groups select a breakfast meal each morning, and others will select different times during the day.

The mentees share game schedules and the mentor plans accordingly to observe as many games as possible that his/her mentees will work. Each mentor is furnished with a master schedule of referee assignments, and the assignor works to accommodate the scheduling so that all of a mentors mentees can work the same game together.

#### 4. Interaction with Assignor

Once the list of mentors has been matched with their mentees, a copy is delivered to the tournament's referee assignor. An effort is made, where possible, to switch referees around so that all of a mentor's group can work together. If that's not possible, then an effort is made to keep the different mentees working close together on a geographical field basis. After the first day's slate of games, it becomes much easier to pair each of the mentees together on the same game.

#### 5. Interaction with other Tournament Officials

Both the Instructor and the Assessor assigned to the tournament by USSF are involved in the mentor programs as invited guests to the initial meetings. During the last three years, the USSF instructors have been heavily involved.

#### **During the tournament**

Spot checks are made by the program coordinators on a daily basis with each mentor to informally track the progress of the referee mentees. Scheduling adjustments are made to game schedules, and if any major tournament problems are discovered, they are conveyed to the tournament referee officials. In the last two years, it was discovered that the observations of the mentors toward the end of the tournament became very useful in determining the top 20 officials. In fact, to identify the top assistant referees of the tournament, several mentors were asked to observe and then rate ARS who were all working at the same time. Then the results were compared and the ARS ranked according the evaluations. Then these results were checked against the observations of the game assessor. Numerical ratings by the assessors were useless in determining the rankings since: 1) National and state assessors rate differently, and, 2) the assessment forms don't have a standard frame of performance reference for referees of different grades when the recommended USSF grade criteria ratings are used.

#### **After the tournament**

After the tournament is completed, the program coordinators contact the mentors and mentees to solicit feedback about their experiences. Many mentees have sent back useful comments and suggested improvements and changes have been made each year based on the feedback received.

# How the Program is Organized – The Informal Program at GIT

## *Before the tournament*

### 1. Invitations to Mentors

Invitations are sent to selected active FIFA panelists and other National referees inviting them to work as officials in the tournament and to mentor promising referees in the games to which they are assigned. The tournament picks up their transportation costs and feeds and houses them during the tournament.

### 2. Invitations to potential mentees

Several months in advance of the tournament, emails are sent to many of the top ranking referees from the regional tournament with an invitation to work in this tournament. The tournament picks up their transportation costs and provides comp lodging at the various hotels used by the tournament as well as paying game fees.

### 3. Game assignments for mentors and mentees

The tournament assigns schedule the game assignments with both mentors and mentees working games together. Assignments are clustered by groups so that sufficient time can be set aside for game debriefings. A mentor coordinator was responsible for the assignments at this tournament and was able to match referee and mentor for their matches. The initial assignments are distributed to all referees at a pre-tournament meeting the night before the tournament began. There were no assigned assessors during this tournament.

## *During the tournament*

### 1. Working same games

At the first game, the mentor may be the referee for the game with the mentee serving as an AR. During a subsequent game, the mentee may be the referee, with the mentor serving as an AR.

## 2. Ad hoc mini clinics

On the first day of the tournament last December, an unusual incident occurred during one match that resulted in a send off. After the game was over and the mentor and mentee discussed the game, the assignor invited the crew to discuss the incident during the match at an impromptu mini clinic. All of the available refs were assembled in a sequestered area for referees, and then the mentor outlined the incident that occurred. The mentee explained the actions that were taken, and the mentors (both FIFA ARs) discussed other options the referee may have had. The coordinators found the opportunity to learn from the experience very beneficial for all of the referees.

## 3. Building a network of support

Many young referees are somewhat shy when sitting/standing around senior referees if they don't know them or have not had any previous experience with them. The same was true at this tournament during the morning of the first day. After many of the mentees had worked with some of the mentors, more conversations began to occur and the beginning of several "friendships" were observed. In a sense, the seeds were planted and then allowed to "bloom" without being forced.

### **After the tournament**

#### 1. Debriefing the tournament

The assignors and mentor coordinators have had ongoing conversations about the experiences that were observed from this tournament and how they differed from the much bigger Southern Regional tournament.

#### 2. Follow-up with mentors/mentees

The assignor contacted the mentors to obtain feedback about their experiences at the tournament.

