

# Manitoba Soccer Association Inc.

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To: Manitoba Soccer Community  
From: Héctor O. Vergara, Executive Director  
Date: June 1<sup>st</sup>, 2022  
Re: Manitoba Referee Shortage Update

Dear all,

As many are aware, this 2022 outdoor season, many games have been played without a referee, or with a non-referee trained volunteer.

This communication is to provide everyone with information on the status of the referee shortage, actions that are being taken, and processes to follow in the immediate future.

This is not intended to make excuses, but to give everyone the facts on what we are facing as a community.

## Current Status

Everyone (teams, clubs, community centres, leagues, provincial body, convenors, coaches, parents, players, administrators, volunteers, referees, etc.) is extremely frustrated with games having to be played without referees. We truly understand and wished that in Manitoba we did not have a shortage. However, the situation is the same across the country.

In 2019, pre-pandemic, we had our best recruitment and retention after continuous work for a few years to get the number of referees to increase. In 2019 we had approximately 120 senior referees and about 400 youth referees. The fact is that every year leading up to and including 2019 we would lose about 30% of the referees in the youth system, but we were able to recruit about the same number and hold clinics for the new referees in the spring keeping our numbers relatively steady to have enough referees to assign to the games.

We then got hit with two years of the pandemic when soccer was suspended throughout, and restrictions prohibited having clinics. This meant that we had two years of decreases in referees that we were not able to replace with new referees because of the restrictions.

In 2022, we were able to return to hosting clinics for new referees, following up with referees from previous years to encourage them to return, doing refresher courses, etc. However, the number for both senior referees and youth referees now registered and available have dramatically decreased to the point that we have only about 89 senior referees (25% decrease) and 216 youth referees (45% decrease), of which 130 are small sided who may only ref U9 and U10. This is a huge impact on the number of referees available to cover the number of games in the summer season, whether that is youth recreational, youth development/premier, or senior games.

MSA has access to every single referee as we must report their registration to Canada Soccer every year. Our database even includes inactive referees, who have also been contacted to come back to referee, with very limited success, but nonetheless we have tried that approach. The MSA is responsible for assigning the referees for all competitions, and every single referee that is available in the system is being assigned to their respective skill level game. During the weekend many referees are doing more than one game per day to help ensure more games are officiated.

The number of referees is simply not enough, and it very much looks like we are back to square one. Working with the leagues, clubs, community centres, and others we will need to rebuild the number of referees to get back to the pre-pandemic numbers of 2019.

We have worked very hard at getting referees to return and if it wasn't because of the extra efforts to date our numbers would be even lower. This still is not good enough and we have to find more solutions.

This shortage is a vicious cycle, as most of the referee mentors, coaches, and assessors that help to support young referees are also referees themselves. To currently have games officiated by a trained referee, those referee mentors, coaches and assessors are not available to carry out that support duty as they must referee. This hurts the system and the development and quality of the referees. But we realize most want to have the games with a referee.

### **Referee Task Force**

We have received many suggestions from different groups and individuals on how to improve the current situation.

We can confirm that we have tried many of the suggestions even before they were provided to us. However, we still need to work on improving the number of referees in the system.

As such, we have coordinated with the voting members (Region and Leagues) to establish a Referee Task Force. The Task Force will be populated with representatives as suggested by the voting members that may include persons from club, community centre, referees, leagues, and provincial referee department to meet immediately to address short and long term solutions for the referee shortage crisis, including reviewing all the suggestions.

We realize that the Referee Task Force won't be able to change the crisis overnight, but it will work very hard to find the best possible solutions as quick as possible.

### **Immediate Process to Follow**

We need to understand that based on the current status as mentioned above there will continue to be games without referees, but every available referee will be assigned.

We can assure everyone that we want all games played, even if an assigned referee does not show up or a referee is not assigned due to the shortage.

In these situations, which the league may consider special circumstances and allows for volunteer referees to officiate a game, please proceed in this fashion:

- Coaches should always have copies of game sheets with them. The WYSA and MSA game sheets are attached to this memo and will be on the MSA ([click here](#)) and WYSA ([click here](#)) websites. Coaches, please print copies of the single page game sheet needed.
- Complete the game sheet as we used to do before we had electronic game sheets. Use only one copy for the game.
- If there is a volunteer who referees the game with the agreement of both teams, have the volunteer put their name on the game sheet. When submitting the game sheet put the volunteer information, including full name and address to where the payment should be sent, in the body of the email. The league will collect the volunteer information and submit to the MSA to pay the volunteer.
- Home and away team coaches take a photo of the game sheet for your records.
- Home team submit a photo of the game sheet to the league office via email.
- If there is no volunteer to referee the game. Still play the game and submit the photo of the game sheet to the league office.

In situations where a youth game is played without a volunteer or an assigned referee officiating the game, WYSA will reimburse the team the referee fees at the end of the year. WYSA is keeping track of the games not officiated by a volunteer or referee.

Please note that the games scheduled by the leagues are still sanctioned and insured when we have these types of circumstances. We need to realize that if we cannot move forward with using volunteer when needed, more games will be lost, and we don't want that to happen.

We will endeavour to communicate through the respective league if a game will not have an assigned referee as soon as possible, although we will try until the last minute to find a referee for the game.

We extend our appreciation for your patience and understanding of the current situation.

Thank you.

*Hector*