

# VSA Meeting Minutes

**August 4, 2025 @ 6:00 p.m.**

**Call to Order:** by Rich DeGraff-Murphy @ 6:02 p.m.

## **Attendance:**

**In-Person:** Rich DeGraff-Murphy (President); Kyl Koenig (Secretary); Keith Roberts (Director of Risk Management); Matt Spitznagle (Treasurer); Andrew Minnis (Executive Director), Jason Mariko (Technical Director); Lori Levinson (Director of Operations)

**Remote:** NONE

**Absent:** Bill Edwards; Emily Milbank

## **1. Approval of Previous Minutes**

- Date of Previous Meeting: July 8, 2025
- Action: Motion to approve minutes as written
- Result: Approved unanimously

## **2. Public Comment:**

- NONE

## **3. President's Report**

- New Technical Director Jason Mariko introduced and welcomed; anticipated significant contributions with ODP and coaching education.
- Tree Farm Lease Negotiations:
  - Essex Town and Essex Junction offered a 4-year lease with a one-year option, less than the expected 12–15 years.
  - Concern: Short-term lease disincentivizes property investment; towns possibly considering converting to a multi-sport complex.
  - Ongoing communication with TFMG board member Giles Willey and Mike Nick regarding negotiation strategy.
  - Next Steps: Tree Farm Management Group meeting August 11; Rich to attend and advocate for a longer lease.
- US Youth Soccer (USYS) AGM & National Championship Series (Orlando, FL)
  - USYS instituted awards this year to recognize the work State Associations are doing locally. Three awards presented this year:
    - Vermont Awarded for having the highest ratio of female players in the nation
    - Kansas for Best Host
    - Massachusetts for Largest Number of Registered Players.
- Vermont Registration

- Player registration increased this year to +6000. Pre-Covid had close to 8000. Ambitions to grow to 8k-10k players in next 3-4 years.
- Consortium of State Associations
  - Update: Group of 16 states (varied size and geography) collaborating for joint opportunities (i.e. advertising, partnerships).
  - Vermont leads technology management within the consortium.
  - Hired consultant Brad Stinson (notable for leadership and team-building; cost covered by collaborative grant funding) to aid in formalizing processes; setting goals and direction of the group.
  - Decision-making within consortium often by population (proportional), which can disadvantage smaller states, like Vermont.
  - Consortium was the source for the \$180,000 female participation grant.
  - Vermont staff encouraged to increase involvement; valued for relationships, technology, and shared initiatives.
- National Relationship Building
  - Attendance at USYS facilitated connections with US Soccer and state leadership.
  - Exchanged best practices covering topics including grant applications, referee payment models, and property acquisition for soccer access.
  - Building a reputation nationally as a strong small state.
  - Collaboration with Round Glass: Innovative mental health app for players and referees piloted in Vermont (free, interactive, age/role specific).
  - Ongoing efforts to foster partnerships and share Vermont's initiatives as leading examples.
- Administrative Turnover at National Level:
  - New East Region top soccer rep: Bill Ross (replacing Tim Kutz, succeeded by Jesse Yeager, NJ).
  - Two new Youth Council members: Nick Bushell (Missouri), and Chris Branscomb (Eastern PA)
  - Optimism that fresh perspectives will drive greater engagement.

#### **4. Vice President's Report** (Millbank, via proxy)

- Hall of Fame & Awards Gala Preparation:
  - Full slate of nomination recommendation letters except "Recreational Male & Female Coach" (expected in the Fall).
  - Outreach to John Warner League and GBGSL to encourage submissions for rec categories.
  - Nominations actively received, reversing previous years' need for solicitation.
  - Award Gala sponsored by Round Glass: Covers up to 88 attendees, room capacity 150 (possible to expand to 120 if desired).\

- Discussion on pricing: Proposal of \$15 for players/children, \$25 for adults, aiming to strike balance—low enough to encourage attendance, high enough to discourage “no-shows”.
  - Award recipients: Attend for free; plus one guest (plus two if under 18).
  - Cocktail party-style format (high-top/cocktail seating, buffet, no plated service).
- Financial summary: Total event cost ~ \$5,600–\$6,900 (bartender, linens, awards). Sponsorship at \$7,000 offsets the majority of the budget.
- Discussion on appropriate “extra” for the Hall of Fame recipient (gift basket, mementos).
- Ticketing to be managed via GotSport; open invite to clubs after award nominees and board.
- Food pricing pending headcount; final pricing to be revisited as costs clarify.

