



Essex County Rugby Football Union Limited

**Mail Address, 37 Wykeham Avenue
Hornchurch, Essex, RM112LA
Mobile: 07957 434854
Website: www.EssexRugby.com**

**President Mr Keith Hill
Chair Mr Alan Brooking
Honorary Secretary Mr Ivor Smith**

From: Keith Hill.

To All Club Honseretaries

Date: 20 September 2024.

Dear Hon Sec,

I am writing to update Clubs on some updates regarding discipline as well as general housekeeping matters as is usual at the start of a new season.

The 2024-25 season sees further revision to RFU Appendix 19, and whilst I hope that no club has to refer to it, this is your notice that the new version needs to be referred to when clubs are dealing with all matters of discipline.

Despite warnings and heavy sanctions being issued previously, we have continued to see an increase of coaches, parents and reserve players entering the field of play without the Referee's permission. Whilst more noticeable in youth rugby, there have also been instances we have dealt with in the adult game.

It is the responsibility of every club to make your players, coaches, parents, and spectators aware that anyone entering the field of play without the Referee's permission will be summoned to appear in front of the CB Discipline Panel, and if found guilty, a 20 match/ week ban will be the entry point for sanction. You should also be aware that the RFU has, this season, introduced an Interim Suspension Order which will be issued to any persons subject to investigation for this offence until the point at which that appear, in person at a formal hearing.

In writing to clubs last year, I reminded all of their responsibility in dealing with matters and issuing sanctions to their members instead of waiting to be summoned and awaiting the outcome. This remains an issue for CB Discipline Panel Members, particularly where charges are accepted and matters can be dealt with promptly, and usually without formal hearing.

This season, greater emphasis will be placed on clubs to deal with matters in the first instance, and clubs not dealing with matters promptly, or deemed not to be taking their responsibility seriously should expect to be summoned to appear at a panel hearing.

As in previous seasons, the CB Discipline Panel will continue to impose an additional sanction of up to 4 weeks/ 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. This is in addition to the sanctions published formally by the R.F.U. during the 2023-24 season.

As promised, 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 me discipline@essexrugby.com
- 2. Suspension following issue of a red card-** Clubs, coaches and players should all be made aware that should they receive a red card, they are subject to suspension from playing until the completion of the disciplinary process- which is confirmed at either a formal hearing, or in writing by the CB Discipline Secretary following the submission of a club investigation and outcome to the Panel. Any case concerning match official abuse or entering the field without permission will require the individual(s) concerned to appear in person, without exception, and they will therefore remain suspended until such time.
- 3. Use of Video Evidence-** The use of video recordings, and submission of evidence is now commonplace and if it is available, then it should be forwarded to the CB Discipline Secretary within 48 hours of an incident as outlined above. Clubs should also advise the referee prior to the game that it is being recorded.
- 4. 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.
- 5. Abandoned Games-** 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.
- 6. R.F.U. Regulation 19 Sanctions-** The sanction tables that Discipline Panels work to are contained within the Regulation 19 appendices and

readily available online. Clubs need to take note when conducting their own investigations and hearings that any offence involving contact with the head requires at least a mid-range entry point.

- 7. 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.
- 8. 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 with 5 red card offences in one season. This applies across the whole Club and does not consider the of the size of the Club.
- 9. Fees for Panel Hearings-** The standard fee for an individual summoned to appear in front of a panel (and the case being proven) remains unchanged at £75. This is significantly lower than imposed by most other CB panels and the maximum permitted by the R.F.U. In cases where clubs deal with matters promptly and a formal hearing is not required, this is reduced to £55. Where a charge is issued against a Club (usually under Regulation 5.12), and this is proved, an increased panel hearing cost of £125 will apply.

In the overwhelming majority of cases, the work done by volunteers and club discipline leads in promoting the Core Values, ensuring awareness of the Laws of the Game and liaising with the CB Discipline Panel is of huge credit to clubs, the County and the wider game- and it is appreciated.

One of the strengths of our game is that we have a robust system and strong sanctions for when things go wrong, and that we can call those responsible to account. Our process of investigation, based on evidence, must be given time to run its course and in rare instances may have to be put on hold while the police investigate. I would ask everyone to help us protect the image and reputation of the game by keeping speculation off social media when incidents occur. Posts on Club social media pages are potentially damaging to the game, and individuals and their clubs are risking disciplinary proceedings being taken against them if these posts do not uphold the Core Values.

To finish on a positive, we should all remember that Rugby provides amazing opportunity for so many women, men, girls and boys to get out and enjoy participating in a fantastic sport. Grassroots Clubs are the lifeblood of our sport and provide crucial opportunity to meet others and be part of a wider community. It is therefore vital that we continue to place the Core Values at the heart of our clubs to make them a welcoming environment for all.

Wishing you all a successful season.

Keith Hill

Chair of Discipline

Essex County RFU