

# Keeping Games on Time

(and other things you should know when officiating tournaments)

Referees are often exhorted to “keep the games on time”, and as official timekeepers of games, it is ultimately your responsibility. In tournaments, this is especially important as there is precious little time between pool games, and even playoff games can eat up extra time with OT periods and Kicks from the Mark.

How exactly can you keep your games on time? What can you, the referee, do when coaches and teams are not “cooperating”? Here then is the guide to having a happy (or certainly less anxious) tournament director/administrator:

1. **READ THE TOURNAMENT RULES** ~ Rules are found online on the website for the particular tournament you are officiating. If you cannot find them, ask the tournament director. Most of the rules do not apply specifically to the referees but print them anyway, mark areas that pertain to you and bring them with you to the field. Read at least your sections and understand what is expected of you for your tournament games. For example, the rules will state length of halves for your division, length of half time, and home team responsibilities and privileges. They will also state the expectations of coaches, which you should know. Which games can end in a tie and which games cannot? How is a tie broken? How much time must each player play? This could be different than your region’s standards. (AYSO National requirement is a minimum of half the game [applies only to regulation time]).  
One much-appreciated convenience of tournaments is that when coaches protest a tournament rule, you may quickly and politely refer the coach to a nearby official at the tournament table. This is their tournament and you are merely enforcing their rules.
2. **PRINT A SCHEDULE OF YOUR GAMES** ~ This should include the game time, location of field and pitch number (if multiple pitches). Most referees have children playing and there can be confusion between games you are watching and ones you are working.
3. **EXPECT THE UNEXPECTED** ~ Be a prepared referee by verifying the locations of your field and check that assignments have not changed at the last minute (tournament assignors usually have to change some assignments). Bring different-colored shirts in case you need to change to avoid color conflicts with teams. Bring AR flags along with your ref bag with all your gear in case of last-minute changes. Be flexible!
4. **CHECK-IN AT LEAST 30 MINUTES IN ADVANCE** ~ There will be a table for referee check-in and your whole team needs to ensure your names are marked as present. If you do not do this in a timely fashion, you may find your game has been given away to another referee team, and your team will not get credit for it. If yours is the first game of the day, plan to arrive 45 minutes early to conduct a proper pre-game inspection and allow time for corrections.

During referee check-in, review tournament rules; know what is expected in the way of team check-in. You may not be expected to do a standard team check-in; maybe just a safety check is necessary. Review the field monitor situation – how will you get the game cards, to whom do you give the finished game cards after the end of the game, will the monitor come get the game cards from you? Must players display a wristband? What do the monitor’s marks and writings on the game card mean?

If games are running late and you are instructed to shorten your game, do so evenly, from each half. E.g. – if your game has 30 minute halves, shorten each half, maybe to 28 minutes each, depending on the length of game the tournament wants. Avoid lopping off time from only the second half.

5. **PERFORM ANY PRE-GAME DUTIES OFF THE FIELD** ~ If you need to do a team check-in, this can be done off the field. Is there a coin toss or does the home team choose? Either way, this can be done off the field if the prior game is running late. Advise both coaches to be ready to go when the prior game ends and that you will start your watch at game time. Also advise them of the time allotted for half-time (e.g. 5 minutes), and that you will also start your watch for the second half on time, per tournament rules. Secure 3 properly-inflated game balls from the home team coach.

These above instructions are provided so that you are prepared for the most important instruction of all:

6. **START YOUR WATCH!!** ~ At game time, you must start your watch. It does not matter if the teams are ready to go, or spectators are crossing the field. It is up to you to keep your game on time. If they want to do a team cheer, it will happen while the clock is running (i.e. during their playing time). So, stand in the center of the field, hold up your wrist, announce that the clock is starting and start your watch. If coaches protest, calmly, professionally and BRIEFLY explain the tournament wants the games on time.

To keep track of time for half-time, *restart your watch* as soon as you end the first half; this way you will know exactly how much time has elapsed. Blow your whistle 1-2 minutes before you will start your watch for the second half. Announce: “Clock is starting in (e.g. ‘1 minute’ or ‘30 seconds’)”. As soon as the stated time has elapsed for half time (e.g. 5 minutes), do the same thing again: If teams are not ready to go for the second half, stand in the center of the field, hold up your wrist, announce that the clock is starting and start your watch.

If you have any hesitation about doing this, remember that you answer to the tournament officials, not the coaches. Confirm when you check-in that the tournament officials want you to start your watch on time, even when teams are not ready. During your pre-game talk with your referee team, instruct them on how they can help you get and keep the game on time; the most important way is for them to be in position and ready to go before game time.

Think a game starting a few minutes late does not really matter? Consider this: When your 8am game does not begin until everyone is ready, a five minute late start may not seem egregious. But games are scheduled back-to-back at tournaments and if everyone’s game was delayed five minutes, the last game of the day might start one hour late! If yours is that last game, then you, your referee team, the coaches, players and spectators might well be fuming, which would not be an auspicious game-start.

7. **POST-GAME HANDSHAKE** ~ If in your opinion there is not enough time for the post-game handshake on the field (or if so instructed by a marshal or other tournament official), conduct

the team handshake off the field, preferably behind a goal. This will be greatly welcomed by the incoming referee team and the players of the next game, as you will be doing your part to help keep their game on time!

8. **POST-GAME DUTIES** ~ As in regular region games, confer afterward with your referee team. Make sure that the scores on the 2 game cards match. The score on the losing team's card should be flipped: 3-1 on winning team's card should read 1-3 on losing team's card. Be sure to turn in your signed game cards either to the field marshal or at the referee table.

A couple things to keep in mind: If a team does not show up and the stated grace period expires, confer with the tournament officials. If they want to extend the grace period, that is their prerogative. Secondly, spectators may feel freer to question your calls since they will not be encountering you next week in their own region. Always remain calm and professional. Remember that you do not engage spectators; it is always the coach who is responsible for his or her team. If the spectator is interfering with the game and/or the pleasure of players and other spectators, bring the matter to the coach and ask the coach to address the issue.

Tournaments are an excellent place to observe some great soccer matches and mingle with other referees. Spend some time hanging out at the referee table and you may be privy to some good conversations and discussions on actual game plays and situations that referees encounter. Ask questions about what you see in games in front of you, as well as games you have officiated. Do you always officiate with the same referee team? Try getting on a match with different and more experienced referees to get a different perspective. You may also be needed to fill in for injured referees.

Written by Julie Nourayi, AYSO 1/F/10, May 2015