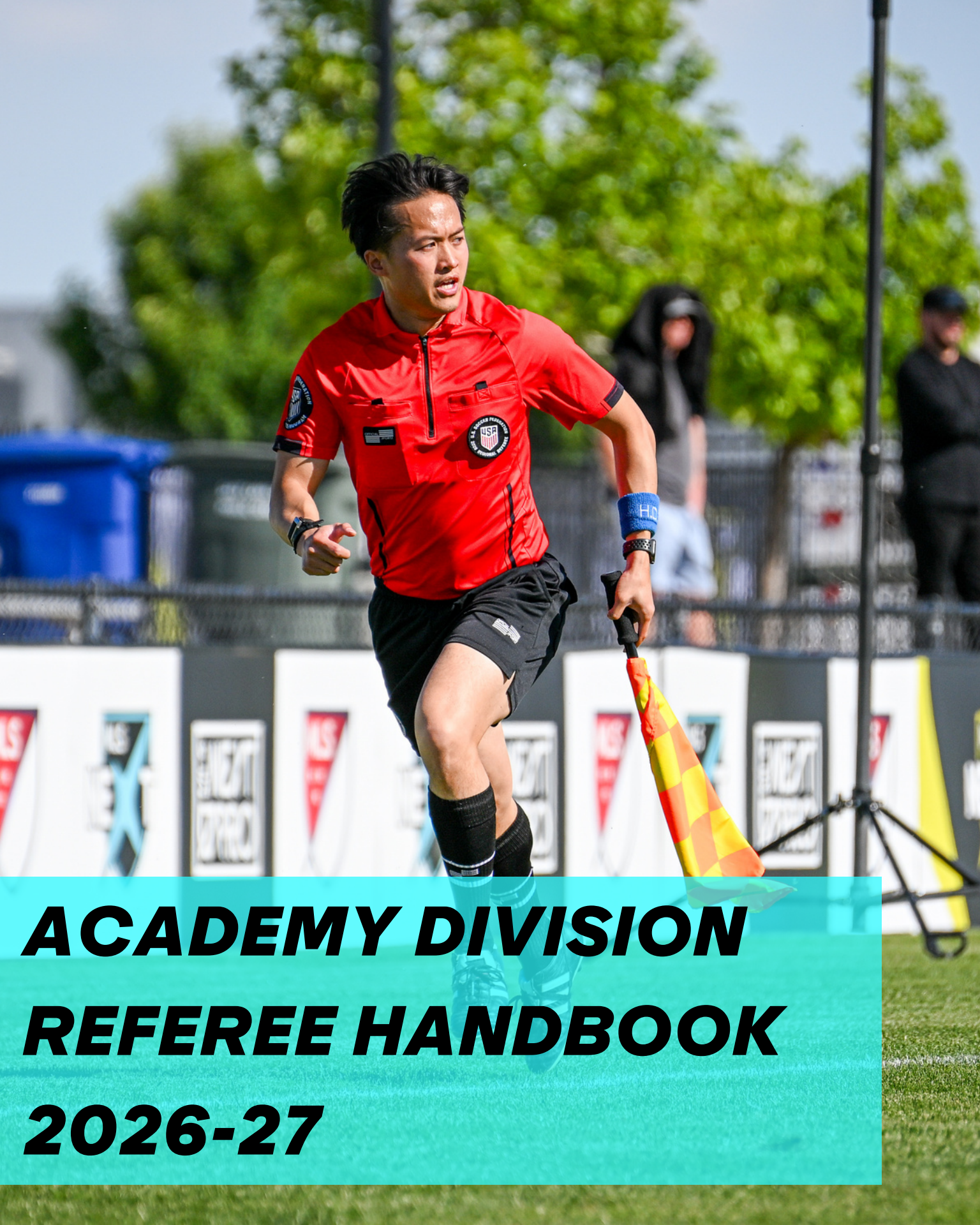




***ACADEMY DIVISION
REFEREE HANDBOOK
2026-27***

CONTACTS - UPDATED FOR 2026-27

MLS NEXT Academy Division Referee Hotline

- **(407) 205-8631**

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For the 2026-27 season, MLS NEXT will follow the 2026-27 IFAB Laws of the Game.

PRE-MATCH

ATC/QMP

- Verify with Home Team location of the QMP (Qualified Medical Personnel), ATC (Certified Athletic Trainer)
 - **If QMP or ATC is not present the Match cannot start until they arrive.**
 - If both teams arrive at the field and home team does not provide Qualified Medical Personnel (QMP), the match will not be played, the home team will forfeit the Match and be fined.
 - Referee must notify league contact and this must be noted in the Kitman Labs match report notes while also checking the "Disciplinary Issues" checkbox.

Technical Areas

- Technical Area must have adequate seating for both teams Players and Staff.
- Spectators are not allowed to enter the field of play or the Technical Area at any time.
- Home club must provide adequate hydration for both teams.
- Maximum of 5 technical staff members permitted in technical area. (Not including medical personnel).

