



FOR ALL

GRASSROOTS DISCIPLINARY GUIDE

2025/26 Season



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INTRODUCTION

This guide has been prepared to provide helpful guidance to Clubs and Participants on the disciplinary procedures within Category 5 football (see page 5) for the 2025/26 Season.

It will cover match-based discipline, process changes, hearings, the appeals process, and demonstrate how the Club Portal can assist Clubs and Leagues with their day to day administration.

In the event of any inconsistency between this guidance and the Rules and Regulations, the Rules and Regulations shall take precedence.

Should you have any questions regarding the Grassroots Disciplinary Guide, please contact your local County FA (for example, Discipline@SussexFA.com) or someone from The FA Grassroots Discipline Team, shown below:

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DISABLED PARTICIPANTS

We are committed to the inclusion of disabled participants in football. This commitment extends to the processes that govern our game. We are committed to removing, reducing or preventing obstacles faced by disabled participants wherever it's reasonable to do so.

We have developed a guide to support those who run discipline processes to identify and implement reasonable adjustments for participants with impairments. For further information please contact your County FA.





CATEGORY 5 FOOTBALL

As per the introduction, this guide is applicable to category 5 football only. These teams are as follows:

- Team at Step 5 and 6 of the National League System
- A team competing outside the National League System playing in Saturday Football, Sunday Football, Midweek Football, Representative Football, Veterans Football, Education Football
- Teams at Tier 3 and below of the Women's Pyramid



THE FA STRATEGY

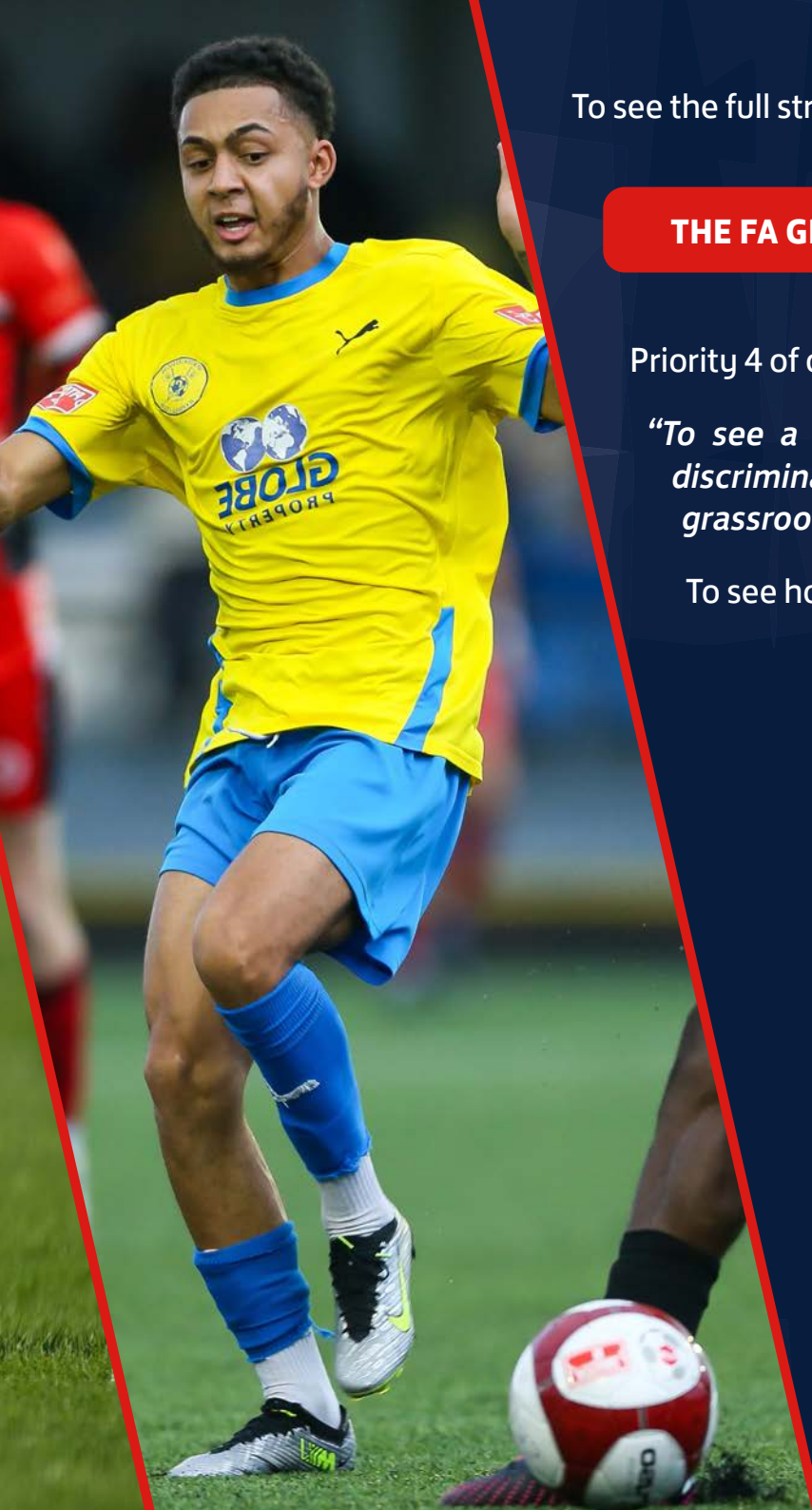
The FA has set out some ambitious targets in its 2024-28 grassroots strategy entitled, “A Thriving Grassroots Game” and its business wide strategy for the same period “Inspiring Positive Change Through Football”. The FA refers to its most important objectives as “Game Changers”. One of the four Game Changer objectives is to see a game free from discrimination. Clearly this is heavily reliant on discipline.

