



FOR ALL

LGBTQI+

**MATCH OFFICIAL
SCENARIO TOOLKIT**

This toolkit forms part of a wider programme of work on LGBTQI+ inclusion in grassroots football, developed with several County FAs through a pilot under the FA's '*A Game Free from Discrimination*' strategy. It draws on the experience of match officials who deal with these situations on the pitch, and it sits alongside existing FA guidance rather than replacing it. This is an evolving document and scenarios and guidance will be updated as more feedback comes in, with further support for match officials to follow as is appropriate.

Document Control

LGBTQI+ match official scenario toolkit

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Summary: How to use this guidance

This guidance exists to support the ways in which Match Officials can challenge incidents of discrimination on the pitch.

It is designed to work alongside the The FA 'Guidance on Dealing with Discrimination' document, produced for Match Officials. The guidance operates to support the current working practices in place.

This guidance is intended to display a range of ways to respond to anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination on the pitch.

In the Laws of the Game, Law 12 focuses on fouls and misconduct. The law states that "using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or action(s)" is a sending-off offence".

The scenarios within this guidance take into consideration Law 12 in a game-like situation. Situations such as this would be dealt with on a case by case basis.

As stated in the FA 'Guidance on Dealing with Discrimination' document, the reporting process should be followed by all Match Officials. This guidance is designed to be used in tandem with other FA guidance.

The guidance is as follows:

If you, as the Match Official, witness or do not witness the discriminatory incident (alleged) on the field of play or in technical area, you should:

- If witnessed, stop play immediately and send off the offending player or technical area occupant from the field in accordance with Law 12.

- If not witnessed and it is alleged incident of discrimination, no red card is shown in this circumstance.
 - Next stage is to make a contemporaneous report of what has happened or alleged to have happened before you restart play (player name, offence, minute, what was/ alleged said/done, where you were, any other necessary information).
 - Simultaneously, check on the welfare of those who are affected.
 - It is important to advise both teams, necessary players and management, that you have written an account and will be reporting this post match.
 - After the match has concluded, you as the Match Official should require the complainant player, along with a member of their team/club to review the written notes taken.
 - Following that and separately, the player that has is subject of the allegation or has been witnessed behaving in a discriminatory manner, along with a member of their team/ club, should have the words or alleged words put to them, with any response recorded.
- If you - or one of the Match Officials - witnesses an incident from a spectator, you should:
- Stop play immediately.
 - Advise the host club about what's been witnessed and ask them to deal with the offender, if they can be identified.

- Make a contemporaneous report about what's happened before you restart play (offence, minute, what was said/done, where you were, any other necessary information).
- Simultaneously, check on the welfare of those who are affected.
- Separately, advise both teams, necessary players and management, that you have made a report and will be reporting this post match.

After the match has concluded, the Match Official should require the complainant player, along with a member of their team/club to confirm their allegation again, and the Match Official should make a note again of what that allegation is - and keep the written notes.

Following that and separately, the player that has is subject of the allegation - also along with a member of their team/club, should have the words of the allegations put to them, with any response also recorded by the Match Official.

If you as the Match Official are advised of a discriminatory allegation after a match, they should:

- Write every detail possible in this report, including where you were at the time, i.e. your position on the pitch or in your changing room etc. Be as specific as you can with elements such as:
 - The time the incident was reported to you.
 - Who reported what to you.
 - The full statements from all necessary participants.
- The notes should include timings and must be as accurate as possible, including reported behaviour.
- The notes should document all participants present when the allegation is made.

- The notes should be retained by you as the Match Official.
- Report all your information as an extraordinary incident through the Match Official Portal.
- You are strongly advised not to make any comments to the media regarding any aspect of an allegation of this nature.
- Contact the County FA or the Match Official appointments officer. Dealing with discriminatory incidents can be really tough. We often need some reassurance and a listening ear, so feel free to pick up the phone or send a text/email.
- You may then be required to give a further witness statement and/or attend a personal hearing. Remember, you are only ever a witness at such hearings.

Important notes:

- As the Match Official, do not defer responsibility for taking notes regarding the incident until the end of the game; it must be recorded there and then.
- Important to note that the County FA may not issue a charge if an evidential threshold is not met. At request, the County FA can explain the reason for the outcome, if you would like further information.

