

GUIDANCE ON THE AGE GRADE RUGBY DISCIPLINARY PROCEDURES



TEAMWORK RESPECT ENJOYMENT DISCIPLINE SPORTSMANSHIP

Introduction

The RFU's Age-Grade Rugby Disciplinary Procedures (RFU Regulation 19, Appendix 6) are designed to ensure that age-grade players understand that rugby is a game of controlled physical endeavor and should be played in accordance with the World Rugby Laws of the Game. The procedures should be read in conjunction with this guidance.

All those involved in age-grade rugby need to ensure that rugby's high standards of conduct on and off the field are constantly and consistently maintained. The RFU urges a 'child-centric' approach that deals with players in an appropriate, fair and proportionate manner that supports their learning of the Game.

The RFU is very proud of the many volunteers involved in age-grade rugby that promote the RFU Core Values: Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship and teach young players to appreciate the value of the Game.

This guidance seeks to outline best practice. Further advice and assistance is available from the local Constituent Body Youth Disciplinary Secretary, the National Youth Disciplinary Secretary, the England Rugby Football School's Union and the RFU Discipline Department.

This guidance should be read in conjunction with RFU Regulation 15 & 19, the RFU Safeguarding Policy and Toolkit and the Guidance on Obtaining Best Evidence from Child Witnesses in RFU Disciplinary Hearings.

Referees are requested to provide Clubs, Schools or Colleges with a report regarding any sending off within 24 hours of the conclusion of the match so that youth matters can be dealt with in an efficient and expeditious manner.

Responsibilities

Rugby lives by a set of core values.
They define the game and they define England Rugby.

- TEAMWORK** – Teamwork is essential to our sport. We believe the only way to succeed is by working together.
- RESPECT** – Respect forms the basis of our sport. We believe every person on our team has something to contribute.
- ENJOYMENT** – Enjoyment is the reason we play and support rugby union. We believe rugby is fun and being passionate and positive are the keys to great performance.
- DISCIPLINE** – Discipline underpins our sport. We believe it takes strength of character and total focus to deliver.
- SPORTSMANSHIP** – Sportsmanship is the foundation rugby union is based upon. We believe in bringing fairness and integrity to our organisation by living our values.

CB AND CLUB RESPONSIBILITIES

Discipline is one of the core values of the Game. The RFU has responsibility for the management of all disciplinary issues. As part of the disciplinary framework, the RFU delegates certain disciplinary powers to its Constituent Bodies (CBs). Each CB appoints a Disciplinary Panel, a Disciplinary Secretary and a Youth Disciplinary Secretary (CBYDS) with responsibility for dealing with disciplinary incidents within League levels 5 to 12. The RFU appoints a National Youth Disciplinary Secretary (NYDS) to provide advice and support to the CBYDSs, Schools, Colleges and Clubs.

SCHOOL AND COLLEGE RESPONSIBILITIES

Head Teachers and Principals of Schools and Colleges (or staff they delegate authority too) are responsible for managing rugby disciplinary issues. To ensure consistency across age-grade rugby all Schools and Colleges are requested to follow the Age-Grade Rugby Disciplinary Procedures and use the sanctions table provided. Advice and guidance can be obtained from the NYDS in relation to any rugby disciplinary matter in a School or College setting.

Best practice

Below are some considerations when dealing with the Age-Grade Rugby Disciplinary Procedures.

THE PROCESS

Where possible those that know an age-grade player best should be the ones to discipline, mentor, guide and educate that player. The disciplinary process should be conducted more informally than the adult process and the procedures should be simple and easy to understand. Where possible, there should be minimal delay when organising a disciplinary hearing.

PROVISIONAL SUSPENSION

Please be aware that a player ordered-off the field of play becomes immediately provisionally suspended and are unable to take part or be selected for any further match until their disciplinary case has been concluded.

The matter should be dealt with as promptly as possible, particularly if the player indicates an intention to plead not guilty. This prevents the player if found not guilty from serving a period of suspension that they need not have served.

