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Referees Union

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MATCH OFFICIAL ABUSE

As the new season approaches in earnest, we hope that you have enjoyed the off season and some well-earned time off from rugby.

At the RFRU AGM held on 25 Jun 23, we had discussions around the issue of Match Official Abuse (MOA) and we updated on the work we have been doing with RFU Discipline over the last season.

In summary, the updated definitions of what MOA is are now in Regulations, The CB Discipline Conference will drive for consistency in how MOA is managed and also underpin the importance of reporting outcomes. We continue to strive to ensure that the “victim” is treated as such and provided the necessary support.

From last season’s Match Official Survey co-ordinated between the RFU Game Development staff and RFU Discipline, it is clear that Match Official Abuse (MOA) continues to be reported as increasing across the game. The survey also has demonstrated that some referees are unsure how to report instances of MOA.

The RFRU Board wishes to reassure referees and members that it remains a top priority for us, and we regularly engage on this issue; at our last Board meeting we had a briefing from Head of RFU Discipline and I was able to put directly to him the concerns raised at our AGM.

This note serves as a reminder for referees and referees’ societies on the definition of MOA and the ways in which MOA **can and should be reported**.

MOA, can and is split into several domains,

- disrespecting the authority of a Match Official (MO),
- verbal abuse,
- using threatening actions or words towards a match official,
- making physical contact with a MO or physical abuse.

Disrespecting the authority of a MO; although possibly of a low level, is persistent and despite warning or use of escalating sanctions (Ask, Tell, Penalise), challenging a MO, with the use of swearing could warrant a red card.

Verbal abuse is whereby foul or offensive language is directly aimed at a MO. This could include an attack on the integrity of a MO, regardless of any foul or offensive language. Often to distinguish verbal abuse from disrespect, a qualifier of you as a person has been added to any swearing. When it is personally directed at you, i.e., the use of ‘you’re’ this is verbal abuse and should receive a red card sanction.

Threatening actions or words towards a MO, are a specific threat to a MO and warrants a red card.

Physical contact of a MO, whereby incidental contact, which is non-intentional and merely more than an accident, warrants a red card.

Although, rare, physical abuse, contact intentionally made with a MO, will warrant a Red Card.

MOA forms are available via societies' and RFU website, and if a Red Card is issued, a Red Card Form can also be submitted. If you have any difficulties accessing or with filling in a form, please do not hesitate to contact [your society, RFRU, RFU].

For reference a guide to MOA is located
<https://www.englandrugby.com/dxdam/2f/2fc5e040-982d-48c7-a077-45937e207f43/MOA%20Guidance.pdf>

We also want to share the best practice that we are sure exists in societies (either in training updates, preparation of match officials (how to manage / deescalate such situations), reporting, support to victims etc)

If societies, have any best practice we would be delighted to share it to benefit the wider MO community. Please send any useful examples of best practice to the RFRU Secretary Dr Adam White (adam.white@rfru.co.uk)

If you have any questions or of concerns, please do not hesitate to contact the RFRU representative who is working closely with RFU Discipline (Nathan Howarth - nathanref@hotmail.co.uk).

Thank You and good luck for the Season ahead

Michael Priestley

Chair, RFRU