Checklist

What this guidance is for

- Helping Match Officials recognise anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination on the pitch.
- Supporting Match Officials to take the right course of action.
- Emboldening Match Officials to enforce the Laws of the Game and assist to create a game free from discrimination.

What this guidance is not:

- This is not exhaustive list of what to do/not do.
- A one-size-fits all approach.
- A critique on current practices.

Core principles to hold onto

- **Dignity and respect:** Everyone in football should be treated with basic respect, even in disagreement.
- **Process, not argument:** When things are complex, follow the process rather than escalating conflict.
- **Consistency builds trust:** Recording and responding consistently is how confidence grows over time.

Understanding Discrimination

As stated in the FA's Laws of the Game, Law 12 defines that using **offensive, insulting or abusive language** and/or actions(s) is as a sending-off offence. Discriminatory language can fall into this category.

This can take a number of forms:

- Direct abuse (slurs, terms, actions).
- Targeted aggressive behaviour.
- Humiliating comments.

As a Match Official it's key that Match Officials understand what might constitute anti-LGBTQI+ discrimination.

Always assess the following:

- **Language** being used.
- **Behaviour** displayed.
- **Impact** on those around.

Match Officials do not require proof of someone's sexuality, to judge intent of the comment, or debate the meaning of the comment. Match Officials are responsible for supporting a safe playing environment by responding to and reporting any incidents of discrimination, whilst ensuring appropriate action is taken to protect those affected.

Scenarios

Below is a list of scenarios that may occur in a football game. In all cases, you should follow the FA guidance of:

Listen: Take notice of what has occurred and find out further information

Action: Take the required action in accordance with the Laws of the Game

Report: Take required statements, and document any actions taken

In each scenario, you will be presented with a range of reflection questions, how it relates to the Laws of The Game, as well as a possible course of action.

Following each scenario, take some time to reflect on how this would play out in your own environment.

With all scenarios, regardless of outcome, the incidents should be written into the match report. In some instances, it may require a safeguarding report too.

Scenario 1

Two players are regularly finding themselves in a 1 on 1 situation. Tensions are rising and you notice them **often exchange words**. After the most recent battle, resulting in a **careless challenge**, one of the players makes a lewd gesture towards the player, shouting a **homophobic** comment.

Questions:

- What actions would you have taken prior to this incident?
- How might you take action now?
- What might you need to find out?

Law 12 Consideration:

- Careless challenge – No card, but possible free kick.
- Clear use of abusive language.

Decision:

- Free kick awarded.
- Player sent off for discriminatory language.

Reflection:

- In this scenario, it's important to break it down. The lewd gesture, the aggression, and the context of constant back-and-forth, means the comment was likely hostile, and using LGBTQ identity to harm others - this would be a sending-off offence.
- It may also be the case that the other player had also said such language. Should this be raised it's important that during the game as tensions are rising, players are spoken to and warned about their conduct – even if you haven't directly heard any slur.
- Captains and club officials should also be informed.
- Aggravated language reported to CFA.

Scenario 2

A defending player commits a **shirt pull** on an attacking opponent who is breaking into the penalty area. The referee applies **advantage** as the attacker remains on her feet and shoots. After the shot is saved, the defending player loudly directs **anti-lesbian abuse** towards the attacking player.

Questions:

- There are two separate incidents here – which takes priority?
- What would be your response?

Law 12 Consideration:

- Holding an opponent – Denial of Goal Scoring Opportunity (DOGSO).
- Application of advantage as player remained standing.
- Offensive, insulting or abusive language.

Decision:

- Play stops after the save.
- **Red card** to the defender for **offensive, insulting or abusive language**.
- DOGSO sanction still applies because advantage did not result in a goal.
- **Advantage played**.
- Match report notes discriminatory language as primary misconduct.
- Aggravated language reported to CFA.

Reflection:

- It may be the case that the women's game is more open around LGBTQI+ inclusion. However, offensive, insulting or abusive language can be present in all areas of the game.

