

## **CB Safeguarding Manager's Report for Yorkshire Council Meeting on 09-01-12**

Apologies for the late submission of this report. I was waiting for the outcome of a disciplinary panel meeting held on Wednesday 4 January as I did not want to prejudice deliberations at that meeting.

- The two issues which have presented the most significant problems recently however have only been peripherally safeguarding issues – these are adults entering the field of play and putting hands on opposition players and the treatment of referees.
- **Adults entering the field of play** – there has been a spate of adults entering the field of play. Their stated intention is to protect young players by stopping/breaking up fights/brawls but almost inevitably this produces an adverse response from the opposition spectators which is made much worse when adults lay hands on players from the opposition team. These factors often escalate the situation and have led to abusive confrontations between adults up to and including blows being struck – not an edifying prospect for the individuals involved, the young rugby players looking on, their clubs and the game in general.
- The Regulations and Guidance are quite clear – adults – coaches, spectators and parents should not go on to the field of play unless called on by the referee. The referee can call coaches on to help him if he decides that this action is necessary but in all other circumstances the coaches should remain behind the pitch barriers – or in the technical areas if they are provided on the pitch.

If a coach decides to go onto the pitch uninvited - “to protect his player(s)” then the coach must be aware that he is already in breach of the regulations and that all aspects of his conduct whilst breaching the regulation will be carefully scrutinised.

- The advice previously circulated makes it clear that Players should be coached to play to the whistle and to stop when the whistle blows. They should be coached to pay attention to the referee's instructions.
- Some referees will make it clear that they do not want anyone on pitch and will invite coaches on when they feel they are needed. They cover this in the pre-match briefing. I suspect that Society referees are coached into doing this – it may be a good practice for Club Referees to acquire.
- If, however, a fight does break out then how it is dealt with depends upon its nature and it seems to me that there are at least three scenarios

A one on one fight that the referee sees in front of him.

A fight that the referee sees but which quickly develops into a brawl.

The fight that develops off the ball, away from the play and behind the referee's back.

- In the majority of cases firm clear action from the referee in blowing the whistle and telling the players to stop will bring the fighting to an end. We should therefore be talking about a small minority of situations. Most fights/brawls fizzle out relatively quickly and there is little evidence of young people receiving significant injuries during such events. Many young players find that they can save face by “reluctantly” following the instruction to stop when told to do so by a responsible adult.
- Initially coaches and parents may have a contribution to make by drawing the referee's attention to an incident and then instructing their players – preferably by name to stop. They should have a role in helping to defuse the situation not exacerbate it and if the motivation is child welfare then they will do that.
- If the fighting does not stop then the referee may call the coaches on to help him. The referee and

John Sheppard

CB Safeguarding Manager - Yorkshire  
01302 724383 (H) 07801 537130 (M)

Oldshep@talktalk.net

coaches may then decide to intervene physically but that decision is a judgement call which the adult (referee or coach) may have to justify formally later. The referee has to complete a formal report. In making the decision to intervene physically the adult should be aware of the following considerations :

- Try to remain calm do not act in anger
  - Physical intervention should be by way of blocking or restraint never by blows
  - Try to get between adversaries
  - At all times make your instructions clear - “Stop fighting Stand Back” if not for the benefit of the combatants then for the benefit of the onlookers who can report you said it in their witness statements.
  - Try not to grab individual limbs to pull them away as this leaves you exposed to re-action from the other limbs. Remember the head is a weapon. Encircling arms are a simple technique. Note some professions -police; prison officers; social workers in children's homes; some teachers have training in restraint.
  - Do not push, pull, grab, or strike – restrain.
  - You are protecting your players so that you should not be laying hands on opposition players – leave that to the referee or the opposition coach.
  - Use your player's name/nickname and focus on calming the situation
  - Do not abuse the opposition player by calling him a dirty .... Help the referee achieve stability quickly.
  - This is easier to do if you are not emotionally involved. This is why parents are not invited onto the field by referees and if you coach a team in which your child plays extra care will be needed.
  - Try to see the situation from the point of view of the opposition parents who want to safeguard the welfare of their children as well – they will not want their child grabbed and pushed around by an adult from the opposition and indeed are likely to lodge a formal complaint about it.
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- If coaches go onto the pitch at the invitation of the referee to assist then they still have to be cautious about how they behave. They are expected to act responsibly with regard to the welfare of all the young people involved.
  
  - If coaches feel so strongly that the welfare of a player was seriously at risk and they decide to go onto the pitch without invitation then they have made a judgement call which they may be called upon to justify. If they have acted responsibly and with awareness once they get onto the pitch then this may mean that no complaint arises and the justification is not required. There will be occasions when such a judgement does lead to a disciplinary hearing and the individual will have the opportunity to justify their actions. If the Disciplinary Panel disagree with the justification they will say so – and why – and the opportunity is there for appeal.
  
  - **Treatment of Referees** – concern has been expressed by several of the Societies about the ways in which some of their referees have been treated by some clubs at Age Grade games. Abuse from spectators is not acceptable at Age Grade games, sets a poor example for young players and can destabilise their relationship with the match referee. Most referees can deal with comments from the crowd – often very emotional and partisan at Age Grade games but clubs must ensure that their spectators understand and abide by the Spectators' Code of Conduct. There have been several incidents of parents or coaches marching onto the pitch to confront the referee. This cannot be acceptable and there have been instances where this antagonism has continued after the game and into the clubhouse either via direct confrontation and abuse or by completely ignoring the referee and the part he has played in the game which is contrary to the core values of our game. Two clubs have been warned that they are in danger of the Society refusing to appoint officials to their club – not just Age Grade games but when it is so difficult to find referees for Age Grade games these are likely to be the first to suffer. This may be a particular problem if the Saturday Club Officials who are well versed in the protocol of working with referees are not present on Sunday mornings.