

Ken Aston Cup

The Ultimate Referee Competition

2026 Ken Aston Cup Rules (as of 4/15/26)

1. Overview

The Ken Aston Cup (“The Cup”) is an annual (hopefully) referee “competition” within an AYSO Invitational tournament that promotes (a) refereeing development through feedback from experienced referee evaluators, and (b) assessment excellence through sharing of best practices. Teams of referees are evaluated on their performance during tournament matches by teams of evaluators.

Specific objectives of The Cup include:

- Provide personalized, actionable feedback to volunteer referees using AYSO assessment best practices
- Recognize excellent referee skills
- Reinforce desirable game management skills
- Promote assessor calibration and peer review

In 2026, The Cup will be presented in conjunction with the **California Strawberry Cup** on May 2-3, 2026 in Camarillo, CA, in AYSO Region 68, Area W, Section 10.

Participation is open to currently registered AYSO referee volunteers from all Sections. Competition will take place in two divisions: Advanced and Excellence. The Advanced Division is open to referees with a certification level of Advanced, Intermediate or Regional Referee (i.e. no National or National 2 Referees). The Excellence Division is open to referees with any referee certification level, including National Referee. Prior winners of the Ken Aston Cup are not eligible to compete, but they may be invited as evaluators.

Specific matches for both divisions will be selected by The Cup Directors in consultation with the Strawberry Cup officials. Advanced Division matches will generally be drawn from selected 12U and / or 14U divisions. Excellence Division matches will generally be drawn from selected 16U and / or 19U divisions.

A maximum of 12 competing referee teams in each division will participate in The Cup. Any Section in AYSO may nominate referee teams consisting of 3 referees to compete. Each three person referee team will be evaluated on three matches within its Division. Evaluations will be conducted by experienced referee evaluators / assessors and feedback will be provided to each referee team after each match. Scores will be assigned by the evaluators in several key categories and tabulated for the full tournament. Referee teams will be asked to rate evaluators as well, and after the tournament, evaluators will receive such feedback.

AYSO Region 68, the host region for the **The Strawberry Cup**, will provide treasury services (depository and disbursement) for The Cup.

2. Referee Teams

Participation will be limited to a maximum of twelve 3-person referee teams per divisions (24 total) or less as tournament capacity dictates. Any AYSO Section may each nominate 3 person referee teams to compete. Each Section may determine the most appropriate method for selecting teams from that Section to participate in The Cup. The nominating Section Referee Administrator is responsible for confirming that the individuals on each referee team representing that Section are qualified to officiate the game levels assigned. (Section Referee Administrators may advise The Cup staff that a nominated referee team should only be assigned 12U, for Advanced Division, or 16U, for Excellence Division, matches.) Any applications received directly by The Cup staff will be forwarded to a Section Referee Administrator for consideration. Applications nominating the competing referee teams should be received by The Cup Directors no later than April 22, 2026. The Cup Directors will make the final selection of teams that will be invited to compete based on the applications and such other input as they may deem appropriate. Selection goals will include (a) at least one referee team from each of AYSO's Sections; (a) at least two teams in each division (Advanced and Excellence) from Sections 11, 10 and 1; and (c) inclusion of youth referees in Advanced Division teams. Date of receipt of applications may also be considered. The Cup Directors will notify selected teams and their associated Section Referee Administrators of selection as soon as such decisions are made. The Cup Directors plan to complete initial selections by May 10 and receive acceptances by April 22, 2026. Early nominations will likely result in early notifications. The Cup Directors may designate up to 3 teams per division as standby teams for The Cup competition. If such standby teams cannot be accommodated in The Cup, the Strawberry Cup referee schedulers will use their best efforts to assign other matches for such referee teams to work.

Each three person referee team will be evaluated on three matches. Each individual on the three person team must act as Referee on one of the assigned matches and Assistant Referee on two of the assigned matches. Each team may choose which team member is the referee for each assigned match.

Once approved as a participating referee team, no changes to referee team membership are permitted without the approval of the nominating Section Referee Administrator and The Cup Directors.

In the event that a member of a competing team cannot continue (e.g. for injury), standby referees may be assigned to join that team for the remaining matches. To be eligible to win The Cup, a competing team must have the same 3 referees on all three of its matches.

