

Atef Iskander

Inducted January 22, 2009

Atef Iskander's introduction to Oklahoma Soccer came in 1979 while a student at the University of Tulsa studying for his PHD in Geophysics. Fellow student Rick Priest had started an adult team and asked Atef to join the squad. At the first team meeting, Priest told Atef he was one of the two players who must attend a referee meeting because each team was required to send two players. "I didn't want to referee." said Iskander
"I just wanted to play soccer, but I went and that's how it all started."

Born in Cairo, Egypt, Atef attended Cairo University and then came to the United States to get a degree "I played soccer in Egypt, but my main sport was water polo." says Atef. He attended the South Dakota School of Mines and Technology in Rapid City, South Dakota, gaining BS in Mathematics and a Master's Degree in Geological engineering. "After two years of classes at TU, I quit and started my own business with my brother." said Iskander. While starting up his own business, Atef became immersed in local soccer activities. In 1980, he officiated high school matches in Tulsa and was working in the Bixby Soccer Club as a referee, an assignor, Area Referee, and eventually club president.

It was while officiating local matches that Broken Arrow's Mano Palma spotted Iskander and began telling his referee friends of an "up and coming" official from Bixby. Atef began working to gain the assessments and games required to attain the coveted State Referee badge. "I remember the first regionals held in Oklahoma in 1982. I worked those games with referees such as Richard Brook, Russ Staurovsky, Tom Iadevaia, and others." At a U19 state championship in East Tulsa, Atef had a Peter Aradi moment. "Peter handed me a note after the match and told me to read it later. When I opened it, he had written that I did well, but I needed to lose 25 pounds. I lost the weight."

By 1985 he had attained the state's highest ranking - a State Referee grade 5. The Oklahoma Soccer Association appointed Atef the State Referee Administrator that year and he held the office for three years. Atef was determined to gain the highest badge available in the United States Soccer Federation - a national badge. He trained and prepared himself for that task and in 1992 achieved his goal. The previous year he gained his USSF State Instructor badge after spending ten days in training at Colorado Springs at the Olympic Training Center. After holding the National badge for three years, Atef retired from refereeing and focused on another aspect of soccer officiating – assessments. In 1995 Atef became a National Assessor and in the same year was appointed State Youth Referee Administrator.

In all aspects of his referee career, Atef has been determined to promote excellence in officiating. Spending hours observing young refs or instructing them or assessing them he wants Oklahoma to be known for its quality referees.

The Iskander family of wife Becky, daughter Sherene (who also referees and plays on a U19 team and at Holland Hall) and son Matthew (who chose not to play soccer) have supported atef as he moved from referee to coach when Sherene began playing.

Atef's advice to new referees and coaches is simple and wise. Watch games and if you are a referee, watch the referee on as many games as you can.