## **5. Treasurer’s Report (Spitznagle)**

- Financial Review:
  - VSA retains several hundred thousand dollars across accounts.
  - Opened a new account at M&T to manage event and travel expenses distinctly from general operations.
  - New credit card established; points accrue toward lowering travel expenses.
    - Example: US Soccer Women travel covered almost exclusively by points (less than \$50 out-of-pocket).
  - Confirmation of D&O (Directors and Officers) liability coverage now in place, including legal fees.

## **7. Risk Management Report (Keith Roberts & Rich DeGraff-Murphy)**

- Referee Abuse Policy
  - Entering phase three—focus on proportional discipline for minors (creative diversion programs versus long suspensions).
  - Proposal to adopt educational “diversion” consequences, reintegrating players if courses completed timely.\
  - Parents increasingly tied to club sanctioning for their conduct Nationally. Other states reporting positive impacts from this approach.
  - Expanding policy to include the behavior of spectators/parents to be discussed at the next AGM.
- Insurance & Background Checks:
  - US Soccer’s Learning Center now offers options for background checks via a central platform (“Safe Soccer Center”).
  - Vermont-specific challenge: State data not shared with national databases, so local checks will remain necessary.

- No immediate cost increase for background checks via new system.
- D&O Insurance:
  - Now formalized as part of policy; use case explained (coverage for defense fees).
  - Incident from past year resolved without litigation or need for coverage use.

## **8. Executive Director Report**

- USYS/US Soccer/Consortium Committee Involvement:
  - Invitation for all board members to engage in national committees (legal, financial, female development, networking, etc.).\
  - Participation generally low time commitment, opportunity for professional growth and organizational input.
  - Andrew to send list/links of opportunities for review and potential involvement.
- Insurance Proposal Review
  - Players Health Proposal for 2025–2026
  - No competing bids; longstanding partner.
  - No major changes to coverage (now includes errors & omissions for officials, increased coverage).
  - General and excess liability: ~ \$20,000/year (\$5,600 excess liability to be paid in full upfront, rest in installments).
  - Coverage details: all sanctioned activities, secondary to personal insurance, timeline for claims—90 days.
  - Sanctioned Leagues/Events Fees for COI \$200.
  - Board comfortable with renewal; recognized as operational rather than board voting matter.
- Annual General Meeting (AGM) Planning
  - Date: Saturday, January 10, 2026.
  - Workshops & Panels 9:00 am–12:00 pm, (open to public, multiple 45-minute sessions).
    - Workshops innovatively modeled after what's done at national events, but not seen at state level.
    - Planned Panels: USYS/US Soccer leadership, technical/educational directors, community resource panel (TopSoccer, Round Glass, Vermont Green), insurance/registration session.
    - Sessions encourage Q&A, direct access to national/state leaders.
    - Target room capacity: 150, Champagne Room.
  - AGM (business): 12:00–2:00 pm (votes, updates, elections, bylaw amendments).
    - By-laws require a business section, BOD's intent is to streamline to 30–60 mins. for efficiency.
    - Reports: All board members/staff to draft one-page summary for

