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To: Club Secretaries, for forwarding to all sections in their clubs

Please circulate this to coaches, team managers, members in leadership roles, in all sections of your club.

MCRFU Disciplinary Sub-committee – Notes and reminders for clubs at the start of a new season

This should mostly be reminders relating to Discipline processes as applied in Middlesex. Please do read this carefully and of course do contact Middlesex Rugby Discipline Secretary (MCRFU DS) for any clarification or help when dealing with an incident. More information is available on the county website, <https://middlesexrugby.com/county/committees/discipline/>.

Please do look particularly carefully at the new “expedited process” below. This can provide a shortened process following a red card, but does come with greater expectations of the internal club process

RFU Regulation 19

Regulation 19 and its appendices is the RFU document that covers all discipline matters.

<https://www.englandrugby.com/run/rules-governance/rfu-rules-and-regulations/regulation-19-discipline>

Reporting red cards, including red cards issued by club referees

All red cards must be reported, at all levels and ages. This applies equally to club referees as it does to Society appointments. Please ensure all levels of referees in your club are aware of this requirement. Club referees should send the red card report direct to MCRFU DS.

All red cards issued to players in your club must be reported to MCRFU DS by 9.00 am on the second day after the incident, subject to fine.

Reporting Age-grade Red cards (schools and clubs)

Caron Evans-Evans is our Age-grade Discipline Secretary (CBAGDS).

Email: youthdiscipline@middlesexrugby.com

All age-grade red cards must be reported to him within 48 hours.

Please note that while the club/school deals with red cards and sanctions, following the appropriate RFU guidance, the sanction must be ratified by MCRFU CBAGDS. There is an option of suspended sanctions, which again have to be agreed by our CBAGDS. These regulations are clear and precise, in an area which has previously been more in the hands of clubs/schools. The regulations are on the RFU website, along with the various subsections of Appendix 6 which cover all age-grade discipline.

Club internal hearings

RFU regulation 19.2.6 requires all clubs to have an internal discipline committee. The referee’s report will be available within 48 hours and the club internal hearing should be held as soon as possible after the incident. This should follow RFU/CB process for a hearing, which can be found on RFU website as *Guidance notes for clubs*. Minutes from this hearing should be sent to MCRFU DS promptly.

GMS – the adult game

You will be aware about the need for all players to be registered. When notifying MCRFU DS of a red card please include the player’s registration number.

It is a requirement that all our clubs do have active members listed on GMS for all the “Golden Roles”.

Please check that you are up-to-date on GMS, including full contact details of the club Discipline Secretary.

Unauthorised pitch encroachment

There have been some particularly unfortunate incidents where coaches/spectators/parents have entered the field of play. This is never acceptable without the referee's permission. Clubs should ensure that pitches are roped off and make it clear that pitch encroachment is unacceptable. The Club remains responsible for marshalling the pitch sidelines.

It is more of an issue in the Age-grade game when people enter the field and often make contact with the players; however, the regulations apply to both adults and Age-grade cases.

Reports of this sort of behaviour will result in an immediate Interim Suspension Order for those involved.

Match Official Abuse (MOA) – by players and from the touchline

Disappointingly this area of indiscipline is still too prevalent in the game. On-field MOA will be dealt with by the referee. MOA from the touchline can be particularly unpleasant, tainting the game. Clubs must take full responsibility for touchline behaviour.

Many incidents involving touchlines can be avoided if clubs follow competition regulations in having technical areas **and** using them. Even if not marked out it is perfectly possible to agree a section near the half-way line where all but the physios must remain – obviously with a roped-off spectator area behind that.

As with all incidents which pass the red card test, but do not involve a player, such MOA is charged under Rule 5.12 – described as “bringing the game into disrepute”. Cases found under 5.12 can follow the tariff but sanctions can be “at large”.

The RFU added extra sanctions in January 2024 to all cases of disrespect and MOA that were found as guilty. These extra weeks added to bans did essentially reflect previous MCRFU policy.

Existing MCRFU policy for extra sanctions (50% to 100% added) continues to apply to adults MOA/disrespect in front of age-grade players.

Recruiting and retention of referees remains a challenge and MOA is often cited by referees when they leave the game. Please be aware that LSRFUR can rarely cover all requests for referees from our clubs.