For any individual or group to suffer discrimination is just not acceptable.

We cannot solve a societal issue on our own but as the national governing body we promise to bring the full weight of our influence to deliver a game free of discrimination.

As the governing body, the job of The FA is to ensure the Laws of the Game are followed by applying our regulatory framework. This framework ensures clarity and consistency in how we deal with any situations that may arise. Some of these situations may be relatively small, like a mis-timed tackle, or could be very serious, like discriminatory abuse or assaults against match officials.





To see the full strategy click on the red bar below.

THE FA GRASSROOTS FOOTBALL STRATEGY 2024-28

Priority 4 of our Grassroots Football Strategy is to tackle poor behaviour and our 2028 ambition is;

“To see a decline in cases of poor behaviour of any kind, and to increase reporting of discrimination, ensuring enjoyment is at the forefront of playing, volunteering or officiating grassroots football.”

To see how some of our discipline processes will make this happen see the short video below:



PROCESS CHANGES 2025/26

Below provides a brief overview of the key process changes for 2025/26 Season for all Players, Clubs & Leagues operating within Category 5 Football. Please refer to The FA or County FA Handbook for the Rules and Regulations in their entirety and all other changes that may affect you. This is not intended to replace The FA Handbook.

1. SINGLE PERSON PANELS

- Following an extensive review, it has been agreed that, from the start of the 2025-26 season, single person disciplinary panels will be introduced on a pilot basis across the grassroots discipline process. This pilot will be closely monitored to assess any impact. Please note, all cases dealt with by either Regional Discipline or County FA Panels (i.e. outside of the FA's National Serious Case Panel) that are denied with a personal hearing requested will proceed with a 3-person panel during the pilot.

2. WRITTEN REASONS

- Following an extensive review, it has been agreed that, from the start of the 2025-26 season, grassroots discipline written reasons will no longer be published on the FA's website. It has also been agreed that written reasons will no longer be automatically produced for National Serious Case Panel cases. Details on how to request written reasons will be provided with each case.





MATCH BASED DISCIPLINE CATEGORIES

There are seven categories for Match Based Discipline:

- Saturday
- Sunday
- Midweek
- Representative
- Veterans
- Education
- Friendly

Automatic suspensions for dismissals apply to one of these seven categories. If you are dismissed in a game, you are unable to play again in the same category of football until the automatic match-based suspension is served. For example, a Player sent off in Sunday football would still be eligible to play football for a Saturday team as the suspension would apply to Sunday football only.