- inclusion in “Book of Reports” to be distributed before AGM
  - New voting system: E-ballot preferred (allows for confidential, documented tallies).
  - Elections: VP, Secretary, and Treasurer positions open
    - Nominations open September 1–December 1;
    - Candidate bios to be requested and shared.
  - Proposals for bylaw amendments to be submitted in written form.
  - Budget vote required; detailed review to be included in reports book for pre-meeting review.
- Grants & Strategic Initiatives
  - Innovate to Grow (ITG) Grant:
    - Funding opportunity from US Soccer (up to \$200,000/year for up to three years).
    - Discussion: Strong board consensus to propose grant for coaching education, targeting higher-level licensure (D license, \$400 per coach).
    - Proposed: 15 coaches/year receiving D license assistance (3-year cycle = 45 coaches, \$6,000/year).
    - Groundwork to be finalized and submitted before September 1 deadline.
    - Other state uses cited (e.g., futsal in schools, free rec tournaments, grassroots referee programs).
    - Consensus: Board wants a realistic, achievable proposal (benefit: upskilling coaches has wide-reaching player impact).

## 9. SRA Report (Edwards via proxy)

- IFAB Laws of the Game updated; immediate implementation necessary (rules include new 8-second goalkeeper rule, captain-only communications, etc.).
- New Referee Assigner
  - Jace Laquerre the youth referee assignor has elected to step down from this role this fall. He has provided a recommendation for his replacement
  - Lacquerre is willing to assist with transition should his recommendation assume the role
  - A proposed contract has been received outlining fees for leagues and tournaments
    - Fees for both are a significant jump from current assignor fees (VSA currently covers these fees at no additional cost to membership).
    - Recommended Assigner
      - Vermont Native
      - Moved to Albany, NY area a couple years ago
      - Was a Vermont ref and still refs college & USL2 in

Vermont

- Will be moving to North Carolina in Fall
- No immediate plans to move back to Vermont
- BOD Concerns:
  - Timing of notice to step away a month before kick-off of fall season - challenging to weigh options in a short period of time.
  - Out-of-state assigner may lack familiarity with local referees (initially told by referee committee & Jace that this was extremely important)
  - Self-assign platform used for most VSA league games.
  - Added possible travel cost to have recommended assignor on the ground for State Tournaments & Festivals
  - Board Discussion on necessity to have a qualified in-state assigner who knows Vermont referees by quality/location.
  - Board recommendation: Table proposal, seek further discussion and input from referee committee / Bill Edwards.

#### **10. Technical Director (Jason Marika)**

- Introductions made
- Looking forward with working with the BOD
- Plans to host in person and online meet & greets to start his introductions with membership
- Has worked with Andrew on the revamp of the ODP program
- Starting to schedule Grassroots Coaching Courses
- Provided various templates for ODP players and coaches

#### **11. Good of the Game**

- Thank you to Jace Laquerre for his years of service in the Referee Assignor Role & Congrats on the coming baby!

Next Board of Directors Meeting Monday, September 8, 2025

## **ACTION ITEMS**

### General & Strategic

- Tree Farm Lease: Rich attending August 11 meeting; continue to push for favorable long-term lease.
- Consortium Engagement: Andrew to increase board/staff involvement and circulate committee opportunity information.
- AGM Preparation:
  - Andrew to send links for national committee opportunities.
  - Board/staff to prepare one-page “Book of Reports” entries for AGM.
- Election nomination process initiated September 1, forms to be sent to membership
- Gather and circulate bylaw amendment proposal form.
- Finalize food and ticket pricing for awards gala; Lori tracking food cost per head as menu is determined.
- Jill to update prices and launch event registration in GotSport.
- ITG Grant: Andrew to finalize coaching education proposal and submit before September 1.

### Referee Operations:

- Reach out to Bill Ross for plan on IFAB rule changes’ rollout.
- Rich/Lori to hold sidebar with Jace and Referee Committee; evaluate assignor transition and managing contracting fees.

### Administrative/Technical

- Board Email/Google Drive Access:
- Members to ensure use of VSA emails for shared drive access.
- IT/Secretary to assist with password and platform onboarding.

### Financial

- Insurance Renewal: Matt/Andrew to execute Players Health agreement for 2025–26; arrange six-payment plan and upfront excess liability payment.
- Event Account Monitoring: Continue separating event/travel finances for transparency.