



Match Official Abuse or Disrespect

1. Background

We pride ourselves on the constructive relationships we have with clubs; and the mutual respect between players and match officials. Adhering to the core values of our great game is a key component of keeping our game vibrant, enjoyable and safe for players, spectators and referees alike.

However, we do have an emerging trend of match official abuse (MOA) and therefore want to work with clubs to ensure we address this now for the benefit of all. Sadly, this is also national trend and the RFU disciplinary panels are imposing strong sanctions for MOA – not just to individuals but to the clubs themselves where there are recurring incidents across all their teams including youth teams.

So, this letter is written in the spirit of collaboration with clubs to help tackle MOA – from players, coaches or spectators.

2. Responsibility on clubs – what the RFU regs say about MOA

The RFU regulations below clearly place the responsibility on all clubs to adhere to the values of our great game. Match Official Abuse is unacceptable and such misconduct of **players, coaches, spectators, members or employees** will not be tolerated.

- **19.4.8** *Often referred to as a breach of RFU Rule 5.12, this includes acts which, in the opinion of the RFU or CBDS bring or have the potential to bring the Union and/or Game into disrepute. It may include on and off-field matters involving actions by players, officials, members, employees and/or its spectators, that were not dealt with by a red card or citing.*
- **19.4.9** *A club shall be responsible for ensuring that **all reasonable steps** have been taken to ensure that its players, coaches, members and spectators conduct themselves appropriately and do not behave in a way that is improper, offensive, abusive, threatening, indecent or insulting or enter the pitch without the authority of the referee.*

3. Sanctions – applied by RFU to individuals and senior team

There are clear RFU reporting systems for Match Official Abuse (MOA) to be reported and subsequent action taken. Indeed, in Jan 24, the RFU issued new guidance for additional weeks to all MOA cases. The relevant RFU CB have a range of sanctions available to the individual and the club. For example, GRFU guidance states:

- a) for a **person**; a reprimand, a financial penalty or suspension from playing, coaching and/or administration; and*
- b) for a **Club**; in addition to the sanction set out in 19.4.48(a), financial or other compensation, deduction of league points or relegation, exclusion or disqualification from any competition.*



The point to make here is that the Club is responsible for all its teams including all men's teams, women's teams and youth teams. So any individuals/teams bringing the club into disrepute could also impact on the Club's senior teams. Indeed, by way of example, a GRFU club has already had a suspended 5-point deduction for its 1st XV this season due to incidents within its youth set up. An individual player has also recently received a 13 week ban for MOA.

4. So, some suggested ways forward

This is not a witch-hunt but a genuine quest to work with clubs to ensure that we eradicate a worrying trend of increasing Match Official Abuse of our volunteer match officials. Two immediate points to raise ...

1. It would be helpful if **senior club officials ensured they have sight of all teams** (not just the 1st XV), including Sunday youth games where sadly some of the issues are more prevalent, to ensure they are totally satisfied with arrangements and the match day experience of all; and that there is not a developing culture of MOA.
2. Ensure all pitches comply with regulations regarding **Pitch Barriers and Technical Areas**. This is a pre-requisite for a sense of order around the match. Please see attached Appendix for guidance and support with this.

5. And finally, the referee reserves the right to:

- Delay the start of the game until satisfied that appropriate requirements are in place.
- Stop the game if any of the requirements are compromised.
- Remove any permitted personnel who are non-compliant from the technical area to behind the barrier.
- Ask the club to remove spectators who are disrespectful, unruly and/or guilty of MOA from the ground.
- Report all incidences of MOA for consideration by the RFU Disciplinary Boards – players, coaches, spectators or employees.

Clubs are responsible for the conduct of all their players, replacements, coaches, spectators and employees on match day.

Clubs are responsible for all teams/matches – men, women and youth – and any individual bringing the club into disrepute risks a sanction to not only themselves but also the club itself (including the senior team).



APPENDIX: Pitch Barriers and Technical Areas

The following applies to all games, including youth games.

PITCH BARRIERS:

- The regulations require a permanent or temporary pitch barrier to ensure that spectators keep away from the playing area.
- The home club should ensure the pitch has a surrounding spectator barriers 5m away from the touchline. An absolute minimum of 2m is acceptable if space is limited.
- If it is only practical to erect a spectator barrier on one side of the pitch, then all spectators must stand on that side and behind the barrier.

***Some suggestions:** If there is no physical barrier, consider roping off the pitch or using tape. Alternatively, as a temporary arrangement, think about double white lines or cones (the effectiveness of this will largely depend on the size of the crowd). Consider pitch marshals, appoint a 'duty of care' officer and post MOA reminders on pitch signage and social media.*

TECHNICAL AREAS:

- The home club must make provision for two Technical Areas that are marked out on the same side of the pitch, one for each team.
- Technical areas are to be located either side of the halfway line each within an area bounded between the halfway line and the respective 10m lines. The area should be at least 2m back from the touchline.
- Permitted personnel - coaches, replacements, water carriers and medical staff – should **remain within their respective technical areas** (unless delivering medical aid or during water breaks).

***Some suggestions:** If no technical areas are marked out then Clubs should use cones, tape or whatever method defines the permitted area. Consider permitted personnel wearing bibs to clearly identify themselves. Ensure the coach and/or a committee member takes ownership of the technical area and calls out anyone who steps out.*

The expectation is that the above requirements are in place in good time prior to Kick Off to avoid unnecessary delays. Clearly, the bigger the crowd, the more robust these requirements need to be.

Remember this is all in the context of ensuring enjoyment and preserving the values of our great game.