

How do we get more Respect in football?

League consultation document



Respect

Introduction

At the start of the 2008/09 season the FA and its partners launched the Respect programme to improve standards of behaviour at all levels of the game. In particular the Respect programme was introduced to promise;

- A base number of registered referees sufficient for the demands of the game at every level
- A year on year reduction in assaults on referees
- An improvement in on- field player discipline particularly in the area of dissent to referees
- A step change in youth football as to what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour from parents and spectators

Now at the end of the third season, the Respect programme has had an impact in some areas of the game. In general it has contributed to a better environment for the recruitment and retention of Referees, a reduction in serious Referee assaults and improving the atmosphere in and around Youth Football. In the professional game (Premier League, Football league and Football Conference) the volume of dissent cautions has declined by 16% and the number of misconduct charges has fallen in most areas. Public perception of the conduct of professional football however remains at a low level. In relation to on field behaviour in the adult game it is more difficult to perceive an impact and the absence of additional related sanctions for those that fail to abide by the programme is frequently cited as a weakness.

The FA is keen to see how it might enhance the impact of the programme particularly in the adult grassroots game. We are keen to gather the opinion of leagues as how best to do this.

Core principles

In considering these options the FA are of the opinion that three core principles should apply;

- 1.** The FA should seek to support leagues in the management of their competition as it relates to dealing with poorly behaved teams and players in a fair and reasonable manner
- 2.** To ensure consistency and fairness across the country the FA and CFA's should remain the bodies to instigate, administer and implement disciplinary measures
- 3.** The primary aim of the Respect programme is to prevent poor behaviour and therefore the most important element will be the promotion of Respect, use of Codes of Conduct, use of team captains, enhanced working relationship between referees, players and coaches, use of designated spectator areas, education of parents /spectators. The measures outlined below are designed to help with those who consistently refuse to alter their behaviour

Potential Enhancement of Disciplinary Measures and Processes

Following feedback from many of its stakeholders the FA wishes to consult with its partners in the national game as to additional measures that may assist them in creating and maintaining a better environment in which the game can take place. The FA is aware of the power of example - both good and bad – that can be set at the highest levels of the game and the FA is working with its professional partners on these issues. However the following options focus predominantly on the grassroots game youth and adult and have emerged from a working group established by the FA's National Game Board.



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Possible Action

| Measure | Pros | Cons |
|--|---|---|
| <p>1. Impose point deductions on teams that exceed agreed disciplinary thresholds and despite the use of other sanctions persist in poor behaviour.</p> | <p>Points deductions could be used as a high level sanction that would come into effect for teams that persist in poor behaviour despite formal warnings and the use of other sanctions. The threat of deductions of points would greatly enhance 'peer' policing of conduct on the pitch as team mates become much more aware of the consequences of individual indiscipline.</p> <p>To avoid accusations of vested interest in league management committees that often have club representatives such sanctions should be administered by the County Football Association rather than being instigated by a league.</p> <p>Such a proposal is popular with many grassroots leagues who feel that club fines have a limited impact whereas a loss of points would have an impact on the entire club or team.</p> | <p>The FA's current position is that points deductions should only be used in exceptional circumstances where misconduct has resulted in a sporting advantage, (i.e financial offences) or extreme offences involving serious misconduct. Such matters currently could only be dealt with in accordance with FA Rule (G1-G4) by either The FA or CFA and under strict guidelines. Clear thresholds would be required not least to ensure consistency and proportionality. Points deductions are likely to be subject to challenge and this could generate significant extra admin and uncertainty over the competition concerned.</p> <p>The extension of points deductions would lead to a growth in the number of 'asterisk' leagues whereby it could be argued that competitions are decided by actions taken off the field of play.</p> |
| <p>2. Reporting - the FA/CFA are unable to take appropriate discipline action if an incident is not reported. A perception still exists that a FA/CFA will only respond to a referees report.</p> | <p>There is greater scope to improve and standardise misconduct reporting mechanisms with the extension of the FA's electronic reporting system for Referees – MOAS.</p> <p>Additional educational work should be carried out with CFAs and leagues to make them aware that it is possible to initiate a misconduct charge without a referee's report.</p> | <p>Reports submitted by people other than the match official require a greater level of scrutiny and an enhanced burden of proof.</p> <p>Inviting additional reports could lead to an increase in biased or mischievous accusations being made.</p> |
| <p>3. Greater standardisation of sanctions. Although sanctioning guidelines exist for single offences there has been very little regarding multiple offences, resulting in some cases in either excessive or lenient penalties being applied.</p> | <p>The FA should produce enhanced Sanction guidelines and ensure use of these is included in the CFA education programme.</p> <p>From the start of the 2011/12 season The FA will be able to appeal decisions of CFA disciplinary commissions that are considered to be disproportionately lenient.</p> | <p>An extension of Sanction guidelines may reduce the remit of CFA Disciplinary Commissions to exert flexibility if they perceive extenuating circumstances.</p> <p>Allowing the FA to appeal against unduly lenient decisions will extend the length of time it takes to deal with some disciplinary offences – a frequent source of frustration for those involved.</p> |
| <p>4. Dealing with managerial/coach misconduct. Usually poor behaviour in the technical area by a team official will result in a 'Club Charge' which in many cases means that the individual concerned is not held directly responsible for their actions.</p> | <p>Provide enhanced guidance to CFAs on imposing sanctions that are applied directly to the manager/coach. This may result in individuals being banned from attending certain matches. CFAs should also be encouraged to deal with clubs who fail to exert control over their team officials.</p> <p>Provide additional guidance on where dismissed team officials are required to relocate themselves having been removed from the technical area.</p> | <p>Volunteer administrators may struggle to police a system which bans individuals from undertaking a managerial or coaching role – particularly if this takes place in an open access public facility. Difficulties also exist when a team official is removed from a technical area only to relocate themselves yards from their original position.</p> |



