



I've received a number of questions regarding Official Sports Inc's release of the new uniform style and color (green!), and the new sock style. Most of the questions relate to whether referees must replace their existing uniforms and whether Mustang will require any one style or another. Here are some answers and some thoughts:

I heard there is a new referee uniform. What is the story on this?

Here is the press release from the USSF:

http://www.ussoccer.com/articles/viewArticle.jsp_3932169.html

Here is a link to OSI's web page with the new pro uniforms:

http://www.officialsports.com/ussf_pro_uniforms.htm

The pictures on this page show the new green color and stripe style. All of the colors are now sold in the new stripe pattern only (the old pattern is discontinued by OSI, but not other manufacturers...yet...see below).

Is there a requirement that referees replace their current style uniforms with the new style?

The official answer from the USSF: "The old striping pattern is still USSF-approved and acceptable to wear during games. In youth and adult amateur games, it is also acceptable for the crew to wear a combination of new and old uniforms. Referees are encouraged to purchase the new uniform when replacing their old version as the updated stripe pattern will be grandfathered into becoming the official referee uniforms of U.S. Soccer."

The real world answer (in my opinion): As youth referees, the question we have to ask ourselves is how much does it matter whether a referee crew is all wearing the same style uniform? In spite of the guidance above that mixed uniform styles are ok, I think we would all agree that it is better not to mix.

Projecting professionalism and capability begins with the appearance of the referee crew. A crew that is dressed identically looks like a team. Credibility is bestowed upon the crew as a result. At the recreational and lower competitive levels it will be fine to mix new and old styles, although if all three referees do not have the new style and they do have the old style, they will usually wear the old style rather than mix. For higher level games the referee crew will almost always dress alike, meaning that the old styles will continue to be worn for the vast majority of games for the near future. As always, the same sock style should always be worn by all three referees.

Should I buy the new styles?

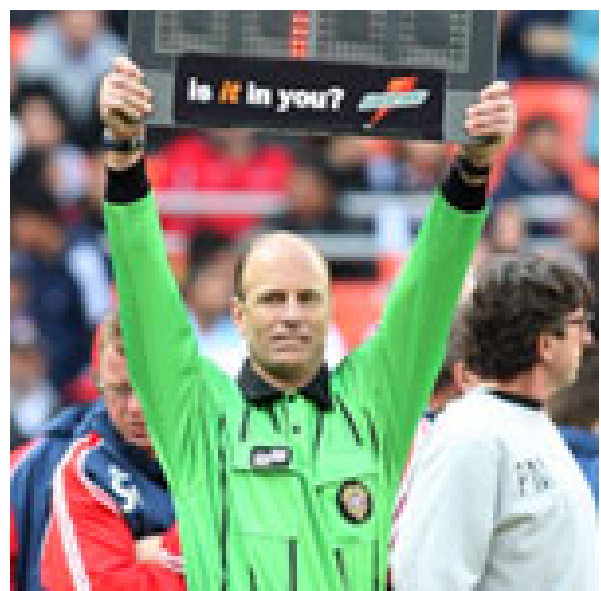
If you agree with my answer above that a crew will wear the old style unless all three refs have the new style, then an investment in new uniforms may result in you carrying a bunch of new jerseys in your bag but not much opportunity to wear them! Only when critical mass is reached will there be a reasonable probability that all three referees on any given game will have the new style, color, sleeve combination to allow them to be worn regularly. Critical mass could be one or two years from now, if it is ever reached.

Wait, won't critical mass eventually be reached?

The new style is an outgrowth of the new 3-year contract between Official Sports and the USSF through 2010.

http://www.ussoccer.com/articles/viewArticle.jsp_281748.html

The prior contract was a 10-year agreement signed in 1998. The trend is to shorter contracts in the US and the rest of the world. The national federations like the royalties they get from new referee uniform sales, and the manufacturers sure like having 150,000 referees buy all new kits! Why do we care about the contracts? Because there is a reasonable chance that the contract will go to another supplier when it comes up for bid, if not in 2010, then in later years. If another supplier wins the contract, the official USSF uniform style will undoubtedly change again. As an example of this kind of change, Official Sports produced the official referee jersey for the English Premier League for the past few seasons, but this year Umbro won the contract and the uniform style for the EPL referees changed (I wonder if all the referees in the United Kingdom are changing to Umbro...?)



For the past 10 years, in the US we have had a period of stability in the uniform style. Those days are probably gone. The question we each have to ask ourself before investing in new uniforms is whether we want to do this again in three years? And three years after that? At some point, it may turn out that 145,000 of the 150,000 registered soccer referees are better off "making a stand" and staying with a relatively "standard" uniform style produced by a number of different suppliers. Is that the style we all have in our bags right now? Should we let the 5000 top referees in the country worry about uniform changes and stick with what we have? Many of them are given their uniforms, and the rest are paid high enough game fees to reasonably be asked to purchase a new set of jerseys at every contract change. The same cannot be said of your average youth soccer referee!



So what's the answer already?!

If you really want to buy a new style OSI jersey, I would recommend that you consider the yellow and/or the green. For those of us who already have all 4 colors in long and short sleeves, the obvious one to buy is green. Nobody can have an old style green jersey because it doesn't exist, so if all three refs have a green jersey, it's the new style!

But the majority of refs don't have all the color and sleeve combinations. Most only have one yellow jersey. If these refs want to buy one of the new style jerseys, then the one to get is yellow. It's most likely that out of all the colors, yellow will be the first one to reach critical mass in the new style. Thus you'll sooner find yourself at games where all three refs have the new style in yellow than with any other color, and you'll get the chance to actually wear your new jersey!

My plan

My personal plan is to take a wait-and-see approach, and I recommend this as the most cost-effective approach. If I see that a lot of refs have bought the green jersey, I might buy one. And once my yellow short-sleeve wears out (and it has 350+ games on it!), I will look and see what's going on with uniforms at that point in time and if a large number of new style yellow jerseys are out there, I'll probably buy one. But unless everyone else jumps on the bandwagon and buys all new jerseys really quickly, leaving me as the odd-man out, I don't plan to buy any new jerseys until my old ones wear out, and that's going to take a long, long time.

Keep in mind that, unless Olympus, Law Five, Score, and other jersey suppliers go to the new style and drop the old style, the old style shirts will still be available. Perhaps in a year or two, one of these manufacturers will have risen and taken the place of OSI as the supplier to the vast majority of referees in this country who don't want to get on the "new uniform treadmill" and who prefer to spend their hard earned referee dollars on something other than \$500 worth of new uniforms every few years. We'll have to see how this plays out, and I think a seat on the sideline is a good place to be for a while.

Bill