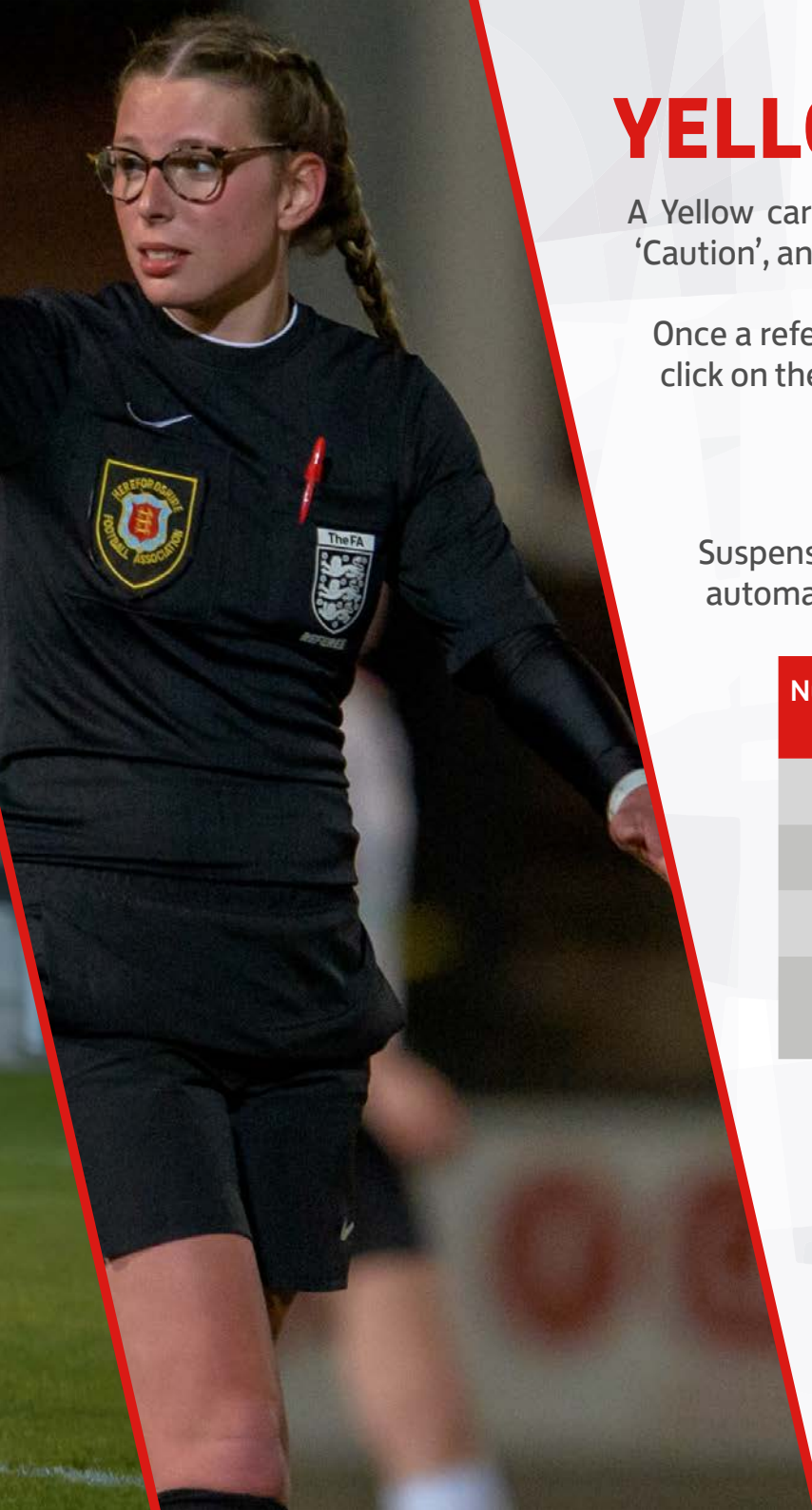
These categories also apply with regards to continuing misconduct, receiving multiple cautions or dismissals in a Season. A Player would need to accumulate 5 cautions before the 31 December in the same category of football to receive an automatic one match suspension. For example, if during the same period, a Player received 3 cautions in Midweek football and 2 cautions in Sunday football, then they would not be subject to the automatic suspension for accumulated cautions.

Please note that suspensions resultant from misconduct cases (charges issued by the County FA) are from ALL FOOTBALL ACTIVITIES at CFA level (see definition of Category 5 on Page 5), so a Participant will not be able to play until the team they were playing for when the charge was issued serves the appropriate number of games.