Player Check-In

- All officials will receive an invite to join Kitman Labs to activate their account once they have been assigned to their match in Assingr.com.
- Each team will/shall have uploaded a Digital Match Roster (DMR) and will/shall be available to the officials a minimum of 60-minutes prior to kick off.
- Referees have access to this via the Match Details page when logged in through their personal Phone, iPad and/or Laptop. It will be available to all members of the Referee Crew. (This is not an App)
- Staff will have indicated starting 11 players.
- Referees will check in all Players and Staff from the Match Details page.
 - **If ALL players and Staff are not listed the match cannot start until the coach/admin updates the roster.**
- Rosters must include Player Jersey Number, and must match the players Jersey.
 - **If not indicated correctly Referee should ask the coach to update this information from their side.**

MATCH

Uniforms

- Home team is required to change if there is a conflict between teams.
- Home team wears the light uniforms and Away team wears dark for all single fixtures or first Match of double fixtures.
- All uniforms must be numbered with an MLS Next Logo patch on the left sleeve.
- In second day (Sunday) of a double fixture, the home team wears dark and away team wears light so teams traveling do not need to worry about laundry during the trip.

Match Balls

- U13: Size 4 match ball must be used.
- U14-U19: Size 5 match ball must be used.
- Minimum of 3 Match balls supplied by the Home Team will be verified by the officials.
- Match balls should be inflated to 12 psi for Matches.

Match Duration

- U13: 3 x 25-minute periods plus 2 x 5 minute intermissions
 - Minimum for completed Match, 50 minutes
- U14: 2 x 40-minute halves plus 10-minute half time
 - Minimum for completed Match, 60-minutes (half + 20-minutes)
- U15, U16, U17, U19: 2 x 45-minute halves plus 10-minute half time
 - Minimum for completed Match, 75-minutes (half + 30-minutes)
- During regular season play there is NO provision for overtime. If the score is tied at the end of regulation time, the match ends in a draw.

Substitutions

- Any stoppage of play which the Referee at his/her discretion allows a player substitution, may include but not limited to the following: Throw-in (either team), Goal Kick, Corner Kick, after a Goal, stoppage for Player/Staff Misconduct, stoppage for injury.
 - Halftime does not count as a substitution moment
- U13: Unrestricted substitutions. 2 moments per period.
 - With exception for head injuries
- U14: Unrestricted substitutions. 3 moments per half.
 - With exception for head injuries
- U15-U19: Unlimited over 3 moments per half. No re-entry per half.
 - With exception for head injuries
- It is the referee's responsibility to confirm all information is correct.

MATCH

Head Injury Substitution Procedure

- A player who is suspected to have suffered a head injury may be substituted while being evaluated by a Qualified Medical Professional (QMP). The substitution for the evaluation of the concussion/head injury will not count against the team's total number of substitution moments in the match (temporary substitution).
- If the player is deemed by a QMP to not have suffered a concussion, the player may re-enter the match at any stoppage of play and must replace the temporary substitute; this head injury evaluation substitution will not count as a substitution moment. Furthermore, the temporary substitute will be able to re-enter the match at a later time if not previously substituted out earlier in the match for a non-head related substitution.
- If the player is deemed by the QMP to have suffered a possible concussion and is not cleared to return to play, the temporary substitute will be considered a permanent substitute. This will not count as a substitution moment.

Policy Principles

- A "concussion substitution" may be made regardless of the number of substitutes or moments already used.
- If all substitutes have been used the "concussion substitute" can be a player who has previously been substituted.
- Each team is permitted an unlimited amount of "concussion substitutions".
- If the team has only 2 goalkeepers eligible to play on the game day roster and the starting goalkeeper has been subbed out during the match and the new goalkeeper is suspected of a concussion, the previously substituted goalkeeper will be allowed to reenter for the head injury evaluation.
- If the goalkeeper cannot return, the previous goalkeeper will remain in the match.

MATCH

U13 Field Structure

- The field dimension minimum of 65 x 84.
- The goals should be placed on the goalkeeper box (6 yard).
- If it's not possible to move the goals at the home field because they are fixed, then proceed without any adjustment.
- With the goals moved the 18-yard box will now be 12 yards and used as lined.
- If a PK is awarded, the ball on the top of the 18-yard box. (12 yards).
- A retention line must be marked 20 yards from the corner flag using a cone or flag on the sidelines.
 - The retention line only comes into play during dead ball restarts from the 6 yard box (ex. goal kicks).
 - Once the ball is played on the first touch, the opposing team can engage.
- There will only be on switch of sides during the game.
- The switch will occur after the first period.
- For example, if Team A is going north during the first period, they will switch directions during the first intermission and then go south for the second and third periods.

