



FOOTBALL  
NSW

# Don't Cross The Line

**A guide to providing a safe,  
positive and enjoyable football  
environment for all.**





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**Participation in football must be safe, positive and enjoyable conducted in an environment that:**

- **teaches values and ethics;**
- **strengthens the community;**
- **promotes competition without conflict, and;**
- **enriches the lives of everyone involved in the beautiful game.**

# A MESSAGE FROM FOOTBALL NSW

As custodians of the wonderful game of football we are all entrusted with the responsibility to ensure our game is played in a spirit of fair play and in an environment that is safe, welcoming and fun.

Poor spectator behaviour and 'sport rage' has escalated in recent years not only in New South Wales, and within football, but across Australia and many sports. Here in NSW some incidents have attracted significant media attention which tarnishes the reputation of our sport amongst the broader community.

In a sports and entertainment environment competing to capture the hearts and minds of our children, football must be at the forefront of stamping out poor behaviour to ensure our participation and retention rates continue to grow.

Sport rage is violence, bad language, abuse and general unacceptable behaviour that does not meet community expectations. Sport rage is a growing concern as we live in a faster, competitive, technology driven (social media) and more stressful society today.

It is simply not acceptable that children and young people are exposed to any form of abuse whilst participating in football and there is a pressing need to address poor behaviour to ensure we foster the physical, mental and emotional growth and development of our participants.

Football Australia has worked closely with all Member Federations to produce a Safeguarding Children toolkit which will establish a set of principles and procedural benchmarks in relation to the protection of children and young people and we look forward to this program being rolled out in 2021.

This guide acts as a resource for Associations and Clubs and is aimed at providing step-by-step initiatives to help prevent poor behaviour, actions to be taken when poor behaviour occurs and recommended procedures and sanctions to ensure appropriate action is taken within the parameters of community football bodies.

Football NSW acknowledges the outstanding work done in this area by Associations and clubs to date and we thank those who have provided input and feedback as part of establishing this guide.

We trust the entire football community in New South Wales will work together to stamp out poor behaviour in football, because whilst it's a game of passion and excitement, we need to make sure we don't cross the line.



Anter Isaac  
Chairman  
Football NSW



Stuart Hodge  
Chief Executive Officer  
Football NSW

# WHAT IS SPORT RAGE?

Football plays a positive part in the physical, emotional and social development of our children and teaches them so many lessons about fair play, teamwork, adhering to rules and winning and losing.

We all have a responsibility to ensure young people's experience of football is safe and enjoyable, including parents and spectators. Unfortunately however, spectators can behave badly which can make young people feel abused, intimidated, embarrassed, scared and angry. Research indicates that such incidents have a significant impact on young people's emotional wellbeing and welfare, and their continuation in football.



## THE SPECTRUM OF SPORT RAGE



The group dynamics of team sports such as football can lead more quickly to unacceptable behaviours in spectating groups with some sports justifying that aggression (and to some extent violence) as being 'part' of the culture of the game. Research suggests that people feel like they almost become anonymous when in a group or crowd and perceive less personal accountability and adopt the 'values' of the group.

***So what proactive measures can we take to mitigate the likelihood of sport rage occurring at our games?***



# MEASURES TO PREVENT SPORT RAGE

Football provides a valuable learning experience for our participants but ultimately fun and enjoyment of the game is the overriding factor as to why we participate in any sport.

Less than 3% of children and youth-aged participants who play competitive sports will ever reach the elite level but 100 per cent can have a chance to enjoy sport if we provide an environment that will let them.

Encouraging fair play, communicating with parents, respecting our referees, providing a safe physical environment at our venues, responsible management of alcohol, education and positive reinforcement and upholding Codes of Conduct are all measures that will help mitigate poor behaviour at our football matches.

## DEVELOP CODES OF CONDUCT

Codes of conduct set the tone and culture of any organisation particularly in sport. For football to grow and prosper it must be enjoyable for everyone. Creating a positive culture and environment will help mitigate Sport Rage incidents and requires administrators, coaches, parents/spectators and players to conduct themselves in a sportsmanlike manner and with a spirit of fair play.

Clubs should gain compliance by having these key stakeholders commit to a 'Code of Conduct' by signing a physical document at the beginning of each football season or event (eg. Parent Pledge).