Scenario 3

An attacking player who is already on a yellow card commits a **careless trip**. When penalised, she aggressively protests and **shouts and directs discriminatory abuse towards the referee**, based on their perceived sexuality.

Questions:

- Does the sexuality of the referee matter in this case?
- What is your response?

Law 12 Consideration:

- Careless foul.
- Dissent.
- Offensive, insulting or abusive language toward a Match Official.

Decision:

- **Red card** for offensive, insulting or abusive language.
- Careless foul punished with **direct free kick**.
- Aggravated language reported to CFA.

Scenario 4

A defender makes a **two-footed challenge**, using **excessive force** and seriously endangering an opponent's safety. As medical staff attend to the injured player, **another player comes running over and pushes the defender**, shouting discriminatory abuse, relating to the fact that the player was not born in the UK and not welcome in this country. In response, the defender **pushes the player back** and shouts **homophobic abuse towards the other player**.

Questions:

- What are all the incidents that have happened here?
- What action would you take?

Law 12 Consideration:

- Serious Foul Play from the defender.
- Offensive, insulting or abusive language from the other player and the defender.
- Player safety and match control considerations.

Decision:

- **Red card** for Serious Foul Play (defender).
- Use of **offensive, insulting or abusive language** recorded as aggravating misconduct (defender).
- Red card for the other player's offensive, insulting or abusive language.
- **Direct free kick or penalty** (depending on location).

Reflection:

- In this scenario, multiple players are displaying discriminatory behaviours.
- There is no hierarchy of identity. Discrimination against any protected characteristic is still discrimination.

Scenario 5

After a fair aerial challenge, the players involved have a little discussion about if it's a foul or not. A substitute warming up near the touchline directs **anti-LGBTQ abuse toward a bisexual opponent**, telling her to 'make her mind up' whether it was a foul or not, like she needs to 'make her mind up' about who she dates. This would be considered **Biphobic abuse**.

Questions:

- How would you respond to the substitute player?
- What about those on the pitch?
- What are some other examples of Biphobia?

Law 12 consideration:

- Applies to **substitutes**.
- Offensive, insulting or abusive language.
- Restart when no foul occurred.

Decision:

- **Red card shown** to the substitute for using offensive, insulting or abusive language.
- Substitute removed from technical area.
- Restart with an **indirect free kick** from where play was stopped.

Reflection:

- Biphobia is a term that relates to discrimination towards bisexual people. A common example of this, is that Bi people are 'confused', 'greedy' or 'need to decide' who they like. The vast majority of Bi people hide their identity, often due to the stigma attached to being bisexual.

Scenario 6

A trans man who has socially but not medically or hormonally transitioned is playing within an FA affiliated women's league. The player tells you that the opposition players **keep referring to him**

as 'she', and deliberately misgendering him. You **haven't heard this** during the game.

Questions:

- What's important to think about here?
- What steps would you take?
- Who would you ask for support?

Law 12 Consideration:

- Though it may not be a slur, it would be fair to conclude that the player is displaying **offensive, insulting or abusive language** by denying the other player's trans identity. The player is a trans man, and so uses he/him pronouns.
- It may be the case you have not heard the comment – in that moment they should ask the assistant Match Official, as a player cannot be sent off if the Match Official didn't hear it.
- If no one else heard the comment, and it has just been alleged, the Match Official should take the player aside, explain that an allegation has been made. It should be explained that if discriminatory language is heard, this will result in an immediate sending off.
- Captains/coaches should be informed and if appropriate, check on the trans player.
- This should be included in a detailed match report.

Reflection:

- It may be that all or none of the players know that this particular player is trans. In any case, the decision to call him a 'girl' is clearly meant as an insult.
- It's not the Match Official's role to prove someone's gender identity (if they're a man or woman) or decide on who is trans. Clubs and leagues have a responsibility for ensuring players involved in the game are eligible.
- If you haven't heard the comment, the player cannot be sent off. That doesn't mean that no action can be taken, the players involved can still be spoken to, and the match report can reflect what happened.

Scenario 7

A player accuses another player of **tackling dangerously**. The referee agrees and awards a direct free kick for a reckless challenge. The player who was fouled walks away and thanks the referee for their decision, but in doing so, makes a discriminatory comment towards trans people.

