



Dear Club Presidents, Club Secretaries, Team Coaches and Managers,

### **Working Better Together to Protect our Match-Officials – Directive to Aggravate Sanctions for Abuse**

Most concerningly, this season there is one persistent issue that continues to occupy our disciplinary administrators and committee members and that is the issue of inappropriate behaviour towards our Match-Officials, many of whom give up considerable time to turn out every weekend to ensure that matches across the region can go ahead.

Despite our zero-tolerance approach to match official abuse, we continue to witness a range of offensive conduct committed by players, team officials and spectators. The behaviours experienced this season towards Match Officials includes, dissent, chat-back, abuse, disrespect and allegations of being a cheat. This behaviour is an unacceptable blight on our game.

In short, it is vital that we all do better to ensure that this type of conduct is dealt with properly under the Disciplinary Rules and Code of Conduct. Quite simply, there can be no matches without our Match Officials, and they need to be better protected.

This means that all cases of Match Official abuse must be treated seriously and, where conduct is proved, robust sanctions will be imposed on offenders to drive this conduct out of rugby and make Match Officiating an enjoyable role. This is critical if we are to recruit and retain talented individuals as Match Officials in the future.

As you all know, the Rugby AU Disciplinary Rules and Code of Conduct are in place to maintain and promote fair play, protect the safety and welfare of all participants, ensure that acts of on- and off-field misconduct are dealt with expeditiously and appropriately and that the image and reputation of the game is not adversely affected.

The ACT&NSWRU and ACTJRU Boards and Executive Management have met and discussed this issue and are strongly committed to sending a clear message to all participants that positive on-field and sideline behaviour, particularly towards match officials, MUST be demonstrated at all games, no matter the level.

This communication puts all participants on notice that in order to seek a change in behaviour and eradicate match official abuse, increased sanctions will be imposed going forward under the Disciplinary Rules, to seek to mitigate the risks of Match Official abuse by players, coaching staff and spectators.

This action is explicitly endorsed by Rugby Australia in accordance with rule 87(b) of the Rugby AU Disciplinary Rules 2022 and clause 13.4(e) of the Rugby AU Code of Conduct:



## Disciplinary Rules 2022

### **Aggravating Factors**

87. Having identified the applicable entry point for consideration of a particular incident, the Judicial Committee shall identify any relevant off-field aggravating factors and determine if any additional period of suspension, above the applicable entry point for the offence, should apply to the case in question.

*Off-field aggravating factors include:*

- a) the Player's status generally as an offender of the Laws of the Game
- b) the need to deter a particular type or pattern of offending in the Game where the teams participating in the Match or Tournament have been put on notice that such a need exists;**

## Code of Conduct

### **Aggravating and/or Mitigating Factors**

13.4 In determining the appropriate sanction(s), the Code of Conduct Committee shall have regard to any relevant aggravating and mitigating factors, including the following:

- a) the presence and timing of an acknowledgement of culpability/ wrongdoing by the Relevant Person or Relevant Organisation;
- b) the Relevant Persons or Relevant Organisation's disciplinary record and/or good character;
- c) the conduct prior to and at the hearing;
- d) remorse for the conduct including the timing of such remorse including any steps taken to rectify any wrongdoing;
- e) any directives from a Relevant Organisation regarding match official abuse; and**
- f) any other aggravating and/or mitigating factors considered relevant by the Code of Conduct Committee.

## Essential Next Steps

All clubs are requested to review their match-day processes and procedures to ensure they are fit for purpose when it comes to putting appropriate measures in place (e.g., the appointment of suitable experienced Ground Marshalls, roping off pitches, no alcohol pitch-side) in order to mitigate the risks of Match Official abuse by coaching staff and spectators.

Please ensure that you remind all of your players of Law 28 of *World Rugby's Laws of the Game*, that emphatically states players must respect the authority of the referee and they must not dispute the referee's decisions.



Additionally, that the on-field sanctions set out in the Disciplinary Rules (see below) will be increased where necessary to deal with any cases of match-official abuse that come before our disciplinary committees in the future.

**9.28 A player must not disrespect the authority of a Match Official.**

Low-end: 2 weeks	Mid-range: 4 weeks	Top end: 6+ weeks	Max: 52 weeks
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**9.28 A player must not verbally abuse a Match Official. Verbal abuse includes, but is not limited to, abuse based on religion, colour, national or ethnic origin, sexual orientation.**

Low-end: 6 weeks	Mid-range: 12 weeks	Top end: 18+ weeks	Max: 52 weeks
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**9.28 A player must not make physical contact with Match Officials.**

Low-end: 6 weeks	Mid-range: 12 weeks	Top end: 18+ weeks	Max: 52 weeks
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**9.28 A player must not use threatening actions or words towards Match Officials.**

Low-end: 12 weeks	Mid-range: 24 weeks	Top end: 48+ weeks	Max: 260 weeks
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**9.28 A player must not physically abuse Match Officials.**

Low-end: 24 weeks	Mid-range: 48 weeks	Top end: 96+ weeks	Max: Life
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Furthermore, all participants are obliged to comply with the expected standards of behaviour as set out in the Code of Conduct, and should be reminded of the following:

**Clause 4.1 (x) - Relevant Persons and Relevant Organisations must, at all times, accept and respect the authority of match officials, refrain from using any offensive language or behaviour, show unnecessary dissension, displeasure towards match officials, whether on or off the field of play or any other official from relevant Organisation.**

In terms of any incidents of Match Official abuse or negative behaviours at match venues, please ensure that these are immediately reported to the appointed Ground Marshall(s) so that action can be taken at the time and escalated as required.

Conclusion

There can be no hiding from the fact that we continue to have issues, year-on-year, with regards to on and off-field Match Official abuse and for us all, as a collective, to accept that unless we get better at dealing with these issues then they will continue to exist and threaten the very fabric of our sport.

27 July 2022



As you are all aware, we are currently experiencing a shortage of Match Officials in the ACT and surrounding regions and it is incredibly difficult to recruit and retain them if they are subject to continual dissension and abuse. The constant subjection to cynical and crude comments from individuals expressing their displeasure or disapproval with on field decisions undoubtedly impacts any desire for our match officials to continue their involvement. As such, we all need to do more to ensure they are better protected.

Thank you for your support in working together to protect our Match Officials and push this inexcusable conduct out of our game. We wish you all the best for the remainder of the season.

Yours sincerely,

Craig Leseberg  
Deputy CEO & GM Community Rugby  
Brumbies Rugby

Peter Johnson  
President  
ACT&NSW Rugby Union

Martin Sullivan  
President  
ACT Junior Rugby Union