HEARING ARRANGEMENTS

For age-grade players subject to a disciplinary case, or acting as a witness to an incident their welfare should be the primary consideration when making arrangements for a disciplinary hearing. For example, their educational commitments and family life should be carefully considered when deciding when and where the hearing should be listed and how the hearing will be managed.

SANCTION

It is very important that the disciplinary process assists in maintaining high standards within the Game, however any playing suspension imposed on age-grade players should not normally be so severe as to discourage the player from continuing to play rugby in the future (subject of course to the seriousness of the alleged act). Any sanction imposed should be based on the sanctions table; this reflects the player's age, rugby experience, responsibility and culpability. It may also include a non-rugby related element if considered appropriate. Financial penalties or costs should not be imposed on an age-grade player.

SAFEGUARDING

Should any safeguarding concerns arise when dealing with an age-grade player (or any witness) advice should be sought immediately from the CB Safeguarding Manager (CBSM) or the RFU Safeguarding Department.

Under normal circumstance the details of a case involving an age-grade player should not be published. Further assistance on this issue may be sought from the RFU Discipline Department.

The age-grade discipline process in clubs

U12 AND BELOW

The RFU believes that for disciplinary matters for U12s or below the player's coach/manager is in the best position to understand the circumstances and deal with the matter providing the most effective child-centric solution.

The primary aim at this level should be teaching young players about the RFU's Core Values and the high standards expected of them. Coaches should work closely with the player's parents sharing concerns they have about the player and agreeing how these can best be addressed.

U13 TO U18

At Club U13 – U18 level most disciplinary issues should be dealt with by the Club's Disciplinary Officer or Panel, consisting of up to three members experienced at dealing with young people.

The Club should obtain a copy of the match official's report as soon as possible following the match. As stated above, the player is provisionally suspended until his/her hearing takes place.

REPORTING

On receipt of the match official's report the Club must report the matter to the CBYDS within 48 hours. Reporting of incidents is essential to the correct functioning of the disciplinary process. The CBYDS will be able to provide advice and assistance in relation to the hearing process and procedure if required.

AT THE HEARING

Panels need to be mindful of the fact that hearings should be dealt with as quickly as possible. Where matters are contested managing their length is key. Careful consideration should be given by the panel to how the evidence can best be dealt with in order to alleviate potentially lengthy hearings.

The hearing should be conducted as informally as possible. It is not a courtroom or an adult disciplinary tribunal. The player should be accompanied by his parents, or with their approval, another responsible adult. The process shall be explained carefully to the player and he/she or their spokesperson should be given the opportunity to have their say.

If the player pleads guilty, or is found guilty of an offence the Club's Disciplinary Officer/ Panel has the power to impose a playing suspension as set out in the age-grade sanctions table. The table does not show every offence in the World Rugby law book but guidance may be sought from the CBYDS, NYDS or RFU if necessary.

Any playing sanction imposed shall apply to the player's forthcoming matches, irrespective of whether they are due to play for their Club, School, College or any other rugby union team. Any sanction imposed on an age-grade player for a rugby disciplinary matter may include a non-rugby related sanction.

The age-grade discipline process in clubs

FINDING, SANCTIONS AND APPEALS

Reasons should be provided to support any findings, or justify how a sanction was reached.

The outcome of the hearing and any sanction imposed on the player must also be reported to the CBYDS.

Sanctions may be reviewed by the CBYDS and the RFU Head of Discipline and if the sanction is thought to be unduly lenient they may require that the case is reconsidered by a new disciplinary panel.

Appeals from a decision of a player's Club disciplinary panel will be heard by the CB Disciplinary Panel. Appeals must be lodged with the CBYDS within 14 days of written notification of the decision.

If a player appeals they cannot play in any further match until their appeal has been heard and concluded, unless their suspension period has already been served.

REPRESENTATIVE, COUNTY AND DIVISIONAL TEAMS

Age grade player's playing England representative rugby will be dealt with by the RFU. The player's case will be heard by an RFU Judicial Officer or Disciplinary Panel with experience in dealing with young people.

An age-grade player representing their County or playing for a Divisional Team will be dealt with by the CB, unless the CBYDS believes that the matter should be dealt with by the player's Club.

