

The reasons and motivations to be a referee are as different and varied as the personalities, ages and skill levels of referees themselves. Everyone has their own reason and motivation for beginning their career as a referee. Some may do it for financial rewards or “part time job”, some feel the need to serve others in some capacity, while others love the game of soccer and want to help make it as fair and enjoyable for players, coaches and fans as possible. Many simply start refereeing to help fill a void while their children play. Of course, these are just a few examples.

All referees affiliated with USSF and FIFA have a designated referee grade. Most referees start out their referee career as either a Grade 8 or Grade 9 referee, which are the entry levels for FIFA certification. The referee program is designed to allow individuals to advance, or “upgrade”, from these entry levels all the way up to Grade 1 or International and World Cup status as they increase in experience, knowledge and desire.

As an entry level referee you will most likely receive assignments to work mainly as an Assistant Referee or even as a Center Referee for younger, less competitive games until you have acquired much needed game experience and understanding. After working a number of games, however, you may feel you have the skills and confidence to be entrusted to work at higher levels of competition and have a desire to upgrade to the next level. Others of you, however, may be happy where you're at and wonder what the incentives and benefits of upgrading are. After all, upgrading is not easy. Specific requirements for upgrading from one grade to another are described in detail below. Briefly they include minimum requirements in:

- Minimum age
- Game experience at the appropriate level
- Time in present grade
- Participation in training courses
- Written examinations
- Assessments
- Physical Fitness Test

So Why Upgrade?

Just as there are numerous reasons and motivations in becoming a referee, the benefits and incentives of upgrading are just as various and specific to each individual. The following are but a few of the more obvious potential, rewards of upgrading:

- Upgrading provides opportunities for higher-level, more competitive matches and allows you to referee players who are more skillful. As you upgrade, you may be given the opportunity to travel to other parts of the state, other states, or even internationally. For those with the desire and learned skills and abilities, you can even work your way up to the professional level, working MLS matches and possibly even World Cup itself. You will never know how good you are until you challenge yourself to become better.
- The higher your grade level, the more variety of games you'll have opportunity for. For instance, as a Grade 4, you could potentially officiate a U12 girls match Wednesday evening, a PDL, (Professional Development League), match on Friday night, and work as a Fourth Official for a Real Salt Lake home game Saturday evening. It is important to remember that officiating at the same level all the time, does not help you grow as an official.
- Upgrading provides opportunity to work with more experienced referees who are also working (on a more regular basis) the more competitive matches. The more levels of play you officiate, the more friendships you'll form. As your experience broadens, so does your network of referee friends and “family. In addition, coaches, players, and fans will come to recognize and respect you and you'll all enjoy the game more.

- The process of upgrading will make you a better official as you gain greater understanding of the game. You will receive advanced training and classroom instruction including a greater variety of referee related topics going beyond the laws of the game to include player, coach, and referee psychology, aspects of the "spirit" of the game, people management techniques, etc. In addition you'll participate in physical fitness tests, assessments, and interact with a greater number of experienced referees. All of which will make you better at what you do on and off the field. This will also allow you to give back to other referees, especially new ones, as you're able to share that knowledge and experience to help others.
- Upgrading gives referees an opportunity to receive much needed feedback from assessors and higher level referees. At a minimum, you will get an annual observation that should encourage you to improve your performance. Theoretically, referees who do not upgrade could referee for years without getting any objective observations on their performance (notwithstanding the constant "help" we all get from parents and coaches on the touchline). If you do not get this and do not try to improve, you could develop a number of bad habits that are difficult to break. If you stay at Grade 8 or 9, the only feedback you could receive is from parents who think they know more than you do.
- Lastly, at least on this short list of incentives, the opportunity for greater financial reward for all the time and effort you spend on the soccer field will increase. You will make more money, because you will work more games as the referee and not as an assistant referee. You will have the opportunity to work highly competitive games that have a higher pay scale. And you will have the ability and opportunity to work a much wider variety and number of games simply by gaining the experience and knowledge that you gain.

If you are interested in upgrading, and would like to start on the journey of meeting the upgrade requirements listed below, let your assigner know that you have a desire to advance as soon as you can. He or she will then be able to work with you and offer you game assignments that will assist you in meeting those requirements. Also you should remember that you are responsible for monitoring the number and level of games you have worked in the past. You will need to show some documentation when you apply for the upgrade, so keep accurate records: game date, opposing teams, referee partners, age bracket, etc.

Lastly, once you are close to meeting the game count requirements and because of the complexity of upgrading, it is strongly recommended that you contact and work with the State Referee Administrator and State Director of Assessment to ensure you satisfy all requirements.