Questions:

- What are all the incidents that have happened here?
- What action would you take?

Law 12 Consideration:

- **Reckless Play** from the defender – resulting in a yellow card.
- However, **offensive, insulting or abusive language** from the other player is present.

Decision:

- **Yellow card** for the reckless challenge (defender).
- **Red card** for the other player's discriminatory language.

Reflection:

- The fouled player here is clearly upset, and you can agree there was a reckless challenge.
- However, that does not excuse discrimination.
- It is not the referee's role to decide who is trans, but in this example, it's clear that the term relating to trans people is being used as an insult.

Scenario 8

A young player (**under the age of 10**) makes an abusive homophobic comment towards another player during an on-pitch altercation.

Questions:

- What should you consider here?
- Who do you need to speak to?

Law 12 Consideration:

- Laws of the game still apply, so a red card would be shown for a serious offence as offensive, insulting or abusive language used.
- Pathway of 'effective dismissal' should be followed.

Decision:

- Play is stopped.
- Player is spoken to and removed from the game.
- Coach is informed.
- A report is submitted to discipline.
- Possible safeguarding referral made.

Reflection:

- This young player is using discriminatory language that is unacceptable, and inappropriate for his age. This would necessitate a safeguarding referral.
- As part of the discipline report, an educational approach would be taken towards the team.

Scenario 9

A 16-year-old player refuses to wear an item of clothing to celebrate LGBTQI+ History Month for the upcoming match. They use discriminatory homophobic language to voice their concerns of wearing the aforementioned item of clothing. You as the Match Official overhear the comment used and understand that it is a discriminatory term.

Questions:

- What actions are you taking here?
- Are the ages of the players important to consider?

Law 12 Consideration:

- It's not an offence to not wear the specified clothing to celebrate LGBTQI+ History Month, and no player should be forced to do so.
- The issue here is the **discriminatory** language.
- In this case the player is "using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or actions" which is a sending-off offence.
- This applies before kick-off as well as during the game.

Decision:

- Stop the situation immediately.
- Separate the player from others.
- Make clear the language is **unacceptable and discriminatory**.
- This is **not a debate or mediation moment**.
- The player should be dismissed for use of the discriminatory language.
- The team can play with a reduced squad, but not a reduced team on the field as the match had not yet started.
- Report submitted to discipline.

Reflection:

- Players can't be forced to wear anything that is not officially part of their kit. The issue here is the comment alongside the action.

Scenario 10

There is a section of home fans who are **flying a rainbow flag**. An **opposition player** walks past them and **shouts something**. The fans report that he **shouted a homophobic and discriminatory comment**. The assistant Match Official heard the comment as well.

Questions:

- Does the Match Official have a role to play here? If so, what?
- What should be considered in this scenario?
- What are your choices?

Law 12 Consideration:

- The assistant Match Official should bring it to the attention of the Match Official immediately.
- In this case the player is using offensive, insulting or abusive language, which is a sending-off offence.
- This was not heard by the Match Official, but by the assistant Match Official.

Decision:

- The player should be shown a red card for using offensive, insulting or abusive language.
- A report should be delivered using the exact wording from the player and what actions were taken.

Reflection:

- It may be the case that fans have been shouting at players during the game, however fans are not the responsibility of the Match Official.
- As soon as a player carries out this kind of behaviour, it is the responsibility of the Match Official to take action.
- The game should be paused and resumed when the necessary action has been taken.

Wellbeing Support:

Dealing with discriminatory incidents can be tough and sometimes distressing for Match Officials. That's particularly true when the environment in which these incidents occur is hostile. Such a situation can be really challenging for you, mentally and physically. Ultimately, your wellbeing is a priority, so if you face one of these challenging situations, please get in touch with your County FA or your Appointments Officer. They are there to support you, so don't hesitate to pick up the phone or send a text/email.

Conclusion:

As Match and Club Officials, the Laws of the game are there for support, guidance and to provide an avoidance of doubt. When it comes to incidents of discrimination, there are sometimes moments of confusion, fear and being unsure of if you're doing the right thing. It is important to manage these situations in the safest, fairest and most inclusive way possible, to keep our game free from discrimination.



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