



Hertfordshire Rugby Football Union



PITCH-SIDE BEHAVIOUR IN AGE-GRADE RUGBY

Policy on pitch-side behaviour, pitch encroachment, physical intervention and use of barriers in age-grade rugby, and guidance on bystander intervention.

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Document control

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Introduction

Purpose

This policy reiterates and expands the scope of the Hertfordshire RFU Constituent Body's (CB) previous policy on 'Protecting the Playing Area with pitch-side barriers' (May 2015).

This new document incorporates policy on pitch-side behaviour, pitch encroachment, physical intervention and the use of pitch-side barriers to ensure that clubs create safe playing environments for age-grade rugby.

This document also provides guidance to support everyone in challenging poor pitch-side behaviour through 'bystander intervention'.

This policy will ensure the safety of age-grade players and promote the enjoyment of the game by all players, spectators and volunteers.

Scope

This policy applies to all age-grade rugby fixtures between different clubs played within Hertfordshire, from under 7 to under 18, including festivals, triangular fixtures, friendly matches, Hertfordshire / Middlesex League and county cup matches.

There is some differentiation in the application of the policy in respect of the physical requirements of the 'playing area' as they apply to different age groups and as set out in the various sections of RFU regulation 15.

How to use this document

The next section of this document sets out the pitch-side behaviour policy statements, beginning with general expected standards of behaviour, pitch encroachment, physical intervention and sanctions.

The section following this sets out expectations in relation to the use of barriers.

The final section is guidance on Bystander Intervention.

The requirements / expectations of this policy are described as follows:

MUST / MUST NOT – these are mandatory requirements and must be followed

SHOULD – these are not mandatory but are expected best practice, and

COULD – these are advisory or suggested

Policy statements

General expected standards of behaviour

RFU Regulation 19.4.9 states:

"A club shall be responsible for ensuring that all reasonable steps have been taken to ensure that its players, coaches, members and spectators conduct themselves appropriately and do not behave in a way that is improper, offensive, abusive, threatening, indecent or insulting or enter the pitch without the authority of the referee."

Core values and club culture

All age-grade clubs in Hertfordshire SHOULD strive to develop a positive culture among players, parents and volunteers based on the game's core values;

Teamwork, Respect, Enjoyment, Discipline and Sportsmanship

Clubs who develop such a positive culture are better placed to recognise and respond to instances of poor behaviour and an increased confidence of members to challenge or report such behaviour. This will lead to the creation of safer, more enjoyable environments where children can thrive and grow into the game.

Codes of Conduct

All age-grade clubs MUST develop, publicise and promote a 'Code of Conduct'. This COULD be based on the template provided by the RFU [link], but SHOULD set out examples of what might constitute good and / or poor behaviour.

The club's code of conduct SHOULD be used to support developmental conversations with any person who acts in a way contrary to core values or whose behaviour falls short of expected standards.

All adult volunteers involved in organising or facilitating age-grade rugby fixtures with other clubs SHOULD remember, and follow the principle that children's rugby matches MUST be;

Player centred, development driven and competition supported

and in that hierarchical order

Aggravating factors

Verbal abuse or the verbal haranguing of a match official is an aggravating factor and MUST be reported to the Constituent Body (CB) discipline officer with a view to considering CB discipline proceedings.

Verbal abuse or the verbal haranguing of an age-grade player is a safeguarding issue, and MUST be reported to the club safeguarding officer (CSO) and / or the CB safeguarding manager (CBSM) with a view to referring the incident to the RFU safeguarding team.

Verbal abuse or the verbal haranguing of a Young Match Official (YMO – defined as someone under the age of 18) is a safeguarding issue and MUST be reported to the CSO and / or the (CBSM) with a view to referring the incident to the RFU safeguarding team.

Abuse which consists of any remarks or behaviour considered to be racist, sexist or homophobic is a serious aggravating factor and MUST be referred to the RFU head of discipline through the CBSM (for abuse directed at children) or the CB discipline secretary (for abuse directed at other adults).

Pitch encroachment during all age-grade rugby fixtures

General principle

As well as Regulation 19.4.9 above, it is a general principle that coaches, other volunteers and parents are not allowed on to a pitch during an age-grade match. It is the role of the referee, or game manager, to guide and advise players while the game is in play.

Adults MUST NOT enter the pitch for any reason while an age-grade game is in play without being invited by the referee (except for a clearly identified emergency first aider to treat an injured player and only when it is safe to do so; World Rugby passport 6.28).

The above statement applies to all age-grade rugby from under 7s to under 18s and to all adults including coaches, helpers and parents.

Breaches and sanctions

Without prejudice to any action that might be taken by a referee:

- An isolated, or first minor instance of an adult entering the field without permission and where there are no aggravating factors (as above), SHOULD be managed under codes of conduct or core values where the emphasis is on reflection and education.
- Any repeated instance of encroachment by an adult (e.g. following any warnings) or where there are aggravating factors (as described above) MUST be reported to the CB discipline secretary and / or CB safeguarding manager (CBSM).