In addition, a concerted and consistent seasonal campaign reinforcing these Codes of Conduct should be undertaken by clubs.

\* Football Australia is currently reviewing the National Code of Conduct as part of Safeguarding tools.



# A PLEDGE

## TO CREATE A POSITIVE AND ENJOYABLE FOOTBALL ENVIRONMENT

### THE COMMITTEE MEMBER/ADMINISTRATOR

- ☐ I will include players in club planning, decision making and leadership
- ☐ I will ensure quality supervision and instruction for players
- ☐ I will help coaches highlight appropriate behaviour and skill development
- ☐ I will ensure that everyone at the club emphasises fair play over winning
- ☐ I will distribute a code of conduct to players, coaches, club officials and parents
- ☐ I will not arrive at the venue intoxicated or consume excess alcohol at junior games
- ☐ I will not allow unlawful supply of alcohol at training, games or functions
- ☐ I will not use bad language nor harass players, coaches, referees or spectators
- ☐ I will respect all people regardless of gender, ability or cultural background

### THE COACH

- ☐ I will remember players play for enjoyment and winning is only part of the fun
- ☐ I will display control, respect and professionalism to all involved in football
- ☐ I will ensure that the time players spend with me is a positive experience
- ☐ I will not use bad language nor harass players, referees, spectators or coaches
- ☐ I will keep abreast of best practice coaching methods and the laws of the game
- ☐ I will operate within the rules and spirit of the game
- ☐ I will not arrive intoxicated at venues nor will I consume excess alcohol on match day
- ☐ I will not allow the unlawful supply of alcohol at training, games or club functions
- ☐ I will respect all people regardless of gender, ability or cultural background
- ☐ I will promote adherence to Football Australia anti-doping, sports betting and other key policies



# A PLEDGE

## TO CREATE A POSITIVE AND ENJOYABLE FOOTBALL ENVIRONMENT

### THE PARENT/SPECTATOR

- ☐ I will not pressure my child – it is their game not mine
- ☐ I will give positive comments that motivate and encourage continued effort
- ☐ I will not use bad language nor harass players, referees or other spectators
- ☐ I will focus on my child's efforts and performance – not the scoreboard
- ☐ I will encourage my child to play within the rules – I will learn the laws of the game
- ☐ I will teach my child to respect the efforts of their opponents
- ☐ I will applaud good play/performance by my child's team and opposition
- ☐ I will help when asked by a coach and thank volunteers for their efforts
- ☐ I will not consume alcohol at junior matches
- ☐ I will respect all people regardless of gender, ability or cultural background

### THE PLAYER

- ☐ I will always play by the rules
- ☐ I will never argue with a referee
- ☐ I will control my temper and not engage in verbal abuse or sledging
- ☐ I will cooperate with my coach, teammates and respect my opponents
- ☐ I will display modesty in victory and graciousness in defeat
- ☐ I will participate for my enjoyment not to please parents or coaches
- ☐ I will not arrive at the venue intoxicated or drink excess alcohol at junior games
- ☐ I will thank the opposition and referees at the end of the game
- ☐ I will comply with Football Australia anti-doping policies
- ☐ I will respect all people regardless of gender, ability or cultural background



# EDUCATION AND REINFORCEMENT

Parents must play a critical role in developing and fostering a positive environment for their children to help develop the physical, social and personal benefits football can provide. Equally parents can benefit by sharing a significant part of their children's lives, appreciate the benefits of football to health and wellbeing, and the comfort in knowing their children are being supervised.

The following strategies will help educate and reinforce the culture and values of football aligned to the Code of Conduct.