In the event of non-receipt of paperwork following disciplinary sanctions being administered by the Match Official, the Club are required to contact the County Association and make them aware immediately. If you have not received paperwork usually within two working days of the game, The FA advises that you must bring this to the attention of your County FA.

Non receipt of paperwork is not an excuse!





YELLOW CARDS

A Yellow card received by a Player will be shown on the paperwork from the County FA as a 'Caution', and we will refer to both terms throughout the booklet.

Once a referee has reported a Caution you can find this in your Club Portal. For further guidance click on the red bar below:

DISCIPLINE IN FA CLUB PORTAL

Suspensions which are imposed for reaching the thresholds below will commence automatically 7 days following the final caution.

Number of Cautions	Cut Off Date (Inclusive)	Automatic Suspension for Number of Cautions
5	31 st December	1 match suspension and £15 Admin Fee
10	Second Sunday in April	2 match suspension and £15 Admin Fee
15	End of Season	3 match suspension and £15 Admin Fee
20+		Every 5 cautions received thereafter will result in continuing misconduct charge

If a Player reaches one of the thresholds after the cut-off date, they will be warned as to their future conduct and no suspension shall be imposed, but an Admin Fee will be payable.

As mentioned previously, match-based discipline categories apply and to reach the threshold you must receive the amount in the same category of football.

Even if you have not received notification of suspension from your County FA you must contact them and inform them that there is information outstanding that has not been received.

For the avoidance of doubt, the accumulation of cautions by a Player in relation to matches in the same Football Category shall include those that are punished by a Sin Bin.

An administration fee will be charged to the Player through their Club for the cost of processing each notification. The applicable administration fee is £12.00 for each notification of a cautionable offence.

For further guidance on paying for discipline cases click on the red bar below:

PAYING DISCIPLINARY FINES IN FA CLUB PORTAL

Non playing participants (e.g. Manager) are subject to Stage One Warnings (SOWs).

A SOW is effectively a yellow card. SOWs accumulate in the season, should a non playing participant receive a 3rd SOW they will receive a one match ban, and a 6th SOW then it will be a 2 match ban and a 9th SOW will be a 3 match ban.

If you are in doubt, please contact your County FA who will be able to advise further.



COMPETITION SPECIFIC SANCTIONS FOR CAUTIONS

There is competition specific sanctioning for Yellow Cards in The FA Cup and FA Vase.

Therefore any suspension for the accumulation of 5/10/15/20 Yellow Cards, or accumulation of Stage One Warning's for non playing participants, from all other competition matches, the suspension will only apply to League, League Cup or County Cup matches.

For the guidance documents for the relevant competitions select the correct bar below:

FA CUP GUIDANCE

FA VASE GUIDANCE

It should be noted this Regulation is for cautions only and dismissals remain unaffected.

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RED CARDS

A Red Card received by a Player will be shown on the paperwork from the County as a 'Standard Charge', but throughout the booklet will be referred to as a Red Card.


Suspensions commence automatically on the 7th day (unless the red card was received in a friendly, see page 18 for guidance) following the match in which the Player was dismissed. The County FA will send you the charge letter and response form via your Club Portal. The standard sanctions are shown below:

Dismissal Offence	Suspension
Serious Foul Play	3 Matches
Violent Conduct	3 Matches
Spitting at an Opponent	6 Matches
Denial of an obvious goal-scoring opportunity	1 Match
Use of offensive, or insulting or abusive language	2 Matches
Receiving a Second Caution in a Match	1 Match

Players dismissed from Saturday football can still play Sunday football and vice versa as these are separate match-based discipline categories.

Qualifying matches for a suspension are based on the team the Player was playing for at the time they were sent off. Should a Player transfer, (i.e. cease to be a member of the original Club), to the satisfaction of the County FA, to a team at the same level and category as the original Club, then any remaining period of suspension may also be transferred to the new Club.





You can add qualifying matches to the relevant suspension in your Club Portal.
Click on the red bar below for a guide on how to add matches to a suspension.

ADDING MATCHES TO A SUSPENSION IN CLUB PORTAL

If the team has no more fixtures remaining at the end of a Season, the suspension is lifted and commences when that teams first qualifying fixture takes place in the new Season.

The Player is free from suspension between the last qualifying fixture and the opening qualifying fixture of the new Season to participate for any team they wish to - this applies to Match Based Discipline football only.

