

Setting Goooooals!

by Doug Coutts, Referee from Millis, MA

The end of the calendar year brings with it a slowing down of the soccer landscape for referees as (except for doing indoor) there's not a lot going on in our local area. The temperature has dropped, fall seasons have come to a close, and before you know it, we will be digging ourselves out from under piles of the white stuff. It is a perfect opportunity to reflect back on a year's worth of accomplishments, and to look ahead and set goals for the next year. Most people do these things every year in regards to important personal things such as job, house, school, etc; there is no reason that we as referees should not do the same.

Take a look back at last year's refereeing and ask yourself a few questions. Did I begin the season in good physical shape? Was I able to sustain my fitness throughout the season? Am I satisfied with the level of games that I officiated? Was I sufficiently challenged, both physically and mentally, in an attempt to improve my standing in the referee community? How satisfied was I with how the season progressed and how it ended?

Looking forward, you might ask yourself different questions: Is there more I can do to make sure I am in top physical shape before the season begins? How can I get noticed so that I can start getting the higher level assignments that I am interested in getting? And what about upgrade, could this be the year that I make a strong attempt at upgrading?

Do not be afraid to set those goals high!

These are just some of the questions we should be asking ourselves this time of year as we prepare to set goals for the upcoming season. Do not be afraid to set those goals high! At last count, there are more than ten professional soccer teams in various divisions playing their home games within a relative short driving distance of communities in Massachusetts...so if that is one of your long-term goals it may be attainable!!

The first step is to continue your education. The material presented at the many re-certification clinics held across the state is very valuable. Look at these clinics as an opportunity for learning - after all, you are in a room full of other referees, talking about (oddly enough) refereeing!! Talk to the people around you, ask questions of the people in charge, and take notes, as there is much that can be learned! Do not be afraid to walk away from these clinics with, not only knowledge of any new rules and interpretations, but also a few tricks that could help you out on the field.

Next you will need to evaluate where you currently stand. To all referees out there, young and old, I say: "Keep track of all your games!" In this day and age of computers, this is easier than ever. Simply keep a running text (or similar) file where you note the date, time, level of the match (i.e. age), game location, home team, away team and results. You may already be keeping something similar to this to make sure you actually get paid for

the games that you work. Maybe you can even have a notes column where you can jot down some short things about the game - things you learned and do not want to forget, things you need to work on, things you think you handled well. Keeping track of everything cannot be stressed enough as you never know, maybe now you do not have aspirations of upgrading, but in a couple of years if you change your mind, you will wish you did have that list somewhere.

Perhaps, you think you are ready to "take the next step"

Now, set some goals. Are you happy with the games you got last year and want to stay with those games? Many people are, and there is nothing wrong with that as perhaps due to other constraints (i.e. job, family, etc.) time and travel commitments are difficult to make. Perhaps, you think you are ready to "take the next step", whatever that may be. Whether you are ready to move up from youth 6 v 6 to youth 11 v 11, local town league to travel league, league games to tournament games, tournament games to MTOC/State Cup games, MTOC/State Cup to regional tournaments, regional tournaments to adult/amateur games, adult/amateur games to being a fourth or Assistant Referee in professional games ... you get the idea.

Massachusetts has not only a great reputation for outstanding referees, but also a structure in place to allow those that aspire to improve themselves a way of getting up the ladder as their skills increase. We have an abundance of referees and administrators that are more than willing and able to help referees of Massachusetts reach their goals - no matter how small or large they might seem! So set some goals for next season to take advantage of the many varied opportunities that are available to all of us right here in our own backyard!

Doug Coutts is a referee from Millis, MA who knows well of the importance of setting goals. In 2001, Doug was invited to officiate at the championships of the Olympic Development Program in Delaware. Later in the year, he worked in the first professional matches of his career. In addition, Doug and his wife became parents for the first time, welcoming a daughter into their lives, late in the fall season.