1. Recruit parents to be part of the team as a volunteer or manager – that way they will better understand the positive behaviours required by the club.
2. Provide parent only social functions where the culture, values, behaviours and mission of the club can be discussed and celebrated.
3. Devise a parent reward system based on best conduct, most supportive, positive team environment. Get the kids involved in voting.
4. Develop a campaign slogan to use on all internal and external communication tools/EDM's, social media etc. e.g. Enough is Enough.
5. Welcome to the club or new season correspondence to parents stating club expectations and consequences of poor behaviour. Attach the Code of Conduct.
6. Conduct a parent information night early in the season which focusses on club philosophy, Laws of the Game and modern coaching techniques for junior/youth players so they better understand the game of football.
7. Develop a Game Leader workshop targeted at parents of MiniRoos teams to educate them on the rules, format and philosophy of MiniRoos football and to promote the message of fair play, respect and values of the game.
8. Distribute spectator education social media posts each Friday afternoon during the season that may contain an image or infographic specific to parent/spectator behaviour in preparation for the weekend round of football.
9. If parental behaviour is poor, film it on your device and in a controlled environment play it back and have a calm, mature conversation.
10. If parental behaviour towards coaches or referees is poor, respectfully ask the parent to attend a coaching or referee course.
11. Clubs should display Play by the Rules venue signage and posters e.g. "This is Community Football, this is not the World Cup! <https://www.playbytherules.net.au/resources/please-remember-posters>
12. Place signage around the venue (and in bathroom and at the canteen) reminding parents and other spectators of the Code of Conduct.
13. Place Terms of Admission at the entrances to grounds and around the grounds. Clubs usually get their power to sanction players and coaches by having them agree to a set of terms and conditions (i.e. they enter into a contract with them). With spectators, clubs do not have the benefit of this "contract", therefore, a spectator could argue they are not bound by the club's (or Associations) rules and regulations. By placing Terms of Admission around the venue, it may assist clubs and associations with arguing that, by remaining at the ground, the spectator agreed to be bound by those Terms of Admission. It is not guaranteed to work but it may assist.

## PLEASE REMEMBER

### THIS IS A GAME

These are children  
so relax, and let the kids play

This is NOT the A-League  
or the World Cup





# SPORT RAGE AND REFEREE ABUSE

Abuse towards match officials forms part of the sport rage spectrum to the point where abuse has unfortunately become a 'normal' part of the game. Abusing the referee whether it be from a player, coach or spectator adds fuel to creating an unhealthy, unsafe and volatile environment for everyone.

Across the Football NSW community, approximately 20% of our referees drop out each year equating to in excess of 800 referees discontinuing from the sport, in part due to hostile behaviours with the most common being verbal abuse and in some instances physical abuse.

In March 2017 the International Football Association Board (IFBA), to make the 'world game' more enjoyable for all involved, approved the introduction of temporary dismissals as a measure to reduce hostile behaviour.

Temporary dismissals for dissent shown towards a match official has been trialled and in some instances formally adopted by Associations from the 2018 season with great effect.

Football NSW recommends all Associations adopt the Sin Bin rule across all age groups by 2021.

Referees will need to follow these guidelines if they are to sin bin a player for dissent:

- Any player cautioned for dissent will be shown a yellow card and placed in a temporary dismissal period of up to 10 minutes.
- The team will not be able to interchange the player and will continue with one less player for the full duration.
- The referee will be the sole timekeeper of the period.
- Once the Temporary Dismissal has expired, the player must wait for the referee to call the player back on the field at an appropriate time. This may slightly extend the dismissal period.
- If the player commits a yellow card offence on the field of play in addition to a period in the sin bin, they will continue to play.
- If the player commits a 2nd dissent caution and no other offences, they will receive a 2nd sin bin. After which they can't take any further part in the game but can be substituted.

2 dads watching junior football.  
"Which one is your lad?"  
"Why?"  
"Wanted to tell him how rubbish he is"  
"You can't say that he's only a kid, how would you like it if I said that to your lad?"  
"You have done all game"  
"Why who's your lad?"  
"The referee"  
Think before you speak...





# PHYSICAL ENVIRONMENT

How we present our facility and venues at both training and match day can reflect the values of a club in terms of the welcoming, safe and fun environment we want to provide to our players, referees, administrators, spectators and parents.

A well-presented facility reflects the club's pride, helps set the tone for an enjoyable experience to be shared by everyone and hence assists in mitigating poor, disrespectful behaviour. Like our normal workplaces, clubs have the responsibility to ensure the environment in which football takes place is as safe as possible and thus enhancing the overall match day experience.