Physical Intervention

The RFU's guidance on [physical intervention in rugby](#) states this is only permissible when it is 'absolutely necessary' to prevent children being hurt.

The RFU guidance SHOULD be read and understood alongside this policy so that everyone is aware of what is expected of adults who might consider it necessary to physically intervene (e.g. between scuffling players).

The RFU safeguarding team will consider each case of physical intervention on its merits. They may choose to refer any case to a Local Authority Designated Officer (LADO) or they may send a case back to the CB for a discipline investigation.

'Absolutely necessary' is a hard threshold to reach. Any adult who considers it necessary to physically intervene MUST be prepared to justify that intervention to the LADO or the police (in the most serious cases) or to a CB discipline panel in every other case.

Any instance of physically manhandling an age-grade player, regardless of any perceived justification and regardless of the player's age, MUST be reported to the RFU safeguarding team by the CSO and / or CBSM within 24 hours.

Interim suspensions

RFU Regulation 19.3.8 states:

"... the RFU Head of Discipline, or a person with delegated authority, has the power to provisionally suspend any individual for a period of up to four weeks if such individual has entered the playing area without the permission of the referee and is subject to a disciplinary or safeguarding investigation. There is no right of appeal from this decision."

Any adults who enter the pitch whilst an age-grade game is in play or who have physically intervened with an age-grade player, and where there is an ongoing safeguarding or discipline investigation SHOULD be subject of an interim suspension for a period of four weeks under the delegated authority of the CB discipline secretary.

Pitch barriers and protecting the playing area

Youth fixtures (under 13s and above)

A physical barrier **MUST** be used to separate spectators from players and those involved in the playing of the game. This is a safety issue and **MUST** be strictly complied with.

(NB – this mandatory requirement only applies to youth fixtures or matches between clubs. In non-competitive events, such as training, or coached games involving one or two age-grade teams of the same club, barriers are not necessary, but **COULD** be used to encourage good practice at the discretion of coaching teams).

Referees (including society referees, independent referees or club referees) **SHOULD NOT** allow a match to begin unless barriers are in place.

Barriers can be temporary or permanent but **MUST** be in place throughout the period the game is in play and extend for the whole length of the touchline from try line to try line.

The barrier **SHOULD** be a minimum of three metres back from the touchline so that it encompasses any flag poles and any technical areas used by coaches and replacements.

As a minimum, in the absence of a permanent barrier, a temporary barrier **MUST** consist of stakes or posts at intervals with rope or tape strung between. A line of cones is insufficient.

If, due to the physical layout of a pitch and space constraints, a barrier can only be placed along one side of the pitch, all spectators **MUST** be required to stay behind the barrier on the side of the pitch the barrier is placed.

If it is customary for some spectators to stand behind the in-goal area, then a barrier **MUST** also be placed along the length of the dead ball line; if this is not possible, the spectators **MUST** be required to move to the side behind a barrier.

The technical area **MUST** be inside the barrier and outside the playing area, within an area between the centre and 10m lines and 2m back from the touchline. The technical areas **COULD** be marked by cones.

Coaches, replacements, water carriers and first aiders **MUST** remain in the technical area while the game is in play (except when delivering water to the players during a break in play or entering the pitch to carry out a first aid assessment or provide treatment).

Coaches or replacements **MUST NOT** walk along the touchline to follow play during the game and **MUST NOT** stand in the in-goal area (except, with the discretion of a match official, where replacements who might be required to play are undertaking a warm-up routine and there is no other available space).

Fixtures involving younger age grades (under 7s to under 12s)

There is currently no requirement for a physical barrier at the sides of the pitch in the same way as there is for youth rugby.

However, clubs **SHOULD** encourage spectators to stand back from the touchline, and not to stand on it. This **COULD** be achieved by using a rope / tape barrier or a secondary line of cones, together with clear instructions being given before the start of a game.

The imposition of a clearly marked space between spectators and players in younger age grades enables children to run close to the touchline without the risk of being impeded and helps spectators to build an understanding of what will be expected in youth rugby.

Coaches or replacements **MUST NOT** walk along the touchline to follow play during the game and **MUST NOT** stand in the in-goal area, although in most cases this can be dealt with by words of advice or through respectful dialogue between coaching teams.

Bystander Intervention guidance

What is 'Bystander Intervention'?

The 'bystander effect', or the likelihood of a person's presence affecting whether another person would intervene in an adverse event, has been a subject of social research since the late 1960s. The term 'Bystander intervention' has more recently come to describe individuals who assume personal responsibility to influence the actions of others to prevent a situation from escalating. Much of the recent research has focused on the success of intervening to prevent unwanted sexual advances or abusive or discriminatory behaviour.