An abandoned, awarded, postponed or friendly fixture will not count towards clearing a Player of suspension as it is not a completed fixture. Any misconduct received from an abandoned match must still be processed by the County FA. Importantly, this is still the case even if a League decides that the result from the abandoned fixture stands. All matches must be completed for the fixture to count towards the suspension.

Leagues can only deal with status of the fixture once all disciplinary action has been completed by the County FA. Leagues will decide on the status of the game in accordance with the relevant League Rules.

A game that is classed as a 'double header' where teams play each other twice on the same day is classed as two matches. A Player can therefore use both fixtures as qualifying matches.

CONTINUING MISCONDUCT

Players who are dismissed on more than one occasion during the Season will receive an automatic additional match ban.

This only occurs for multiple dismissals that have taken place within the same category of football.

For example, if you have been dismissed in a Sunday football match and are then sent off again in a Sunday football match later in the Season, then you will get an additional match ban. There would be an additional two matches for a 3rd dismissal within that category and so on.

There is no right of appeal against this punishment and it will be imposed automatically. However, if you have been sent off in Sunday football but are then sent off again later in the Season in a Saturday football match, you will not receive any additional suspension other than the standard charge.

SENDING OFF SANCTION INSUFFICIENT

In truly exceptional circumstances, an Affiliated Association may seek to increase the disciplinary consequences of a sending-off offence by making a claim that the standard punishment is clearly insufficient. An Affiliated Association may bring such a claim where it is satisfied that the standard punishment otherwise applicable to the sending-off offence would be clearly insufficient. Such claims may only be made by an Affiliated Association for the following sending-off offences: (a) serious foul play; (b) violent conduct; or (c) spitting at an opponent or any other person.





QUALIFYING MATCHES

The following competitions will qualify for a Participant within Category 5 Discipline to serve the suspension imposed by the County FA:

- FA Competitions (Cup, Trophy, Vase, Women's Cup and FA Sunday Cup)
- League Matches
- League Cup Matches
- All County Cup Matches
- League Cup Competitions
- Any Competition as designated as a qualifying competition by the sanctioning authority

If you are unsure whether a fixture qualifies for a suspension, please contact your County FA who will be able to advise you further.

Suspensions under the Match Based Discipline System automatically commence 7 days from the date of the fixture unless the red card was received in a friendly, see page 18 for guidance.

If you have not received correspondence relating to a fixture within 2 working days of the Red Card, you must contact the County FA immediately.

Non-receipt of paperwork is not a valid defence, and a charge is issued for playing whilst under suspension for both the Club and the Player.

FRIENDLY FIXTURE SANCTIONS

A Player shown a Red Card in a Friendly Match will receive an automatic immediate suspension from Friendly Matches until such time as their Club has completed its next Friendly Match, as decided by the relevant Affiliated Association. This is irrespective of the offence committed.

Should the County FA deem that the offence committed warrants further discipline action, they do have the ability to raise a misconduct charge if they feel that the standard punishment is insufficient.

Any Player who is sent off in the last friendly fixture of the Season will automatically have the suspension carried over to the following Season. They will not be suspended from their competitive fixtures in this instance.

ADMINISTRATION FEE

The Administration fee for non-caution offences (send offs and all misconduct cases) will be £15.00 to account for the additional administration of these cases.

The Administration fee for cautionable offences is £12.00





MISTAKEN IDENTITY CLAIM

Mistaken Identity claims can be made if the Referee cautions or sends off the wrong Player from the field of play.

A Club should identify the name of the person who was responsible and submit to the County FA any supporting evidence along with the appeal fee, within three working days of the match. If a claim is successful, the claim fee will be returned, and the suspension/fine will be removed from the incorrect Player's record and transferred to the correct Player.

In all cases the claim fee, which must be submitted with details of your claim, is £50.00 for teams at step 5 and 6 of the National League System, or £30.00 for all other teams.

Time limits are strict, claims received late will not be considered

Day of Dismissal	Claim to be submitted 5pm on the third Business Day following the incident
Saturday	Wednesday
Sunday	Wednesday
Monday	Thursday
Tuesday	Friday
Wednesday	Monday
Thursday	Tuesday
Friday	Wednesday

If Bank Holidays fall within this period, the appropriate number of extra days will be made available, but claims will always be heard before any sanction commences.