**Clubs are encouraged to work with their local council to assist in helping ensure that a club's facility provides an enjoyable experience for all. Some tips include:**

- Sufficient shaded areas are provided for comfort and protection.
- All playing surfaces are inspected prior to each game and training.
- Grass is mown, sprinkler heads covered, lines marked etc.
- Facility lighting on and off playing fields meet minimum standards.
- Ensure your club has a PA system (permanent or portable) for ground announcements and reinforcement of Codes of Conduct and appropriate behaviour.
- Posts, fencing and other objects that may be collided with are secure and padded.
- Spectators are separated from coaching areas with designated line markings.
- Codes of Conduct are displayed at entry/exit points and around the facility.
- Jacketed Officials on match day are easily identifiable e.g. high visibility apparel.
- Designated referee escorts are used as referees enter and exit the pitch pre-game, half time and postgame.
- First aid facilities are available for spectators and defibrillator signage is clear.
- Designated alcohol consumption areas should be clearly marked and situated away from technical/coaching areas and areas where families gather to spectate.
- Conduct regular facility inspections to identify hazards and potential risks and sign appropriately.
- Portable signs are used to warn of hazards.
- Fire extinguishers in clubhouses are easily accessible and maintained.
- Structures and equipment comply with laws, regulations and standards.
- Car parks (if applicable) are well maintained and marked.
- Public amenities such as toilet blocks are well maintained and clean.
- A sign on the clubhouse with the following details should be displayed:
  - Name of the venue
  - Address of the venue
  - Nearest cross street
  - Dial 000 for ambulance/police

# ALCOHOL MANAGEMENT

Alcohol abuse is not tolerated in football, nor is poor behaviour related to the consumption of alcohol.

Alcohol is almost synonymous with sport and Australian culture and seems to afford men in particular (and their mates) an 'accountability free' area where they believe their bad behaviour will be excused.

Any club that serves alcohol must do so under the NSW Club Liquor Licensing requirements and conditions including the responsible management, sale and consumption of alcohol.

If you adhere to these requirements you can avoid excessive drinking, as well as antisocial and unsafe behaviour occurring at your club.

It is recommended that all clubs adopt an Alcohol Policy that is communicated to and adhered to by all members of the club and external parties such as visiting teams and spectators.

Football NSW recommends clubs adopt the Alcohol Policy available on the Play by the Rules website and includes the following:

- A commitment to the responsible consumption of alcohol.
- Trained servers with an RSA will only be permitted to serve alcohol.
- Alcohol free social events for young people and families.
- Alcohol will be served in compliance with the club's liquor licence.
- Alcohol will not be served to any person who is intoxicated.
- Persons under 18 (including team members) will not be served alcohol.
- Food and water will be available when alcohol is served.
- The club will take action for breaches of behaviour and responsibilities outlined in the Alcohol Policy.
- Clubs should register with Good Sports <https://goodsports.com.au/join>
- It is common for teams to 'bring their own' alcohol in eskies to games for consumption following play. Whilst this is a fairly common practice clubs must comply with Council regulations and should monitor consumption and behaviour during the course of the day/night.

Football NSW, our clubs and our associations will not tolerate alcohol abuse in football nor poor behaviour related to the consumption of alcohol. If alcohol is to be permitted at grounds it must be strictly controlled.







# SOCIAL MEDIA

The reach and impact of social media in society is well known. With this interactive impact comes some negative effects and can be yet another factor that may contribute to sport rage.

The inappropriate use of social media within community football does not align with the all-inclusive image and reputation that associations and clubs are wanting to promote.

We want Social Media to be used to benefit football and its participants and to applaud achievements. Inappropriate use may occur unintentionally or when participants do not realise that their comments, once published are in a public forum and are difficult to retract.

Football NSW recommends all associations and clubs develop and promote a Social Media Policy to be adhered to by all members including players, committee members, volunteers and parents.

