



## **U.S. Soccer Referee Abuse Prevention Policy (Policy 531-9) Frequently Asked Questions** **Updated as of February 26<sup>th</sup>, 2025**

### **Where can I find Policy 531-9?**

The updated policy can be found on our Bylaws and Policy page [here](#).

### **How was the penalties framework determined? How is the ecosystem being informed of the strengthened policy?**

The Referee Abuse Prevention Working Group has representation from member organizations, state associations, SRCs, referees, athletes, and leaders in the soccer community. The penalties framework was benchmarked against other federations, the FIFA Code of Ethics, and went through multiple iterations of feedback through member meetings, working group meetings, and open sessions for key impacted stakeholders. The updated policy is being shared across the ecosystem via partnered roll outs with the National Associations, and via email and Q&A sessions for all members, currently registered referees, and SRCs. The information is also being shared at learning booths at United Soccer Coaches Convention for coaches and at U.S. Soccer's AGM right before the 3/1 effective date. The larger soccer community is encouraged to learn more at [www.ussoccer.com/rap](http://www.ussoccer.com/rap).

### **Who can report an abusive offense?**

Anyone can submit a report, and everyone is in fact encouraged to report offenses as necessary. All reports should be treated with equal consideration.

### **What does the 'one offense warning per league to be managed by states and leagues' mean?**

During this transition, the first offense that would result in a penalty in any given league is subject to a warning rather than a penalty. This is to support the transition to the strengthened policy as we communicate these changes to the ecosystem. Once that warning is provided, all subsequent penalties will follow the penalties framework within the policy. This warning is across the entire league, meaning one warning per league and not per person or per team within the league.

### **If the first offense is offered a warning, is a potential second offense treated as a "first offense" or would the individual receive double punishment for a second offense?**

As the warning is once per league and not tied to any individual person, if the coach or player that received the league warning commits another offense, the second offense will be treated as a first offense for this individual.

### **Does the penalties matrix only apply to offenses the referee issues a red card for? What is required for the disciplinary process to be initiated when a red card is not involved?**

Penalties are contingent on reporting the abusive offense, regardless of a red card issued. The policy goes into effect when an abusive offense is reported, therefore disciplinary action is contingent on a report of the incident and / or offense. With the updated policy, players, coaches, and spectators are encouraged to report abuse. The penalty framework only takes effect if abuse is reported. We are asking everyone to do their part to support the



referee by reporting any instance of referee abuse. If abuse is reported, a coach or player could receive a penalty for a cautioned incident. If a red card is given, the penalty includes the mandatory one game red card suspension.

#### **Does the policy apply to spectators?**

Policy 531-9 applies to coaches and players within youth and amateur games. We have seen teams and leagues supplement this policy with additional penalties, however this policy outlines the minimum sanctions for coaches and players only within youth and amateur games.

#### **Our state has a policy that treats spectators as the responsibility of the head coach, and if spectators are abusive towards a referee, the head coach receives punishment. Can we continue this policy?**

Policy 531-9 applies to coaches and players of youth and amateur games. Teams and leagues have the ability to supplement penalties beyond these minimums, however all members must adhere to these minimums within the penalties framework. In this example, if the state chooses to apply spectator offenses to coaches, this can continue to occur during Phase 2.

#### **Can a penalty be given for the rest of a tournament or season regardless of team advancement?**

As the penalties matrix has required minimums, anything beyond the minimum is at the discretion of the hearing panel and can exceed the minimum as deemed appropriate.

#### **What is U.S. Soccer's recommendation for enforcing penalties for coaches who coach multiple teams in the same league / different leagues / across sanctioning bodies?**

Best practice would be to have a coach or player suspended for the correlating number of games (and / or time) across all teams and leagues – we do understand this is not always easy to track, and have noted this as an opportunity for improvement as we develop a reporting structure with the goal to track penalty outcomes in one place. For now, we recommend teams, leagues, and members communicate penalties with each other while we develop a more standardized process during Phase 3.

