

## ***THE SPIRIT OF THE GAME***

Soccer is designed as a players' game and involvement by nonplayers—coaches and referees—is intended to be limited. This can be a difficult concept for those accustomed to seeing active involvement by coaches and officials in other popular sports. Coaches participate in these other popular sports by directing the action of the players, debating rule decisions with officials or completely stopping the action by calling time-outs. Officials, in these other popular sports, participate by stopping the game for each rule violation and not continuing play until the infraction and violator have been identified, the punishment options explained to the opposing team and a final accounting of the entire incident announced or signaled to the spectators. Indeed, it is not uncommon in some sports for considerably more time to be devoted to dealing with these matters than is actually spent playing the game. The spirit of the game of soccer intends something quite different.

In soccer, particularly youth soccer, the application of the spirit of the Law is far more important than the rote application of the letter of the Law. Soccer is a fast-paced game that should flow with a minimum of interruptions. Referees have considerable authority and flexibility when determining whether or not to stop play. Violation of the letter of the Law may be overlooked if the referee considers it to be a trifling or doubtful offense. The referee may also elect not to stop play for a foul when it would be more of an advantage to the team that was fouled to continue playing. It is easy to fall into the trap of becoming overly concerned with the details of various rules and regulations surrounding the game. Players simply want to get on with the enjoyment of playing. Standards that may seem appropriate to enforce during international, college or high school competitions are not necessarily appropriate to apply at all levels of youth soccer. Soccer is a game, and the reason people play games is to have fun. The role of AYSO coaches and referees is to facilitate a game that will provide the maximum enjoyment for the players. Understanding the spirit of the game and philosophy of refereeing can significantly contribute toward the enjoyment of the match for all concerned—coaches, referees, spectators and players.

Referees strive for uniformity of interpretation, just as players strive for excellence in playing skills and coaches strive to develop successful teams. With varying degrees of success, each does the best he or she can, and it is the inevitable human variation that makes for greater interest and enjoyment.