Social media platforms include:

- Networking sites including Facebook and LinkedIn
- Video and photo sharing websites such as YouTube and Flickr
- Micro blogging sites such as Twitter
- Weblogs including personal blogs or those hosted by traditional media
- Forums and discussion board
- Online encyclopaedias such as Wikipedia

The following guiding principles should be included in your Social Media Policy:

- Do not include personal information of yourself or others in Social Media channels
- Do not use offensive, aggressive, defamatory, threatening, discriminatory, obscene, profane, harassing, intimidating, sexually explicit, bullying, racist, sexist, provocative, hateful or otherwise provocative language in Social Media channels
- Use your best judgement – do not publish something that makes you the slightest bit uncomfortable, and never write/publish if you're feeling emotional, upset or intoxicated
- Always ask for a person's permission before posting their picture on Social Media platform
- Never comment on rumours, do not deny or affirm them or speculate in Social Media channels
- Do not include information which is in breach of laws, court orders, undertakings or contracts
- Always use Social Media/network forums to add value and promote football in a positive way. (source Football Australia Social Media Policy)
- The e-Safety Commissioner has been established to help Australians to have a safer, more positive experience online and provides a vehicle for the reporting of cyberbullying, image-based abuse or illegal and harmful content. [www.esafety.gov.au](http://www.esafety.gov.au)



# **MANAGING SPORT RAGE**

## **PROCESSES, PROCEDURES AND SANCTIONING GUIDELINES**

Despite our best intentions sport rage incidents will occur. While it is predominately the role of the 'Jacketed Official(s)' and club committee members to deal with incidents, it is vitally important everyone understands and supports the process.

The Jacketed Official is a vital part of effectively managing sport rage. Ideally clubs should have sufficient trained officials who rotate duties throughout the course of the season to alleviate the constant week-by-week burden on volunteers in dealing with this very important and what at times can be a challenging duty. In addition, both competing clubs should provide a Jacketed Official at home and away matches and in the case of multiple fields at one venue, Jacketed Officials should be appointed to each field.

Jacketed Officials should be trained and confident in dealing with difficult people and situations. They should be conversant with applicable Codes of Conduct and cognisant of conditions of entry for non-binding members such as officials, spectators and parents of visiting teams.

In addition, some understanding of what may constitute a criminal or civil matter (referred to on page 20 of this document) would be beneficial.

### **JACKETED OFFICIALS ROLES AND RESPONSIBILITIES**

- Agree to be bound by club rules/codes of conduct
- Make yourself known to referees and coaches prior to match
- Be visible (fluorescent vest) at all times
- Give warnings and enforce compliance of codes of conduct with players, spectators, club officials, parents and coaches
- Where a club is in a position to control field entry evict persons displaying inappropriate behaviour after initial warning
- Notify police in the event of criminal conduct
- Complete incident reports where necessary

### **TIPS FOR CONFLICT RESOLUTION**

- Receive other people's comments without interruption
- Speak pleasantly – be aware of tone of voice and the type of language
- Use non-aggressive body language and facial expressions (e.g. do not point finger or stand with hands on hip)
- Do not become emotionally involved
- Be patient and calm no matter what the person says or does
- If the conflict becomes physical, do not get involved – call police immediately
- Look for signs of a situation getting out of hand (tension on sidelines) and act early before it escalates.