It has been shown to have relevance to spectators at sporting events, with a measurable effectiveness in reducing abusive, offensive or discriminatory remarks. Being an 'active bystander' is important for fostering a positive culture in a sport like rugby as it helps to ensure everyone feels safe and respected.

Positive and negative influences

Most age-grade rugby spectators, parents for the most part, are respectful of the sport and exhibit core values, almost by default. This means that children can enjoy their sport and develop their skills supported by positive and encouraging comments from the sidelines.

From time to time, however, an individual may display negative behaviour, which manifests itself as inappropriate, abusive, threatening, or discriminatory comments. This behaviour can have a destructive impact on a young person's self-esteem, confidence and overall enjoyment of the game, and in some cases very real distress. In which case, if the behaviour persisted without challenge, it would constitute emotional abuse.

The effect of acquiescence

Whilst most people recognise such poor behaviour for what it is, not everyone possesses the confidence or the will to challenge it. This can be because of a dislike of confrontation or a fear of repercussions. It may even be because it just happens to be a child other than their own who is the subject of the behaviour, and putting their head up to challenge it might be seen as 'not worth it'. This is known as 'acquiescence'.

If the majority of people acquiesce in this way it generates a phenomenon known as 'false consensus'. This is the false impression that most of the people in the vicinity actually do not object to the behaviour. If it persists, the false consensus can reinforce a state of mind of the perpetrator, and of everyone else, that they are behaving in a way that is approved of, giving their behaviour a degree of legitimacy. In reality, the likelihood is that most of the people who witness this behaviour are equally uncomfortable with it.

The impact of an active bystander

An active bystander who chooses to intervene can have a significant effect on the state or mind of everyone else. A simple verbal challenge to the perpetrator does two things:

It signals to others that the behaviour has been acknowledged and 'called out' and will validate their own feelings of discomfort about the behaviour. This can lead to others being confident enough to speak out and 'back up' the original challenger.

It notifies the perpetrator that the behaviour is not accepted by the majority and will, hopefully, induce some reflection, thereby preventing a repetition.

Curtailling the behaviour AND changing hearts and minds at the same time is the ideal solution as it dispenses with the need to escalate further.

Effective and assertive challenging

An intervention by an active bystander is an effective tool. But it is important to follow some ground rules to ensure the challenge is meaningful and less prone to push back or conflict.

Use the 'I' statement

Effective – “I am offended by this; I am uncomfortable with this; I don’t agree with this; I would like you to stop”. This means you, personally, have taken responsibility and ownership for the problem

Not effective – “Lisa / Jack / Sadie / Robin is offended by this; you have upset Lisa / Jack / Sadie / Robin”.

This gives the perpetrator an escape route, “Lisa / Jack / Sadie / Robin, you aren’t upset by that are you?”

The problem with this is that the third party here might not be quite ready or have the confidence there and then step forward, and the most logical response would be “No it’s fine; I’m okay; it doesn’t matter”. This sets up a conflict triangle or a two *versus* one scenario where you, the challenger, are now in the wrong.

Use facts – not judgments

Effective – Focus on the behaviour and not the person. “This behaviour is against our codes of conduct; This is contrary to our core values”.

Not effective – “You are stupid; you are a right piece of work; you are a dick mate”.

The problem with this is you have unwittingly escalated the perpetrator’s emotions by being personal and they are more likely to be defensive or react in a more threatening way.

Use agreement

Effective – “I know you probably didn’t mean to cause offense, but I am uncomfortable with your words, and I’d like you to stop”

Not effective – “I’m not interested in your excuse; I don’t care what you think”.

If you give the perpetrator a way out of the situation by giving them a ‘safe’ opportunity to back down with some grace you are more likely to prevent escalation.

Broken record

Stick with your point and repeat it to ensure you get it across assertively without engaging in extraneous discussion.

“I am uncomfortable with this, and I’d like you to stop. As I say, I am uncomfortable and I’d like you to stop. Please stop”.

Follow-up

Lastly, it is important that you report this appropriately to someone who can make a note of the identity of the perpetrator – perhaps the CSO? It may well be that the perpetrator will have learned their lesson, and their behaviour will not be repeated. If that is not the case it is important that evidence of a course of conduct can be established in the event of repeat incidents so they can be dealt with appropriately under the club’s code of conduct or through discipline if that becomes necessary.

Appendix

Related regulations, policy and guidance

[RFU Safeguarding children policy](#) – especially section 6 – Best practice guidance

[Age-Grade rugby codes of practice](#) – especially section 2 – Player centred approach

[RFU Regulation 15](#) and associated age-grade rules of play

[RFU Regulation 19](#) – Discipline – especially Regulation 19.3.8 and 19.4.9

[Codes of conduct](#)

[Guidance on physical intervention](#)

[Information for those who have had a concern raised against them](#)