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Possible Action

| Measure | Pros | Cons |
|--|---|--|
| 5. Encourage Clubs themselves to take disciplinary measures against misbehaving members. | Clubs are in a position to take prompt and effective action against players, coaches and team officials. Such action needs to be proportionate and progressive. Additional guidelines for chartered standard clubs have been produced and should be promoted more extensively. The implementation of such measures is however at the discretion of the club itself. | The implementation of such measures is however at the discretion of the club itself and inevitably some clubs will chose to do so and others will not. The playing contributions of the individual concerned can often have an impact on a club's willingness to take a stand against poor behaviour. |
| 6. Improve the provision of Disciplinary Information to leagues. - At the moment the FA is able to provide for its senior leagues a breakdown of disciplinary offences and how these compare to other clubs in that league. A number of leagues have welcomed this information and used it as the basis to identify problem clubs as well as target setting season to season. | Currently this information is provided to Leagues operating above Step 4. The extension of the distribution of this information to leagues further down the pyramid would significantly assist many with their management of club discipline. | Additional work for hard pressed administrators to take on. |
| 7. Dealing with persistent and serious offenders. Many leagues consider that it has become much more difficult to exclude problematic players from participating in a league arising from FA Regulations which required that the individual exceed a suspension threshold of 112 days or 10 match days over two seasons for repeated misconduct (i.e not an individual incident). Currently the cumulative totals of a player across different leagues are not taken into consideration. | <p>The difficulty experienced by Leagues in removing badly behaved players from their competitions is perhaps the greatest area of complaint by leagues.</p> <p>This threshold is scheduled to be reviewed at the end of the 2010/ 2011 season and the general feeling of many leagues and CFAs is that the threshold should be lowered and that a league should be able to seek the exclusion of a player following an individual incident of significant misconduct.</p> <p>To prevent unfair or unreasonable exclusions CFA's should remain the sanctioning body for such decisions. The CFA will also need to take a decision as to whether an exclusion from one league should apply to other leagues and for what period of time.</p> | <p>The move to a match day suspension threshold of 10 days may make it easier to deal with persistent offenders.</p> <p>There is a danger that a reduced threshold could be used to exclude players that are clumsy or unlucky rather than ill disciplined and malicious.</p> <p>The system only takes into account one 'type' of football and does not allow for the records of an individual involved in Saturday/Sunday/Small Sided football to be linked up.</p> |
| 8. Revise the current CFA 'Disciplinary Points' system so that it becomes a more effective deterrent. | <p>The current system is unable to distinguish between clubs and teams. Larger clubs are unlikely to reach penalty thresholds given the points allowance for each team. The financial penalties that are imposed are not considered to act as a significant deterrent for misbehaving teams or clubs.</p> <p>The System could also be adapted so that the points tariff is higher for Respect related offences - use of offensive, insulting or abusive language or gestures, assault, continuing misconduct, abusive or insulting behaviour, racist or discriminatory behaviour directed at a match official.</p> | The 'Penalty Points' system is not in operation in all CFAs. Even if it were better targeted on teams rather than clubs its impact on amending the behaviour of ill disciplined teams is not proven. |
| 9. The FA provides £500k of financial support to leagues at all levels of the football pyramid. This support should be withheld from leagues that fail to support the 'Respect' programme. | When successfully implemented Respect can assist in recruiting and retaining more referees, players, teams and spectators by providing a more enjoyable playing environment. Why should a league not feel in a position to offer its support? | Some volunteer league administrators feel that Respect will require more work at a time when they already feel stretched. |



Respect

What's Your View?

These options present a range of measures or initiatives which could strengthen the management of discipline by CFAs and leagues and attempt to deal with many of the concern voiced by volunteer administrators in recent years. Your views and opinions on these proposals are sought and we would welcome your feedback on the attached form.

What's the Deadline?

If you have a view to express please make your response on the electronic template by Monday 14 November 2011

It is also the intention of the FA to discuss the contents of the document with various league advisory committees that it hosts as well as at County FA League Forums staged within the consultation timeframe.