TOURNAMENT, FESTIVALS AND COMPETITIONS

If an age-grade player is ordered-off in a tournament, festival or competition (e.g. Sevens) the matter should be dealt with by the player's coach as soon as possible and in any event it must be dealt with before the player's next match.

The age-grade player will be provisionally suspended and unable to take part or be selected for any further match until the matter has been dealt with.

For serious incidents a full Club hearing may instead be necessary after the event.

The age-grade discipline process in schools and colleges

ORDERING OFF

Thankfully few age-grade players are ordered-off in School or College matches. But if this happens it is the responsibility of the player's Head Teacher or Principal (or staff they delegate authority) to deal with such incidents. The institution should obtain a copy of the match official's report as soon as possible.

PROVISIONAL SUSPENSION

It is important to remember that from the moment the player is ordered-off the field of play they are provisionally suspended until the disciplinary matter has been dealt with.

REPORTING

Upon receipt of the match official's report the matter must be reported to the NYDS/ERFSU within 48 hours.

THE HEARING

A School or College will have their own way of conducting disciplinary meetings but we request that when it comes to dealing with on-field rugby matters that the RFU's procedures are followed. This ensures consistency within the Game. The ERFSU and local CSU can offer advice and guidance especially on interpreting the sanctions table if required.

FINDING, SANCTIONS AND APPEALS

Where the offence is admitted or proven the Head Teacher or Principal has the power to impose a playing suspension in accordance with the framework set out within the age-grade sanctions table. The sanction should apply to all of the age-grade Player's matches, irrespective of whether they are scheduled to play for their School, College, Club or any other rugby team. A Head Teacher or Principal may also impose non-rugby related sanctions if they feel it is appropriate.

Reporting to the NYDS is essential to the successful functioning of the RFU's disciplinary process; especially since any playing suspensions imposed by a School or College apply to all of the player's forthcoming matches, including any Club or representative teams. Please state if it is known that the player is also in a Club team.

Schools and Colleges are asked to honour and enforce any Club imposed playing suspensions on their students.

Sanctions may be reviewed by the NYDS and if they believe that the sanction is unduly lenient they may direct that the School or College review the matter.

If an age-grade player wishes to appeal, this shall be dealt with in accordance with the School's or College's own internal procedures. There is no right of appeal to the CB or the RFU from a decision of the School or College.

If a player appeals in accordance with the School or College's internal procedures they shall not be selected or play in any further match(es) until their appeal has been heard and concluded, unless their period of suspension has already been served.

Citing

Citing complaints may be brought in relation to U13 to U18 matches, but not at U12 and below level.

A citing can be made when there is an allegation that an opposition player has committed a serious act of foul play that merited a red card in a match but the player was not ordered off.

CLUB CITINGS

The complainant player, or their parent /guardian, or Club can lodge a citing. The citing complaint must however be made in writing and be signed by the Club Chairman or Secretary and sent to the CBYDS within 14 days following the match. The citing should set out the following:

- The match detail [date, venue, teams, final score, referee etc.]
- Details of the actual allegation as accurately as possible and the time played, the score at the time of the incident, the position on the field of the incident etc.
- The identity of the player(s) being cited (or information to be able to identify the player(s) concerned)
- Sufficient evidence to establish a case to answer.
- If the incident was seen by the referee representations should be provided to demonstrate that the referee was wrong in not awarding the alleged offending player a red card.

Following receipt of the citing complaint the CBYDS will set up a Disciplinary Panel, with experience of dealing with young people, to hear the case. If the offence is admitted by the offending player, the matter may be referred back to the player's Club to be sanctioned by the Club's Disciplinary Panel.

SCHOOL OR COLLEGE CITING'S

The procedure for citing in Schools and Colleges is similar to the procedure used by Clubs. The citing complaint must be lodged by the Head Teacher or Principal.

The citing complaint should be sent to the opposition player's School or College within 14 days following the match, in order that the matter can be properly dealt with by the alleged offending player's Head Teacher or Principal.

Please see the Club section above for the information on what a citing complaint should contain.

Final word

For further information on any of the issues outlined in this guidance document please contact the RFU Discipline Team. Contact details may be found on the RFU website or via your CBYDS.