#### **If someone who is a coach and a player is found guilty of an offense and is suspended, how does their suspension work?**

If someone receives a penalty, the penalty is served via all participation methods – meaning if a coach or player receives a penalty for 4 games, he or she would serve the penalty through the next 4 games as either a coach or a player. Whether the penalty is received as a coach or a player does not impact how the penalty is served.

#### **Are MLS Next Matches covered by Policy 531-9 or are these matches and players considered a part of the professional game policy and bylaws?**

Yes, MLS Next is covered by Policy 531-9 as it is considered a youth or amateur game. MLS Next Pro is covered outside of this policy and details can be found on our [Bylaws and Policy page](#).

#### **Is there punishment for non-compliance with suspension?**



While we transition to this updated framework, we recommend current processes stay in place. For example, if there is a process or further penalty in place for early participation (not serving the full penalty), continue to adhere to that process. During Phase 3, we aim to have a reporting structure in place to better track penalties and outcomes. Please anticipate more details on Phase 3 in the coming months.

#### **What is the anticipated timeline for the rollout of the standardized reporting mechanism?**

We plan to kick off Phase 3 in the coming months, beginning with a discovery phase – where we will understand best practices across the nation, key opportunities, and areas for standardization and needed nuances. Once the discovery phase is completed, we will communicate an expected timeline for development and roll out.

#### **Do members, state associations, SRCs or other key impacted stakeholders need to do anything differently in terms of reporting processes, hearing panels, or adjudication?**

Given Phase 2 focused on developing a penalties framework and updated policy, we ask that current reporting and hearing panel processes stay in place. During Phase 3, we will focus on reporting the offenses, disciplinary hearing and adjudication guidelines, and communication on repeat offenders and other key penalty factors. Thus, at this point in time, reporting, adjudication, and outcomes should follow the same current process until more guidance is shared during Phase 3. Phase 3, which will begin in the coming months, will focus entirely on reporting, adjudication, and penalties enforcement as necessary.

#### **Is a virtual or in person hearing required for abuse towards an official? Can a hearing be held solely on the written record?**

Whichever method is currently in practice is appropriate at this time (as long as the written record goes through due diligence as well). During phase 3, we will kick off with discovery on how reporting and hearing panels are currently operating as we develop guidelines for the future.

#### **Are all penalties for abuse towards referees appealable?**

Yes, as the penalties framework all have correlating consequences, appeals are permitted. Appeals will also be part of phase 3, as phase 2 focused on developing the framework and updating the policy accordingly – phase 3 will focus on reporting structures and processes, how penalties are handled and enforced, and best practices across teams, leagues, and competitions.

#### **How are repeat offenders impacted by the updated penalties framework, especially if offenses occur in different leagues?**

Second time offenders are subject to double penalty, while third time offenders are subject to a lifetime ban. Best practice would be to have a coach or player suspended for the correlating number of games (and / or time) across all teams and leagues – we do understand this is not always easy to track, and have noted this as an opportunity for improvement as we develop a reporting structure with the goal to track penalty outcomes in one place. For now, we recommend teams, leagues, and members communicate penalties with each other while we develop a more standardized process during Phase 3.



**A provision in the written bylaws determines that harm must be established by a disciplinary hearing panel in order to decide that an offense warrants punishment. How does this impact how disciplinary hearing panels adjudicate alleged cases of referee abuse?**

The updated penalties framework should be used to determine harm – the offenses listed within each level are inclusive however not exhaustive and should be used as a guide for any other offenses and correlating penalties. In terms of adjudication, the current process should stay in place until updated guidance is provided in Phase 3 of the Referee Abuse Prevention work.

**Will there be updated resources around hearing panels and due process requirements since the new updates are likely to see an increase in the number of incidents reported?**

Yes, expect to see more resources and guidelines on reporting, adjudication, and penalties outcomes in Phase 3 in the coming months.

**If I have more questions, what should I do?**

Please email your question to [rap@ussoccer.org](mailto:rap@ussoccer.org) and a member of our Refereeing Department will get back to you.