



Discipline Update and Reminders for Clubs

Dear Hon Sec,

I am writing to update clubs on several disciplinary matters of concern and to provide some general housekeeping reminders.

Last season, discipline incidents across the country reduced overall. However, two Constituent Bodies reported an increase, with Essex being one of them. A particular concern has been the rise in coaches, parents, and replacement players entering the field of play without the referee's permission. While this has been most prevalent in the youth game, we have also dealt with incidents in adult rugby.

Please ensure that all players, coaches, parents, and spectators are aware that entering the field of play without the referee's permission is a disciplinary offence. Any individual reported for doing so will be required to appear before the CB Discipline Panel and, if the charge is proven, the entry point for sanction is a **20-week suspension**.

We are also seeing an increasing number of clubs deferring their responsibility to deal with disciplinary matters involving their members, instead waiting for cases to be referred to a hearing and relying on the outcome of the Discipline Panel.

This is both disappointing and frustrating for Panel members, as a number of recent hearings could have been avoided had clubs dealt with matters promptly and applied the sanctions set out in the RFU Sanction Table, particularly where the charge had already been accepted by the individual concerned.

Clubs have a clear responsibility to manage disciplinary matters appropriately and at the earliest opportunity. In light of this trend, clubs should consider this formal notice that where a Discipline Panel determines that a club has failed to take its disciplinary responsibilities seriously, or has unreasonably delayed taking appropriate action, the club itself may be subject to significant sanctions. RFU regulation 5.12 gives the Discipline panel to take disciplinary action against a person, club, constituent body or other rugby body for conduct prejudicial to the interest of the Union of the game. The sanctions available can include:

- Reprimands or warnings.
- Suspensions.
- Expulsion from league or cup competitions.
- Deduction of League Points.
- Financial Penalties (fines).
- Any other sanction considered appropriate by the disciplinary panel or RFU authority dealing with the matter.

Clubs should be aware that breaches of RFU Rule 5.12 may result in disciplinary proceedings and sanctions, including significant financial penalties and costs, at the discretion of the



Discipline Panel. However, if summons to appear then a starting fee of £125 will be issued to be paid before the hearing takes place, this can rise at the discretion of the discipline panel.

As in previous seasons, the CB Discipline Panel will continue to impose an additional sanction of up to 4 matches for instances of behaviour that bring the game into disrepute, particularly where any individual (player, spectator, coach, member, or spectator) chooses to disrespect or abuse the match official. In addition to this, RFU Regulation 19.11.13(b), which covers aggravating factors when determining sanction states for any offence contrary to RFU rule 9.28 (Match Official Abuse) the following is to be added

- Low-end entry point adds 2 matches
- Mid-range entry point adds 3 matches
- Top-end entry point adds 4 matches

In cases where a game is abandoned then Clubs are reminded that they will be required to attend a formal disciplinary hearing. The sanctions that may be considered include deduction of league points, removal from cup competitions or holding games in a closed environment.

I have listed a few housekeeping items that hopefully are just reminders:

1. **Notification of all red cards and abandoned games within your Club-** The Club must report any such events to us within 48 hours. This applies to youth as well as adult games and applies whether the match official is a Society Referee or a Club one. Failure to do so will result in a fee of £25 being applied regardless of the eventual outcome of the case. To notify us please email discipline@essexrugby.com.
2. **Club referees must notify us of any red cards issued or games abandoned** – This must be done within 48 hours of occurring by emailing as above. If they need some guidance as to what is needed in the report, then they should contact me, and I will arrange some support.
3. **Touch judges** – Clubs should be ensuring that anyone taking on this role is clear as to 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, 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. They should also adopt a neutral view of the game and not be cheering on their own side.
4. **Bad Disciplinary Record** - The RFU also delegates to the CB Discipline Panel, the task of dealing with any Club with a Bad Disciplinary Record. This is defined by the RFU as any Club reaching the following
 1. Any single team within a club that has 3 of the same offences;
 2. Any single team within a club that has 5 incidents of varying offences;



3. Any club reaching 8 incidents in 1 season;

It is important to understand, incident in this instance, is any time a person, player, coach or spectator has been proven guilty of an offence either via an internal process for discipline, through the Essex CB or the RFU process. This applies across the whole Club, and does not take into account the size of the Club.

Whilst I appreciate that much of the tone of this letter has focused on areas of concern, I would also like to recognise the excellent work undertaken by the many volunteers, club discipline leads and officials across Essex. Their commitment to promoting the Core Values, improving understanding of the Laws of the Game and supporting the disciplinary process plays a vital role in maintaining the standards of our sport.

One of rugby's greatest strengths is that we have robust disciplinary processes and meaningful sanctions when standards fall short. This enables those responsible to be held accountable and helps protect the integrity of the game. Our investigations are evidence-based and must be allowed to run their course. In some instances, this may mean that disciplinary proceedings are delayed while a police investigation is undertaken.

I would ask everyone to help protect the image and reputation of rugby by avoiding speculation on social media when incidents occur. Comments made on personal or club social media platforms can be damaging to the game, to those involved and to any ongoing investigation. Clubs and individuals should ensure that all communications uphold the RFU Core Values, as inappropriate social media activity may itself result in disciplinary action.

To finish on a positive note, rugby continues to provide fantastic opportunities for women, men, girls and boys of all ages to participate in a sport that builds friendships, develops character and strengthens communities. Grassroots clubs remain the lifeblood of our game, providing an inclusive environment where people can come together, enjoy rugby and be part of something bigger than themselves.

It is therefore vital that we continue to place the Core Values at the heart of everything we do, ensuring our clubs remain welcoming, respectful and enjoyable environments for all.

I wish you and your clubs every success for the forthcoming season.

Kind regards,

Keith Hill

**Discipline Chair
Essex RFU**

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