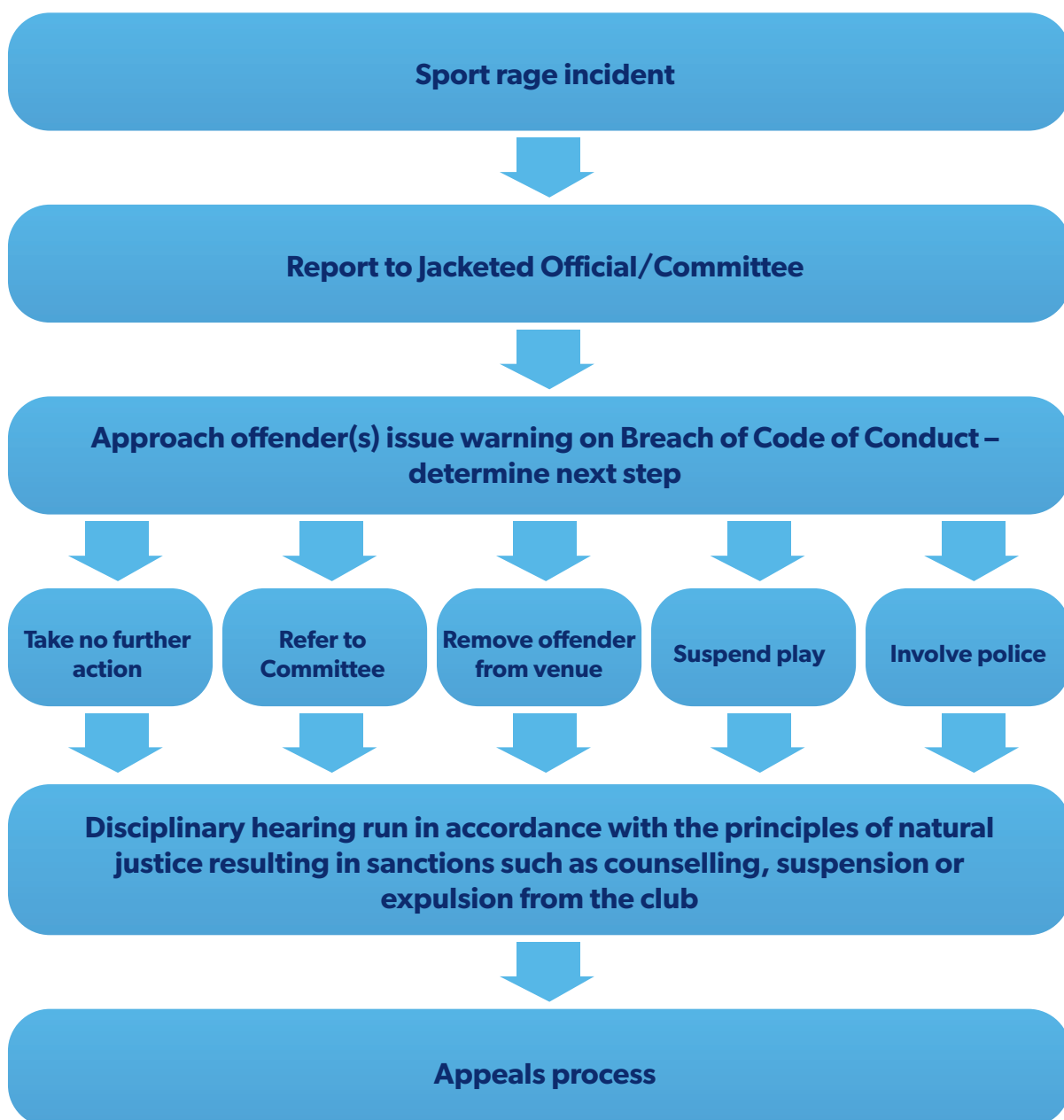






# SPORT RAGE INCIDENT STEP BY STEP GUIDE

With measures in place to best mitigate sport rage, your club should have a step-by-step roadmap outlining a clear and concise process for dealing with sport rage incidents. This roadmap should be well understood by Committee members, volunteer staff and of course Jacketed Officials.



# SANCTIONING GUIDELINES

Following consultation with Football NSW Associations and clubs, and advice from Sports Law practitioners, the following table outlines recommended sanctions based on the spectrum of sport rage referred to earlier in this document. The sanctions are to be used as a guideline only as the circumstances of each individual case will need to be taken into account.

INCIDENT	MINIMUM	MAXIMUM
Participating in a Melee	1 month	Life + club fine & loss of competition points
Instigating a Melee	2 months	Life + club fine & loss of competition points
Serious violent conduct	12 months	Life + club fine & loss of competition points
Damaging property/equipment	2 Fixtures	24 months + club fine and cost of repair/replace property & equipment
Serious assault on an individual	6 months	Life + club fine
Several involved in violence on the sidelines	3 months	Life + club fine
One-on-one physical violence on the sidelines	2 months	Life + club fine
Unauthorised entry onto field of play	1 Fixture	24 months
Threat of physical violence towards an individual or their family or property	6 months	24 months
Use of flares, fireworks and other dangerous materials*	24 months + club warning or fine	Life + club fine & loss of competition points
Verbal abuse including foul language	3 Fixtures	24 months
Verbal abuse of referee(s)	1 Fixture	24 months
Disrespectful behaviour by spectators	1 Fixture	24 months
A group of spectators uttering insulting words or sounds	6 months + club fine	60 months + club fine

\*For further information please refer to [Football NSW 2021 Grievance and Disciplinary Regulations](#)

## NATURAL JUSTICE AND RIGHT OF APPEAL

The principles of natural justice should be afforded to anyone dealt with in respect of a sport rage incident.

