

SCOTTISH RUGBY UNION

DISCIPLINARY MEMORANDUM : ABUSE OF MATCH OFFICIALS

Memorandum to : Referees, Assistant Referees and Members of the Discipline Panel

Cc. Scottish Rugby Council, Scottish Rugby Board and all Member Clubs

From: GA Ireland, Head of Regulation

Subject: Abuse of Match Officials

Policy on the Application of Sanctions

The Scottish Rugby Board has reaffirmed that the abuse of match officials is wholly unacceptable within our game. Scottish Rugby is the custodian of the game and its brand in Scotland under powers allocated to us by World Rugby. Referee abuse issues have emerged in other rugby jurisdictions and have been dealt with as best fits their particular circumstances. The Board's view as to the appropriate remedy, to protect our match officials and to act as a deterrent, is to sanction the following steps to combat this offence.

With immediate effect:

1. All instances of on-field abuse must be dealt with severely by match officials and those involved in any subsequent disciplinary process under *Scottish Rugby's Disciplinary Rules* (the "Rules").
2. Instances of off-field abuse, which are dealt with under the misconduct procedures set out within the Rules, must be treated as being of an equivalent gravity to on-field abuse. In this regard:
 - Where the match officials determine that equivalent on-field abuse would have resulted in a Red Card, such off-field abuse must be reported to the Discipline Manager using the prescribed form;
 - Disciplinary committee members should ordinarily sanction such misconduct abuse cases in an equivalent manner to a Red Card offence i.e. if a player would have received a 6 week playing ban for an on-field offence, a club official or player found guilty of misconduct for a similar offence should normally receive a 6 week ban from attending his club's games; and
 - In the best interests of the game instances of off-field abuse must be dealt with expeditiously. In view of this modified misconduct procedures shall be incorporated into the Rules.

Entry Point in relation to the Abuse of Match Officials

In determining the entry point for the sanctioning of abuse the Board recognises that each case will require to be taken on its merits. The Board does, however, consider the following matters as being of relevance in relation to determination of the appropriate entry point (i.e. whether the offence should normally be regarded as being Low End, Mid-Range or Top End):

- The nature of the language used, including the actual words, the frequency of their use and the degree of venom with which they are imparted;

- In relation to competence criticisms, whether the comment was personally directed (e.g. *“that was ***** awful ref”* as compared with *“you are a ***** awful ref”*, with the latter being more offensive);
- Whether the abuse involved personal comment including in relation to the official’s family life, personal circumstances or moral values;
- Allegations of impartiality, bias or cheating, which question an individual’s moral values and the wider ethos of refereeing and may therefore be seen as more pernicious;
- Whether the abuse is by an individual or is conducted collectively by a group of individuals.

It is anticipated that other than in wholly exceptional circumstances:

- the presumption shall be against allegations of abuse being downgraded to the lesser offence of not respecting the authority of the match officials;
- allegations as to a lack of impartiality, of bias or of cheating should as a minimum be regarded as a Mid-Range offence; and
- language that is racist, sectarian, homophobic, discriminatory or attacks an individual’s ethnic origin or religious beliefs should as a minimum be regarded as a Mid-Range offence.

In addition, it is the Board’s view that there is a need for a deterrent to combat referee abuse which is an emerging pattern of offending and disciplinary committees should consider the need for a deterrent as an off-field aggravating factor in all cases.

Threatening actions or words constitute a separate serious offence and should be dealt with on that basis.

GA Ireland
Head of Regulation
18 July 2019