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COMMENTARY

# Ref Watch: Teenage job quests led Tori Penso and Katja Koroleva to World Cup

by **Mike Voitalla** (/publications/author/40/mike-voitalla/) @MikeVoitalla  
(<https://www.twitter.com/MikeVoitalla>), Aug 1, 2023



**Tori Penso** was a 14-year-old Florida youth player when her mom told her it was time to get a job.

"I said OK, why don't I work at the mall. And she said, 'Why on earth would you do that? Why don't you spend some time at the soccer field where you're already at?'" Penso told Ben Ferree of **NPSL.com** (<https://www.npsl.com/14952/>),

**Katja Koroleva** was playing in Iowa when she started reffing at age 15 to help pay for youth soccer's cost demands.

"Being raised by a single mom and traveling most weekends for MRL [Midwest Regional League], as well as having club fees, uniforms and equipment, brought the cost of playing high," Koroleva said (<https://www.arkansassoccer.org/way-to-go-katja/>). "Refereeing gave me the opportunity to pay for the sport I loved and allowed me the opportunity to continue being active as an athlete."

For both, quests for teenage income became a path to professional refereeing and both are whistling games at the 2023 Women's World Cup.

Koroleva, who also has a career in emergency medicine, has reffed NWSL Challenge Cup finals, at youth World Cups, and served as a fourth official at the 2019 Women's World Cup in France.

Penso (*top photo*), who worked in marketing and advertising while reffing collegiate and NWSL games before becoming a full-time official, in 2020 became the first woman to center **ref an MLS match** (<https://www.latimes.com/sports/soccer/story/2020-10-13/mls-referee-toni->

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penso) in 20 years and in 2021 **became the first woman to referee a men's World Cup qualifying game** (<https://www.concacaf.com/news/penso-gonzalez-make-refereeing-history-at-concacaf/>).

Of her early teen years of reffing, Penso **said** (<https://www.npsl.com/14952/>), "I took it on then, had my fair share of parents chasing me off the field, stuck with it, and it's turned out pretty well."

At 18, she was able to buy her first car and participating in an ODP refereeing camp inspired her to continue moving up the officials' ladder.

"It was the first time I'd been out of Florida; I'm still in touch with a lot of people that I met there," she told **FIFA.com** (<https://www.fifa.com/technical/refereeing/news/inspirational-refereeing-trailblazer-penso-savours-womens-world-cup>). "But most importantly, I began to appreciate refereeing as the art that I see it as today."



Koroleva's enjoyment of each bigger challenge kept her on the path to the World Cup.

"With each step — through first refereeing youth, then some adult and semiprofessional mixed with college, and then working our way through professional ranks, I just saw an increased level of players and skills, and I wanted to continue to be a part of that spectacle and the sport that's really the greatest sport in the world," she told Tyler Snipes of **MLSNEXTPro.com** (<https://www.mlssoccer.com/news/pro-s-katja-koroleva-on-life-as-a-professional-referee-we-make-hundreds-of-decis>).

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The other four members of the U.S. officiating crew at the 2023 Women's World Cup are VAR **Armando Villarreal** and Assistant Referees **Brooke Mayo, Felisha Mariscal** and **Kathryn Nesbitt**.

Nesbitt, at the 2022 Men's World Cup, ARed England-Senegal and was an offside VAR in seven games, including Costa Rica-Germany, the historic game that was officiated by an **all-female crew** (<https://www.nytimes.com/2022/12/01/sports/soccer/world-cup-women-referee-crew.html>) for the first time in Men's World Cup history.

While a 14-year-old at her brothers' games in Rochester, New York, Nesbitt answered requests for AR volunteers among the spectators.

"Then one of the guys actually asked me, 'Hey, would you like to make money doing this?'" Nesbitt told **The Washington Post** (<https://www.washingtonpost.com/sports/2022/11/14/world-cup-female-referee-kathryn-nesbitt/>)'s by Thomas Floyd. "And I was like, 'Yeah, that sounds great.'"

\*\*\*\*\*

***So far at the 2023 Women's World Cup:***

- Penso-Mayo worked Germany-Morocco and Switzerland-New Zealand:
- Koroleva-Mariscal-Nesbitt took charge of Sweden-South Africa and Japan-Spain.

- Villarreal has been in the VAR booth for seven games. Nesbitt and Mariscal have also done Video Review work as offside VARs.

**NOTE:** The remaining 22 games have yet to be assigned.

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## Refereeing in Soccer America & Around the Web ...

### 1. Soccer's Rules: What's changed for the 2023-24 season

(<https://www.socceramerica.com/publications/article/96806/soccers-rules-whats-changed-for-the-2023-24-sea.html>) By Ian Plenderleith (Soccer America)



- To download 2023-24 rulebooks in various languages go [HERE](https://bit.ly/3O5pRoe) (<https://bit.ly/3O5pRoe>).

2. Gino D'Ippolito (1935-2023): Legendary referee served many levels of soccer (<https://www.socceramerica.com/publications/article/96852/gino-dippolito-1935-2023-legendary-referee-ser.html>) By Mike Woitalla (Soccer America)

3. American refs could elevate U.S. Soccer's standing during the Women's World Cup (<https://www.latimes.com/sports/soccer/story/2023-07-17/world-cup-referees>) By Kevin Baxter (Los Angeles Times)

4. History as ref announces VAR penalty at Women's World Cup ([https://www.espn.com/soccer/story/\\_/id/38039335/history-ref-announces-var-penalty-women-world-cup](https://www.espn.com/soccer/story/_/id/38039335/history-ref-announces-var-penalty-women-world-cup)) By Dale Johnson (ESPN FC)

5. PRO's Inside Video Review ([https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NOJ\\_PXUYD0](https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=0NOJ_PXUYD0)) with Greg Barkey MLS (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLom3E6hjejkC7loep2pDNgKivR8UD1W7N>) | NWSL (<https://www.youtube.com/playlist?list=PLom3E6hjejkBx-6bvtR4WfmL1AvIVyY3k>)

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