



Brave new programs our future

During a recent article, (*Young refs travel rough roads, Issue 55*) I mused the difference between the training of youth players and that of youth referees - the main point being that considerably more time and energy in people resources is put into player development than into referee development. Not a criticism, just an observation. This time around, a look at possible solutions.

Durham Region Soccer Referees Association in Ontario has taken a different approach. Under the guidance of **Gordon Arrowsmith**, retired **FIFA Referee**, and **Denise Robinson**, current **FIFA Assistant Referee**, the **Durham Region Referee Academy** has been in place for a few years. In this innovative and successful training program, Arrowsmith and Robinson work with a small group of young officials in a team-like environment. They train together regularly, discuss refereeing issues, work games in trios, and often a coach or assessor watches matches to provide feedback, correct mistakes, and reinforce strengths. The result; confident officials miles ahead of their contemporaries who do not have such advantages. The standard of officiating is now more dependent on ability to perform rather than outside factors such as frustration, intimidation and lack of confidence.

Pioneers and proven results

Closer to home, three referee programs are trying something different. Vancouver's **Metro Women's Soccer League** has sponsored several programs over the past 14 years and the program specifically designed for females, provides a built-in support network. Referees are trained in trios, pairing new officials with an experienced one, a mentor. Participants attend seminars then go work games in their trios, running line for the mentor. When they feel ready to go in, they first referee a half, then a full match. This method provides 100% support for new refs and maximizes the development process through good modeling and constant, positive feedback. The program has been well received by participants and by teams. Two who started as refs in the program reached the highest level possible; **Stacey Findlay** became a **FIFA Assistant Referee** and **Jill Proctor** is currently Canada's only female **FIFA Referee**.

Langley to fall in line

Langley United Youth Soccer Association has developed an **Advanced Referee Training** program to be overseen by head referee **Peter Thomas**. Due to begin this fall, a small group of young referees will meet at least twice a month during the winter season to discuss refereeing mechanics and techniques by watching videos and attending top-level games as a group, to observe senior refs in action. They will officiate competitive youth games via the

LUYSA Soccer Academy, but the games will be carefully selected to match refereeing ability and experience, and all games will be observed by a referee coach.

Whistling for Whitecaps Women

Vancouver Whitecaps FC has also joined the party. Recognizing the importance of developing this aspect of the game, **Bob Lenarduzzi**, **Director of Soccer Operations**, has endorsed a pilot program using referees identified by the **BCSA Referee Assessment Committee**, who participate in training sessions with the **Whitecaps Women's** team. With the cooperation of coach **Pat Rohla**, referees working in trios participate in regular training session where, under the guidance of retired and active **FIFA referees**, they listen in on tactical talks, observe functional drills, engage in "patterns of play" activities, and referee mini scrimmages. The referee coach observes and provides suggestions, all in an environment conducive to learning and without the fear of "messing up" in front of a few thousand spectators. In a follow-up session the trio officiates a full 11-on-11 training game, taking turns in the middle and running line under the watchful eye of the referee coach.

Advancing the craft

The common thread in all these programs is that they are labour intensive, that is, an instructor, mentor or coach works with small groups of officials. And referees do not go out and officiate on their own. The coach watches them perform and provides the appropriate feedback, just like we do with players.

But that is the key factor, having enough bodies to go around for everybody, which draws the response, "there aren't enough bodies to go around for everybody." The trick is to not let that stop effective programs from operating. The solution may be to focus on a few and guarantee their success (as much as a referee's success can be guaranteed, which is not a safe bet!) and go from there. Because maybe, just maybe, if we develop enough successful referees now, in 20 years the current shortage of trained, knowledgeable referee coaches will be a thing of the past. It never hurts to dream.

Programs such as these, working in conjunction with regular programs of the **BCSA Referee Development Committee**, are certain to see improvement in individual performances. And that bodes well for the future. Just ask **Stephen Nichol** and **Craig Rohla**, the two young **Langley referees** observed last February. Both are enrolled in the **LUYSA** program for the fall and both successfully completed the **BCSA Class 3** course at **Shawnigan Lake** in July. They, along with several young colleagues, have now joined the ranks of senior referees. Congratulations to them all and good luck. We're counting on you! ●