Interactions with referees post-match after a red card

Please note that after all matches the referee is allowed 30 minutes of “down time” where they are not to be approached. This is an RFU regulation and we expect MCRFU clubs to follow this. This is a most important cooling off time if there have been contentious incidents or a red card in the match.

Society referees are instructed to avoid any formative comments in the club-house about any red card. They will happily clarify what the card was for but clubs must not try to get into extensive discussions about the referee's decision here. Clubs trying to persuade the referee not to send in a red card report will be asked to explain themselves ahead of a possible 5.12 charge. This behaviour is unacceptable.

Abandoned Matches

At all levels abandoned matches, for whatever reason, must be reported to the county. This applies whether it is a society referee or a club official in charge. The process should a match be abandoned is covered on the RFU website.

Touch judges/Assistant referees – TJ/AR

There was still confusion about TJ/ARs and I repeat earlier notes.

Many games will have volunteer touch judges. These are usually club members wanting to help the game. However these “officials” must be clear about their responsibilities, namely, marking touch at the appropriate point for the game to recommence and indicating if a penalty kick or conversion is successful.

Unless appointed to the game by the Referee Society **and** approved by the Organising Competition Committee Secretary as ARs, they cannot enter the field of play, comment on the decisions of the match official, or offer advice on something the referee may have missed. Referees cannot ask local volunteers to act beyond the remit above. Touch judges remain touch judges and are not assistant referees, except as described above. Touch judges should also adopt a neutral view of the game and not be cheering on their own side, not a good look.

Hearings and Sanctions

MCRFU Discipline hearings are either in person or online. Sanctions are decided according to Appendix 2 of Regulation 19 on the RFU website. We predominantly define bans in matches and not weeks. Clubs must supply, ahead of the hearing, a list of matches that the player would be expected to play. These must be of the same level as the match with the red card.

Expedited/shortened process – new for this season

Cases where the tariff is fewer than 4 matches can be considered for an expedited process, not requiring in-person/online attendance. These are the lower level offences. Offering this process is at the discretion of the panel Chair. Each case will be considered on its merits.

To be offered the expedited process the following are essential

- Guilty plea and apology from player
- Not serious violence/injury
- Not MOA
- Good previous player record (no similar offences in previous 3 years)
- Club hearing held properly with full engagement of the player and detailed minutes with reasons for decision/sanction. Sanction dates of matches clear in minutes.
- Not 5.12 cases.

Two yellow card cases do not require an in-person hearing. If a foul play yellow is contested then there would need to be a hearing,

Citings

Please consult the RFU site for the process for citings. While not essential for a citing, most are backed up with VEO footage. Please note that the club citing a player has to make the case. This will be a written document ahead of the hearing, with the club official responding to questioning at a panel. As with all hearings the evidence base of documents, statements and video footage will be made available to all parties ahead of the hearing. There is a 7 day deadline for notifying MCRFU DS about a citing.

Evidence, VEO footage

Please be aware that clubs are required to respond within 48 hours to all requests for information/witness statements/VEO footage involved in a case. The balance of evidence is always towards the referee's report. Panels will also consider witness statements and any VEO footage. Footage which is not clear or inconclusive will essentially be disregarded. Often such footage across the width of the pitch lacks necessary clarity. MCRFU DS will require both clubs involved to submit VEO footage/link and if these are from opposite sides of the pitch then one will usually give suitable clarity. Note that ahead of any hearing all evidence is shared with both clubs involved.

Hearing outcomes, appeals

After a citing hearing the summary is included in a CB Short Judgement Form (CBSJF). This is sent to both clubs involved and the referee's society.

Appeals against hearing outcomes must be made to the RFU within 14 days of receiving the CBSJF.

Club DS and Committee training

With the opportunity of avoiding an in-person hearing by following the expedited process (as above), it does mean that clubs' own internal processes need to be complete, timely and thorough. Fortunately most clubs have little experience in this area until suddenly they need to deal with a red card. Some proactivity, noting the advice here and on the county website, will always help. In addition I am looking at doing ½ day conference-type meetings for clubs – possibly one more geographically south west in the county and one more north east. This is very much first thoughts at this stage and your suggestions would be valued. I would envisage a hybrid type meeting with ideally in-person attendance but with on-line possible. This would be relevant to club management - senior and age-grade sections.

John Orr,
MCRFU Discipline Secretary