

How to Become a Referee

People become soccer referees for a variety of reasons. But whether you want to help your local leagues, improve your conditioning, continue your soccer career, learn more about the sport, or someday make it into the MLS, the road to becoming a USSF referee is the same for all. You simply:

1. Attend an entry-level clinic
2. Pass the certification test
3. Get a uniform
4. Connect with assignor(s)
5. Officiate your first game

Step 1: The Entry-level Clinic

All entry-level clinics throughout the state are posted on the Michigan Referee Committee website and they are listed by region. The clinics are offered on different days and at different times of the year, so you can choose the clinic most convenient for your needs. Pick one that does not conflict with work or playing schedules, because you will need to be in class for the duration of the clinic. If you have any questions, call the person listed as the contact for that particular clinic. There is no age limit for persons taking the entry-level class.

The entry-level clinic consists of at least eight hours of instruction which is mostly classroom work, but field demonstrations are used if the site permits. The clinic is usually spread out over two or three days.

To register for the class, click on the web link for that particular session and you will be guided through the registration process. All clinics have a maximum number of participants allowed which varies on the size of the site and other factors. Registering early will hold your place in the class.

Step 2: The Certification Test

The clinic focuses on mastering the FIFA Laws of the Game. At the conclusion of the class, participants will be given a 100 question, multiple choice test. A passing score of 75% or greater is needed for USSF referee certification. Students not achieving a passing score will be allowed to re-take the test at a later date. The message here is to do your homework, read the materials you are given, and don't assume that because you have played, coached, or refereed for years that you will pass with ease. Be prepared. Students successfully completing the entry-level clinic and exam will be certified as Grade 9 USSF referees.

Step 2a: Moving Ahead

After holding a Grade 9 badge for a minimum of one season (either the spring or the fall season), qualified candidates may elect to go on to the Grade 8 certification in what is known as a Bridge Class. Bridge Classes are also posted on the MRC website and are offered at different times of the year depending on local demand. Qualified candidates are those persons who are 14 years of age or older by January 1 of the certification year.

The Bridge Class consists of eight additional hours of instruction and takes a much deeper look at the Laws of the Game. The registration process is identical to that of the entry-level classes. The website link will take you through the registration and payment process and will hold your spot in the class.

Step 3: Getting a Uniform

The basic referee uniform consists of a yellow pin-striped jersey, black short, black sock with three white stripes, and black shoes. There are no restrictions on the shoes, but they must be comfortable and not cause blisters. Your instructor will discuss the uniform at some point in class and will offer suggestions on how to get a uniform. You will need other equipment as well, including a watch (preferably one with a stopwatch), flags, a whistle, a small book to keep score, a pen or pencil, a flipping coin, and red and yellow cards.

Step 4: Connect with an Assignor

The next step in getting games is to let an assignor know you are certified and available. Your instructor should give you information on local contacts during the clinic. You can find a local referee assignor by going to the "Assignors" link on the Michigan Referee Committee website and clicking the map on your county. Finally, you can ask other referees or local leagues in your area for contacts that coordinate their game assignments.

Remember, having the referee license does not guarantee you assignments and assignors won't necessarily come looking for you. You have to take the initiative if you want to work games.

Step 5: Working your Games

Now you are a referee, with all of the accompanying headaches, frostbite/sunburn, and last minute schedule changes that come with it. Knowing the Laws of the Game is only the foundation of being a good referee. It takes top fitness, constantly honing your skills, a professional demeanor, and unwavering focus. Experience is the best teacher. Work games. Watch other referees and "borrow" what might make you a better official. At the end of the year, usually in November or December, you will need to re-certify your license for the next year. The recertification clinic consists of five hours of advanced-level instruction and a 50-question test. Clinic dates and locations can be found on the MRC website as they become scheduled.