It is usually not good enough to only provide an accused with general information about the allegation. They should be provided with the evidence against them (e.g. witness statements, photos, video etc.) and be told which specific rule or section of the Codes of Conduct they have allegedly breached.



The accused should then be given a reasonable opportunity to respond to the allegation. It is preferable that this be done in the form of a hearing before a club's management committee or a disciplinary committee but it can also be done "on the papers" with the accused providing a written explanation for their conduct along with any evidence they wish to rely on.

While there is no requirement to provide an accused with a right of appeal we recommend that one be provided. The individuals dealing with the appeal must not be the same individuals who dealt with the matter the first time. Ideally, the appeals tribunal should be made up of individuals with no connection to the club and you could consider having appeals dealt with by one of the disciplinary bodies of your Association. Any appeal process (including the eligible grounds of appeal) should be clearly set out in the club's rules and regulations in order to avoid arguments about jurisdiction.

Eligible Grounds of Appeal may include:

- Party not afforded reasonable opportunity to present their case;
- Lack of jurisdiction of the decision-making body;
- Decision was affected by bias;
- Decision was not reasonably open to the decision-making body having regard to the evidence before it; and
- The sentence/sanction was too severe



# SPORT RAGE AND THE LAW

It is important that administrators understand the risks of failing to take action in response to sport rage incidents.

Administrators have a responsibility to actively address behaviours which offend community standards as well as those set by Associations and clubs themselves. Often, when incidents occur, they are 'swept under the carpet' due to a lack of preparedness to deal with the matter in a timely, programmatic and systematic manner. While it is sometimes difficult for administrators (many of whom are parents themselves) to deal with incidents of sport rage, a failure to do so may place clubs and/or Associations at risk of legal action for negligence for failing to provide adequate safety systems and procedures and/or for failing to have taken sufficient preventative steps despite repeated previous incidents.

There have been numerous instances of on and off field conduct resulting in legal action. A victim of sport rage may decide to take criminal and/or civil action against the alleged offender and/or may take civil action against the club or Association for the reasons set out in the above paragraph. There are also a number of cases of the alleged offender taking legal action against the club or Association for failing to afford them natural justice.

Whether a victim of sport rage wishes to take criminal action against the alleged offender is entirely a matter for them. Victims should keep in mind that clubs and Associations are sometimes limited in the action they can take against spectators for jurisdictional reasons. The police are not subject to the same restrictions and taking criminal action may be the only way to hold an offender accountable.

Where criminal proceedings have been commenced, any disciplinary proceedings may need to be put on hold until the criminal proceedings are finalised. If you are aware that criminal proceedings have commenced, we recommend you liaise with police on this issue.

Serious assault is considered as those that involve actual bodily harm or grievous bodily harm whereby the health or physical well-being of the victim is interfered with.

We can expect that our courts will not tolerate such behaviour in the same manner they have severely punished individuals in road rage incidents.

# RESOURCES

[www.footballnsw.com.au](http://www.footballnsw.com.au)

[www.playbytherules.net.au](http://www.playbytherules.net.au)

Good Sports -NSW Club Liquor Licencing Requirements

[www.goodsports.com.au](http://www.goodsports.com.au)

[www.liquorandgaming.nsw.gov.au](http://www.liquorandgaming.nsw.gov.au)

Sport Rage Prevention

[www.sport.nsw.gov.au/clubs/ryc/fairplay/sportrage](http://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/clubs/ryc/fairplay/sportrage)

Child Safe Sport

[www.sport.nsw.gov.au/clubs/ryc/memberprotection/child-safety](http://www.sport.nsw.gov.au/clubs/ryc/memberprotection/child-safety)

Spectator Behaviour in Sport – A Study of the Impact on Children and Young People

<https://emduk.org/wp-content/uploads/2016/07/Sideline-bad-behaviour-report.pdf>



[Message from a coach](#)

[Magic kits](#)

[Ireland FA - Supporter Education](#)

[We only do positive](#)

[The FA - Joes story](#)

[The FA - Referee behaviour](#)

[Football Australia - Let them play](#)

[MiniRoos - adults on a big field](#)

[Changing the game project](#)

[Let kids be kids](#)



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