Postponing A Match

- MLS NEXT League Office is the only authority to cancel or postpone a scheduled match.
 - Do not cancel or postpone a match or depart from a venue before contacting a MLS NEXT representative and receiving approval.

Weather

- Any decision needs to be made with 3 parties: home team coach, away team coach and the official. The 3 parties need to discuss and agree on the questions below.
 - What is the longest you can wait to kick off?
 - How long do you have the fields?
 - How long can the referees stay?
 - How long can the away team stay?
 - Is this a local matchup? How easily can the match be rescheduled?
- **The weekend Hotline only needs to be updated in case of a cancellation, not for delay.**

Injuries

- Injuries that occur during the match involving a player(s) should be left to the QMP to manage and if need be, contact further emergency services as required.
- If the injury is severe and needs further assistance the MLS NEXT Match Day contact must be alerted.
- Referee must report all injuries in the Kitman Labs Match Report.

Spectators or Outside Interference

- Spectator conduct is the responsibility of the club staff.
- Match delays due to spectators or outside interference must be reported by the Referee who is responsible for contacting the MLS NEXT Match Day contact.
- If personal safety is a concern the Officials should contact 911.
- All specators must sit across from their own team's bench.

DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT

Procedure

- What do you do....
- When officials have heard/seen a derogatory slur or behavior:
 - Immediately issue a red card
 - Stop the game
 - Inform coaches
 - Coaches bring their team together to inform them of the incident
- When officials haven't heard/seen a derogatory slur or gesture
 - Make sure the player making the allegation is given time and space to explain the situation fully
 - Stop the game
 - Consult with other members of the referee crew to establish if they witnessed the incident
 - Inform coaches
 - Coaches bring their team together and inform them of the allegation
- How to report the incident
 - Add incident information in the Kitman Labs match report (see pg. 7)
 - Select the Disciplinary Issue checkbox under the match notes section in the Kitman Labs match report
 - Notify the match operations hotline at halftime or after the match (646-682-5999)

MLS NEXT is committed to facilitating a diverse and inclusive environment. Discrimination or offensive remarks of any kind arising out of or in connection with an individual's background, ethnicity, religious beliefs, sexual orientation, or identity, in English or any language, will not be tolerated.

Examples of Banned Terms

"Sp*c" / "Sp*ck" / "Bean*r" / "Wetb*ck"	"Ch*nk" / "Sl*nt"
"Rag He*d"	"K*ke"
"N*gga" / "N*gger" / "N*gro"	"Monkey" / "Mono" / "Gorilla" / "Gorila"
"Black Boy" / "White Boy" / "Jew Boy"	"Cracker"
"P*to" / "Mar*cón"	"F*g" / "F*ggot" / "Homo" / "B*tty Boy"

POST MATCH

Match Reporting

- It is the assigned center referee’s responsibility to complete and ensure the match report is submitted by the end of match day. It is the referee crew’s responsibility to ensure the match report is accurate: score, cautions, sendoffs, injuries, weather, and any important added match information that requires league admin attention.
- If you have any issues with the Kitman Labs match report including delay in submitting the report, you must contact MLS NEXT match may contact.
- Yellow Cards (cautions) and Red Cards are tracked and must be submitted in the match report.
- It is recommended the referee complete the match report before leaving the field.
- The final submission of the match report must be submitted no later than 10:30 PM on match day. This includes evening matches that kick off after 6:00 PM.
- Check the Discipline Issue Check-Box for, egregious discipline issues or anything requiring MLS NEXT Staff attention.
- All injuries should be included in the Notes Section regardless of the Player returning to play or not.
- Match Reports are **REQUIRED** to be fully submitted the same day.

Referee Fees (2026 ONLY)

- MLS Next clubs will be processing Referee fees through Assignr.com, available for you to review and manage using your current access to the website. **Please ensure that your bank information is updated or there will be delays in payment processing.**

Age	Center	AR1	AR2	4th
U13	\$80.00	\$50.00	\$50.00	\$25.00
U14	\$90.00	\$55.00	\$55.00	\$25.00
U15	\$100.00	\$65.00	\$65.00	\$25.00
U16	\$110.00	\$70.00	\$70.00	\$30.00
U17	\$110.00	\$70.00	\$70.00	\$30.00
U19	\$110.00	\$70.00	\$70.00	\$30.00

POST MATCH

Referee Fees (Beginning 2027)

- MLS Next clubs will be processing Referee fees through Assignr.com, available for you to review and manage using your current access to the website. Please ensure that your bank information is updated or there will be delays in payment processing.

Age Group	Center	AR1	AR2	4th
U13	\$85.00	\$55.00	\$55.00	\$30.00
U14	\$95.00	\$60.00	\$60.00	\$30.00
U15	\$105.00	\$70.00	\$70.00	\$30.00
U16	\$115.00	\$75.00	\$75.00	\$35.00
U17	\$115.00	\$75.00	\$75.00	\$35.00
U19	\$115.00	\$75.00	\$75.00	\$35.00