3. Evaluators

Any AYSO Section may nominate Evaluators for The Cup, based on the recommendations of the Section Directors of Referee Assessment and / or the Section Referee Administrators. We expect the majority of our Evaluators to come from Sections 10, 1 & 11. The total number of evaluators will be determined by The Cup Directors. To help accomplish the objective of providing constructive, actionable feedback to the referee team, consistent with the AYSO National Referee Program guidelines, Evaluator candidates should generally be experienced referee assessors with excellent interpersonal skills and current knowledge of the Laws of the Game as well as AYSO Rules and Regulations. Current certification as an AYSO Assessor or National Assessor is highly desirable, but not required. It is an explicit objective of The Cup that referee participants come away from their

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experience with a feeling that they learned something they can use to improve their performance and that the feedback they received was constructive.

Names, contact information and accommodation requests for each of the nominated Evaluators from each Section must be received by The Cup Directors no later than April 22, 2026.

Final invitations to participate as a Cup Evaluator will be sent by The Cup Directors via email as soon as such determinations are made. Early nominations of Evaluators will likely result in early notification.

A limited number of hotel accommodations (double occupancy) may be made available for Evaluators travelling from long distances. Requests for housing accommodation should be submitted at the time Evaluators are nominated.

Subject to having a sufficient number of evaluators, each match will have a minimum of 3 Evaluators assigned. Feedback to the referee team will be given in a debriefing session lasting no more than 20 minutes. Feedback should be actionable and constructive. Video recordings may be made of some of the debriefings for the purposes of compiling training material for referee assessors and evaluators.

Evaluators will be assigned to matches in such a way as to maximize utilization and minimize any personal conflicts that may exist. Evaluators who are available for both days of the competition will likely be assigned to 3-5 evaluations during The Cup.

Evaluators will be briefed by The Cup Directors on their responsibilities and will be provided with scoring sheets and instructions prior to their first evaluation.

4. Recognition

Each referee participating in The Cup will receive a token of recognition.

The highest scoring referee team will receive additional tokens of achievement and recognition.

There will be a brief awards ceremony after the last match of The Cup competition.

5. Match Assignment

Generally, each referee team will be assigned two matches on the first day of The Cup and one match on the second day. Variations from this may be made for reasons of match availability and/or schedule conflicts. Matches will generally be assigned so as to minimize any overlap of home Section/Area/Region for playing teams vs. referee teams.

Matches for both competing referee teams and evaluators will not be scheduled 'back-to-back' so that evaluators and referee teams have sufficient time to debrief and get ready for the next match.

6. Observations and Upgrade Assessments

Neither assessments nor observations for referee badge upgrades will be performed within The Cup operations. The Strawberry Cup referee management may or may not accommodate such assessments outside The Cup operations as they choose.

7. Scoring

Referee teams will be scored in each match in several categories using a score sheet. These categories will include general items (such as appearance, pre-game instructions, etc.), positioning, signals, teamwork, and match control. Evaluation criteria will be consistent with AYSO National Referee Program guidelines and recommendations.

The score sheet will consist of two main parts: 1) quantitative category scores; 2) recommendations for improvement to the referee teams. The recommendations for improvement will also be used to help calibrate assessor feedback.

Each referee team will be evaluated based on the performance of all team members in each match. Each team's scores will be combined across the three matches, and the referee team in each Division with the highest combined score after 3 matches will be the winner for that Division. The actual method for computing scores will not be disclosed.

The Ken Aston Cup Directors will appoint a scorer, who will compile all the scores given to each competing referee team to determine an overall winner in each division by the last game of the competition. Each evaluator team will turn in their scoring sheets to the scorer immediately after the debrief for the match and prior to their next scheduled evaluation.

8. Controlling Rules

Matches will be conducted in accordance with The Laws of the Game, AYSO National Rules & Regulations, and the Strawberry Cup tournament rules. Any questions regarding rules of the matches will be resolved by the Strawberry Cup Tournament Director. Any questions regarding The Cup will be resolved by the Ken Aston Cup Director. Decisions of such directors are final. The most up-to-date version of these rules will be posted on the web site – kenastoncup.org

9. Fees

There will be no fees for referee team participation.