A full guide to raising a Claim for Mistaken Identity on Club Portal can be found below:

ADDING A CLAIM FOR MISTAKEN IDENTITY IN CLUB PORTAL

WRONGFUL DISMISSAL CLAIM

A claim of Wrongful Dismissal is lodged for on-field offences that result in a straight sending-off only – not for Players dismissed for receiving two bookings or a player dismissed for offensive, insulting, or abusive language/gestures.

A Club wishing to lodge a claim must notify the County FA in writing of its intention to do so by 5pm on the second business day following the game in which the dismissal occurred. By 5pm on the fourth business day any evidence relied upon in support of the claim must be submitted to the County FA.

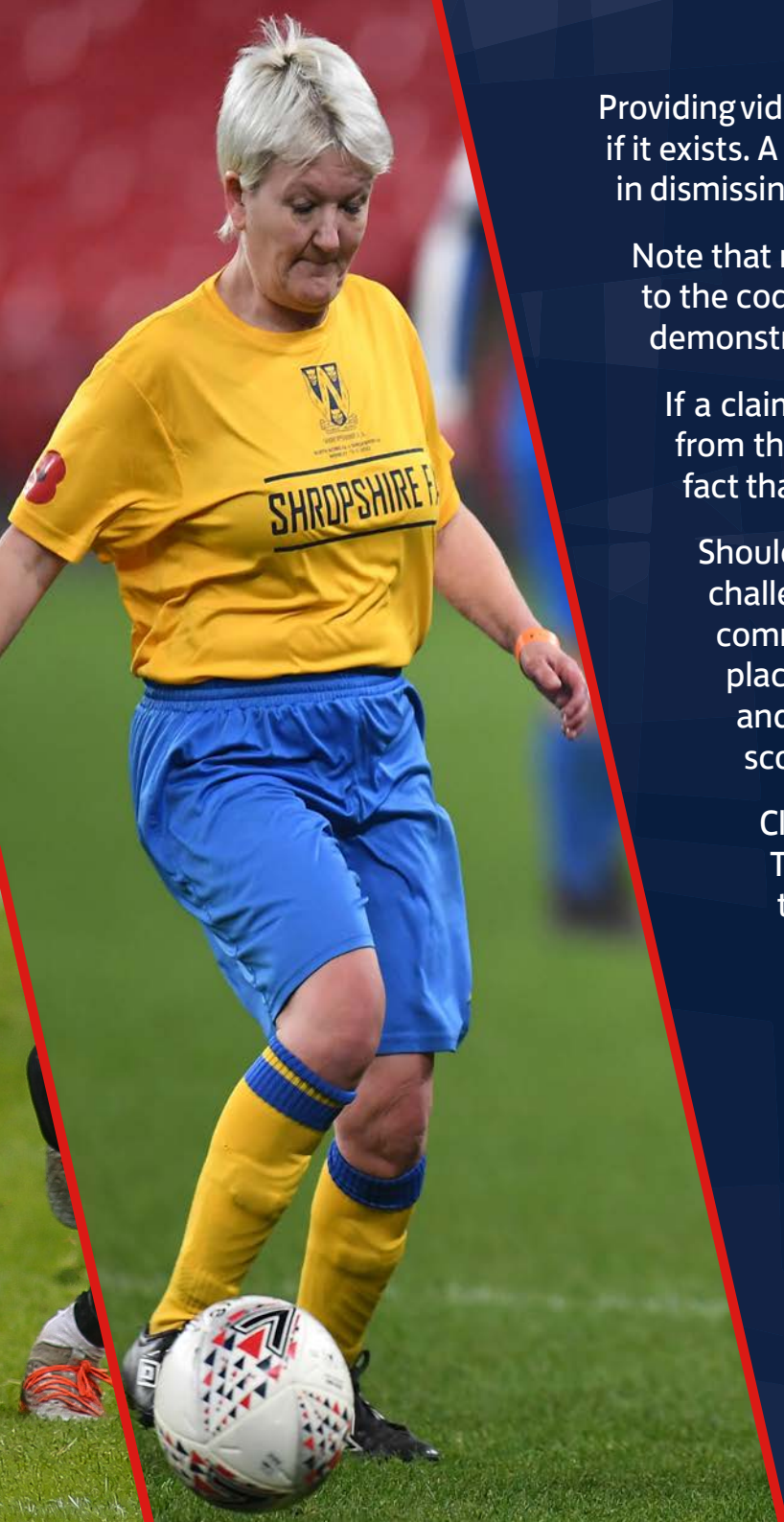
In all cases the claim fee, which must be submitted with details of your claim, is £50.00 for teams at step 5 and 6 of the National League System, or £30.00 for all other teams.

