

August 2026

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

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

THE NEW SEASON

- There are no significant changes to Discipline Regulations for this season.
- We are hoping to welcome some new panellists.
- We will continue the initiative started last season, offering clubs a non-hearing process for lower level incidents. These will always require a guilty plea **and** a full club minuted, timely, internal hearing. A full hearing including all relevant evidence, a clear decision and any sanction following Regulation 19, Appendix 2, can often avoid the need for attendance at a full County hearing in person.
- Last season the new shortened process did allow clubs to take more responsibility for aspects of discipline. I do thank clubs for their efforts here and hopefully some self-evaluation did allow clubs to revisit the importance of discipline within our game.
- One aspect from last season which could be better is the time taken to respond to a red card report and to emails in general. Clubs should not delay getting their internal process going following a red card. Time lost at this stage only prejudices the player's return to the game.

REMINDERS

From here this annual communication should mostly be reminders relating to the 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/>.

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 your club referees 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 (e.g. 9.00 am on the Monday following a Saturday game).

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 Caron within the same time-scale as given above.

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 an internal club hearing must 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*. After reporting a red card, clubs receive notes from MCRFU DS about their hearing. Minutes from your club 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. This has to stop.

This has become an issue in the Age-grade game where people enter the field and have made contact with the players. Note that the regulations do 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, possibly by a red card.
- MOA from the touchline can be particularly unpleasant, tainting the game. Any such incidents which would pass the red card test but do not involve a player, are 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".

Technical areas, roped off spectator barrier

- 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 with the referee a section near the half-way line where all but the physios must remain – obviously with a roped off spectator area behind that.
- Clubs must take full responsibility for touchline behaviour and have a spectator barrier..

Deterrent Sanctions

- The RFU added extra sanctions in January 2024 to all cases of player red card disrespect and MOA that were found as guilty.
- Existing MCRFU policy for extra sanctions (50% to 100% added) continues to apply to adults MOA/disrespect in front of age-grade players. This also applies for touchline/technical area MOA type offences.

Recruiting and retention of referees remains a challenge and MOA is often cited by referees when they leave the game.

Interactions with referees during the game and post-match

Referees will have their own way of communication with players during the game. However any possibly contentious aspects in the game must only be dealt with in a positive way between referee and captain. It is totally inappropriate for players in general, or coaches, to be shouting and appealing for decisions. Such behaviour tends to get on the wrong side of referees and may ultimately lead to a red card or MOA report. At half-time, unless the referee initiates an engagement with captain or coach, do not make any such approach.

Please note that after all matches the referee is allowed 30 minutes of “down time”. This is a 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 is totally unacceptable behaviour.

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 is a difference!

To remind you:

Most games will have volunteer touch judges. These may be club members wanting to help the game. However these “officials” must be clear about their limited responsibilities, namely, marking touch at the appropriate point for the game to recommence and indicating if a penalty kick or conversion has been successful. Unless appointed to the game by the Referee Society **and** approved by the organising Competition Secretary as ARs, they may not 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 limited TJ remit above. Touch judges remain touch judges and are not assistant referees, except as allowed 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 on-line. 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 and team as the match with the red card.

Expedited/shortened process

Cases where the tariff is fewer than 4 matches can be considered for an expedited process, not requiring in-person/on-line 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 (typically 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. Any sanction must follow Regulation 19 with dates of matches clear in the minutes.
- Attempting to level down the nature of an offence when the referee report or VEO suggests otherwise, will always result in an in person hearing.
- Not Rule 5.12 cases. Rule 5.12 applies in incidents involving non-players, so is more about touchline behaviour of coaches and spectators.
- Not citings.

Two yellow card cases (which will have resulted in a red) do not require an in-person hearing. If a foul play yellow is actually contested then there would need to be a hearing. Technical yellow card offences cannot be contested.

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. Panels are allowed to make an assumption of guilt if a club is clearly withholding VEO footage.

Hearing outcomes, appeals

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

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

Adult incident outcomes are published on the Discipline page on the county website, with names redacted.

Club DS and Committee training

With the opportunity of avoiding an in-person hearing by following the shortened/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