

Orange & District Football Association

Ground Official

Preparation

- Arrive punctually at ground
- Pick up Vest.
- Make yourself known to the Match Officials.
- Follow the below Job Description.
- Sign the Match Card at Half Time & Full Time to prove attendance.
 - Sign your name & print your team name.

Job description

- Thoroughly understand your club/association:
 - codes of conduct for parents, players, coaches and officials
 - processes for dealing with sport rage incidents
- Understand club/association disciplinary procedures and penalties
- Understand the degree to which club/association rules can be enforced on non-members (non-members are not necessarily bound by club rules)
- Be skilled and confident at resolving conflict and dealing with difficult people
- Support and uphold the principles of fair play
- Be visible at all times during game days
- Use a formal incident recording and reporting process.
- If you believe a game is getting out of hand, report this (as soon as practical, when taking into account the game situation) to Senior representatives from your Club, Referees & Football Association who are at the venue.

Tips for conflict resolution

- Receive other people's comments without interruption
- Speak pleasantly – be aware of the tone of your voice and the type of language you use
- Use non-aggressive body language and facial expressions (eg. don't point your finger, don't stand with your hands on your hips)
- Don't become emotionally involved
- Be patient
- Stay calm no matter what the person says or does
- Hand the person a copy of the Code of Conduct to read.
- If the conflict turns physical, don't get involved – call the police immediately
- Look for signs of the situation getting out of hand (eg. tension growing on the sideline) and act early before it reaches boiling point.

What to do

As an administrator, it is important that when an incident occurs you understand exactly what to do and who is responsible for what.

Here are some of the steps that can be taken depending on the seriousness of the incident:

- **Reporting inappropriate behaviour** - Responsibility of everyone
Behaviour that contravenes the codes of conduct should be reported to the ground official. Any person who is unsure who the ground official is should report the incident to a club committee member.
- **Approaching the offender** - Responsibility of the ground official / club committee
Only the ground official should approach the offender - this prevents the situation escalating.
- **Issuing warnings** - Responsibility of the ground official / club committee
The first time a person breaches a code of conduct, they might be issued with a warning. The person might not be aware that their behaviour is unacceptable and should be notified of the club's rules regarding behaviour.
- **Taking disciplinary action** - Responsibility of the club committee
If the conduct is repeated or of a serious nature the club committee should consider taking disciplinary action in accordance with its rules. This might result in counselling, suspension or expulsion.
- **Removing people from the field of play or venue** - Responsibility of the ground official / club committee
The referee/umpire should communicate directly and immediately with the ground official to remove a person from the field. If the club is in a position to control ground entry, it will be able to evict persons from the ground. Where attendance is not controlled, clubs can request offenders leave the venue, or otherwise can discipline the person for breach of the code.
- **Suspending play** - Responsibility of the referee/umpire
The referee/umpire may suspend play and refuse to restart until appropriate action has been taken. They may request that a person is removed from the sideline and, in serious cases, abandon the game altogether.
- **Involving the police** - Responsibility of the ground official / club committee
If a person feels the behaviour of another constitutes a criminal act the police should be notified immediately by the ground official.

While it is lawful for a club to detain a person who has committed a criminal offence until the police arrive, it is recommended that this is only done as a last resort. Club officials are able to exercise reasonable force in detaining a person who has committed a criminal offence until the police arrive, but this should not be disproportionate to the conduct of the offender.

Understanding the law

Sporting clubs and associations have legal duties to address behaviours which offend community standards, as well as those standards set by the association itself.

It is not uncommon for a person to be sued for financial compensation if association or competition rules have been broken resulting in physical or emotional damage to another person.

Similarly, the association itself may be sued for breach of its duty of care owed to members, officials and visitors, by virtue of the conduct of individuals at its games or activities.

Discrimination and vilification of persons on the basis of attributes such as gender, age, religion or race is against the law. Breaching such laws can result in large penalties for individuals and sporting associations, not to mention the damage to reputation which may result from the publicity surrounding these issues.

If the behaviour of individuals or groups at your sporting event or activity is sufficiently serious that it offends the criminal law, then formal criminal charges and legal sanctions may follow.

Criminal law

People involved in grass roots sport are not immune from the criminal law just because their behaviour might occur at a sporting contest.