Time limits are strict, claims received late will not be considered.

Day of Dismissal	Notification of Intention to Submit a Claim by 5pm on the second Business Day following the incident	Claim/Evidence to be submitted by 5pm on the fourth Business Day following the incident
Saturday	Tuesday	Thursday
Sunday	Tuesday	Thursday
Monday	Wednesday	Friday
Tuesday	Thursday	Monday
Wednesday	Friday	Tuesday
Thursday	Monday	Wednesday
Friday	Tuesday	Thursday

If Bank Holidays fall within this period, the appropriate number of extra days will be made available, but claims will always be heard before any sanction commences.





Providing video footage of the incident is no longer mandatory at this level but should be made available if it exists. A successful claim will need to demonstrate that the Match Official made an obvious error in dismissing the Player from the field of play.

Note that match officials are not required to write a report when a Player is dismissed, they report to the code only of the Red Card offence. The onus is on the club to provide sufficient evidence to demonstrate that the match official made an obvious error.

If a claim is successful, the claim fee will be returned, and the suspension/fine will be removed from the Player's record. However, the details of the dismissal will remain on the record as it is fact that the Player was sent off.

Should a player be dismissed for denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity because of a challenge outside of the Penalty area, a claim will only be considered as to whether the foul committed was an obvious error. The Commission will not consider whether the offence took place inside or outside of the penalty area, this is not an opportunity to re-referee the game and the Commission must only consider whether the Red Card for denying an obvious goal scoring opportunity was an obvious error.

Claims for wrongful dismissal will always be dealt with before any suspension commences. The onus will be on the County FA to ensure they have arranged a Commission to consider the claim prior to any suspension.

A full guide to raising a Claim for Wrongful Dismissal on Whole Game System can be found below:

ADDING A CLAIM FOR WRONGFUL DISMISSAL IN CLUB PORTAL

All disciplinary commission decisions for Wrongful Dismissal or Mistaken Identity cases are final and binding on all parties and there is no further right to challenge.

MISCONDUCT CHARGES

A Misconduct Charge will be issued for a reported incident which does not fall under standard dismissal offences or is a serious offence.

A Disciplinary Commission will convene to consider all Misconduct Cases, whether the response to the charge is accepted, denied or where the charged Participant fails to respond by the deadline.

A Player can be charged with Misconduct following being sent from the field of play. For example, a Player is sent off for violent conduct (will receive the standard three match ban), and before leaving the field of play used abusive/insulting comments towards a Match Official.

The latter would be dealt with as Misconduct and subsequently the Player will have a second charge that they need to respond to, having the options to accept or deny the charge.

A Club, League or any Participant in football can be charged with Misconduct (for example, Manager, Coach, Physio, Club Secretary, Chairperson).

If you receive a Misconduct Charge and it is found Proven, any suspension will be from ALL Football at Category 5 with a start date at the discretion of the Disciplinary Commission.