## **Lessons Learned About Mentoring Programs**

### **1. Mentors should not be assigned as officials in a formal program.**

During the first day's game of the first year of the mentoring program, mentors were scheduled to work games with their mentees. The immediate feedback from one of the mentors was that this didn't work. This arrangement set up an unusual expectation from both the mentees and the assessors who were working the game about their performance. The mentors being part of the "team" weren't able to separate themselves as mentors and fellow officials. It did not make sense with what we're asking them to do. Not working together allowed the mentors to retain some objectivity when discussing game performance and being able to be a link between the assessor and the referees themselves. When the referee was part of the team, that link didn't exist, and it became an "us" vs. the assessor during the feedback session.

However, when assessors aren't assigned to every game (i.e. Germantown), then it makes more sense to have the mentor working as part of the team and be able to provide feedback to the referees at halftime and the end of the match without the pressure of the assessors' insights.

### **2. Retain clear distinctions between mentor programs and assessment programs.**

Mentor coordinators felt that tournament officials have a responsibility to insist that each program remain distinct, but work together in a spirit of cooperation and the benefit of the referee. These learning programs are not about "turf" wars as they might be perceived, and tournament officials should be vigilant to ensure that this doesn't occur.

### **3. Screen potential mentor candidates**

During the first year of the mentor program at regionals, one mentor began second guessing the assessor and asking the referees to throw out the feedback they received from the assessor. These actions were contrary to the ground rules established by the mentor program coordinators and became a source of friction between the assessment and mentor programs. After further problems with that assessor during the tournament (he fell asleep during a match) he was assessing, he was reassigned to other non-mentoring activities for the remainder of the tournament. The mentor coordinators reemphasized the role of the assessor program to the mentors.

### **4. Solicit feedback from both mentors & mentees during and after the tournament**

Feedback from the mentees has been extremely beneficial. Mentor programs should be fluid and not so rigid that they are unable to adapt to changing conditions and environments.

5. Mentoring Programs should be flexible about match-ups and scheduling

The mentoring program should be very organized from the administrative side—to ensure that the program remains a learning vehicle. On the other side from the mentee, the program should appear to be transparent.

6. Mentoring programs are relationship based and not event based

Referees tend to be timid in nature and this learning vehicle is an opportunity to work and then be at ease with higher level officials because of its informality.

7. Mentoring is about opportunity to learn

Mentoring programs can't be rigid nor micromanaged. To be successful believe that these programs must be informal and spontaneous. Mentoring is not about taking notes or filling out written feedback forms, but about developing a mutual and caring relationship that serves both the mentee and the mentor.

8. Role of the Mentor in the Assessment Program

Mentors provided three important elements to the assessment program: 1) Link for exchange of information, 2) Opportunity to diffuse misunderstandings, and, 3) Support the need for assessors and assessments.

9. Role of the Assessor in the Mentor Program

Just as important, the mentor coordinators believe it is the role of the assessor in the mentor program: 1) To validate the feedback, 2) Check for learning, and 3) Report concerns unnoticed or observed by the mentor.

10. Desirable *Mentee* Characteristics

The mentor coordinators felt there were at least three desirable mentee characteristics: 1) Be eager to learn and be enthusiastic, 2) Have the ability to accept feedback (with out excuses/justifications, etc.), and 3) Have the desire to advance to the next level at whatever point in their career they may be

11. Successful *Mentor* Characteristics

The mentor coordinators felt that there were a number of characteristics successful mentors shared: 1) Desire to be of service, 2) Supportive of less experienced referees, 3) Have no “agenda”, 4) Have experience, 5) Be passionate and dedicated, 6) The ability to form personal relationships, and 7) Be committed to help others learn.

12. Indicators of Successful Mentor Program (either formal or informal)

- a. Mentees taking ownership in the program
- b. Relationships within the mentee group that are mutually supportive
- c. Evaluation and feedback by all involved
- d. Impeccable teamwork with the assessment program
- e. Network of relationships between mentors and mentees that begins extending outside of/beyond the tournaments themselves.

## **Further Comments**

The mentor coordinators consider the mentor programs as they have evolved to be a work in progress, subject to further refinement and development. If they become too systematized and over organized, they will lose their spontaneity and flexibility and possibly the referees who are learning through them.