There are many instances where both on-field and off-field conduct by participants, officials and spectators have attracted the attention of the criminal law.

For example, a female soccer player was recently fined \$250 after being found guilty of common assault for spitting at a referee during a women's soccer match. The complaint was laid with the police by the referee.

Interestingly, by the time the criminal sanction was handed down, the player had already received a life suspension by the soccer association for the offence.

Criminal assault

Criminal assault is the most common form of unlawful abusive behaviour which might arise at a sporting contest. It can arise in either of two ways:

- Through behaviour that causes the victim to feel threatened by the actions of another. Words by themselves do not amount to an assault. There must be some act or gesture accompanying the words which together indicate an intention to assault or which a reasonable person would understand as indicating such an intention
- Behaviour which results in the actual infliction of unlawful force on the body of another.

Common assault is the least serious form of assault and may or may not involve physical contact (eg. spitting).

Common assault charges often result in a fine if the offender is convicted. In order to establish an offence of common assault it is necessary to establish an intention by the offender to cause harm, or recklessness where the accused person appreciates the risk of harm involved with their conduct but proceeds to carry out that conduct anyway.

More serious assaults include those involving actual bodily harm or grievous bodily harm. These offences require actual bodily harm to occur whereby the health or comfort of the victim is interfered with.

There have been numerous instances of on-field sports participants and off-field sports spectators being charged with assault involving actual bodily harm and courts have clearly demonstrated that they will not tolerate such behaviour whether in the sporting context or otherwise.

Scenario

Spectator threatens a referee

Greg regularly referees soccer matches in his local association.

During one Saturday morning game **Greg issues a red card to a player** following what he considered to be a reckless tackle resulting in an injury to another player.

The coach of the player issued with the red card loudly questions the decision. A number of the team's supporters, encouraged by the coach's outburst, shout obscene comments at Greg.

One spectator is particularly aggressive and promises to take the matter up with Greg after the game.

Greg stops the match and asks the Club President of the home team to stop the sideline abuse.

The Club President **warns the coach of breaching the code of conduct** and formally **notifies the aggressive spectator that he will face disciplinary proceedings** for breaching the code of conduct two weeks in a row.

The aggressive spectator refuses to leave the ground but agrees to watch the remainder of the game away from the club rooms.

He is advised that **any further threats to the referee would result in the police being called to attend the ground.**

Scenario

Parents abuse a referee

Joe coaches a basketball team.

During a game two parents direct derogatory comments at the referee. Joe warns the parents that they are breaching the code of conduct.

The individuals say they were not aware of the code of conduct but will "pull their heads in" in any case.

The following week Joe presents each of the parents with a code of conduct which they agree to sign and abide by.

Later in the season one of the parents becomes upset at the referee's ruling against his son and proceeds to verbally abuse the referee.

Joe responds by asking the ground official to report the parent for breach of the association code of conduct.

The official asks the parent to attend a hearing before the association committee during the week.

The association committee suspends the parent from attending three matches and asks him to meet with Joe to discuss the impact of his behaviour on the team.

Alternative arrangements are made the suspended parent's child to attend the next three games.

Scenario

Parents chastise a young player

Helen's daughter Jenny plays in a netball team.

During a match Jenny drops a pass. Some of the **parents of her team shout insensitive comments and even suggest to the coach that Jenny should be replaced.**

The coach ignores the suggestions.

Helen is horrified at their behaviour. **The team manager advises Helen that he will take the matter up with the parents in his official capacity.**

The team manager advises the parents of their breach of the code of conduct by pointing to a copy of the code he keeps in a clipboard.

The parents are told to improve their behaviour or face disciplinary procedures by the club committee.

During later matches Helen witnesses **a marked improvement in the behaviour of the parents.**

Scenario

Player taunts the opposition

Will is playing his football semi-final against the Kangaroos, a team comprising five Aboriginal players.

During the match Will tries to stir up trouble by using racial taunts to induce the Aboriginal players in the Kangaroos to retaliate and give away free kicks.

The referee is quick to respond to these taunts and warns Will that he is in breach of the Player's Code of Conduct.

The referee makes the right decision and through his prompt action he is seen by the players and spectators to be trustworthy and impartial.

In the second half of the game, Will continues to sledge the Aboriginal players, and back chats the referee.

The referee responds quickly by giving Will ten minutes in the sin bin and penalizing his team.