



Introduction

Following an increase in cases that relate to social networking sites, Suffolk FA wish to issue a reminder to anyone using social media.

This reminder applies to all participants, that any comment they make which is offensive, threatening, violent or that is deemed to have brought the game into disrepute will result in action being taken against them by Suffolk FA.

To clarify a participant is a player, referee, coach, parent, club official or any other individual who has an active involvement with football.

Participants are responsible for any comments or posts that are associated with their account.

Clubs and Leagues are responsible for all content of their own websites and accounts, and if comments cannot be traced back to an individual, the club or league will be held accountable for these.

Several serious charges have previously been raised against individuals and clubs; please ensure all members are educated on this subject.

Media comments and Social Networking cases – Charging guidelines

These guidelines have been prepared to provide helpful guidance to Clubs with regard to media comments and social networking postings. The guidelines in no way affect, supersede, alter or replace the actual FA Rules and Regulations in force from time to time. Reference should always be made to the actual FA Rules and Regulations for the full regulatory provisions which govern the disciplinary procedures and which shall at all times prevail.

General

Cases involving media comments or comments made on social networking sites are charged under FA Rule E3(1). Should the comments include a reference to any one or more of a person or person's ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, faith, gender, sexual orientation or disability, these are considered 'aggravating factors' and FA Rule E3(2) may apply. This allows for a Regulatory Commission to consider the imposition of a doubled sanction.

Types of comment

The following types of public media comment, including on social networking websites, may be considered to be in breach of FA Rule E3:

- Comments which are improper, which bring the game into disrepute, which are threatening, abusive, indecent or insulting.
- Comments about match officials which imply bias, attack the officials' integrity or which are personally offensive in nature

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Points to note

Participants are deemed responsible for any postings on their account. The fact that a posting may have been made by a third party will not necessarily prevent disciplinary action being taken.

In addition, re-tweeting another person's posting may lead to disciplinary action if the original comment was improper. Finally, deleting an inappropriate posting, whilst advisable, does not necessarily prevent disciplinary action being taken.

Process

For cases involving social networking media comments and media comments which have only been published in a written media format and which are considered by The FA to potentially breach FA Rule E3, The FA will always seek written observations from the Participant alleged to have made the comment. This provides an opportunity for a Participant to explain whether he did in fact make the comment, clarify the context in which the comment was made and what was meant by it.

The FA will then consider the observations provided by the Participant and decide whether to either charge the Participant with a breach of FA Rule E3, issue a formal warning to the Participant or to take no further action in relation to the matter.

With regard to public media comments made during television or radio interviews or in articles written and attributed to the Participant, The FA may choose not to seek written observations. This will often be the case where the comment was clearly made by the Participant and the context is apparent.

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