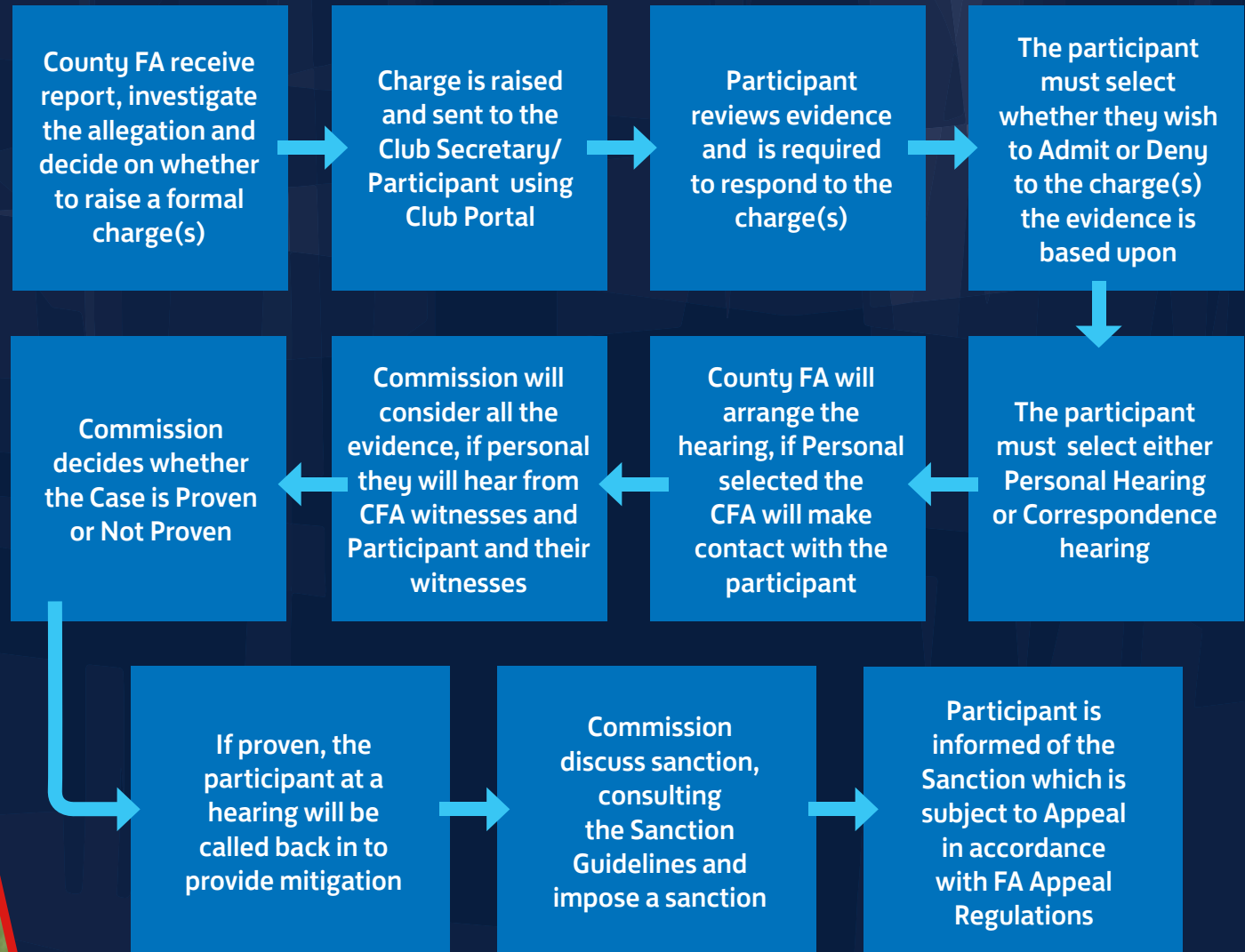
If you are issued with a Misconduct Charge you will receive a charge letter, response form and any evidence that the County have based their charge upon. You must ensure you respond to the charge within 14 days, or within 7 days where the Misconduct arises from an Abandoned Match, relates to playing whilst suspended, or where an Interim Suspension Order is imposed.

Click on the red bar below for a guide on responding to a Misconduct Charge in Club Portal.

RESPONDING TO A MISCONDUCT CHARGE IN CLUB PORTAL



MISCONDUCT DISCIPLINE PROCESS



NON-RESPONSE TO A MISCONDUCT CHARGE

When a County FA raises a Misconduct charge, paperwork is generated to the Club and on some occasions will be sent directly to the Participant. Where it is sent to the Club, the Secretary must make the Participant aware of the charge and ask for their response. For each charge the Participant is invited to respond, selecting whether they accept or deny the charge and how they wish for the case to be heard (e.g. Personal or Non-Personal Hearing).

If the County FA fail to receive a response by the deadline date that is shown on the charge, then the matter will be passed to a Disciplinary Commission for them to consider the charge outcome at their discretion by way of a correspondence hearing. No reminder will be sent to Participants who fail to respond to a misconduct charge, and the Participant may forfeit their right to a personal hearing.



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RESPONSE TO CHARGE

On the response sheet Participants will be offered four options, one of which must be chosen:

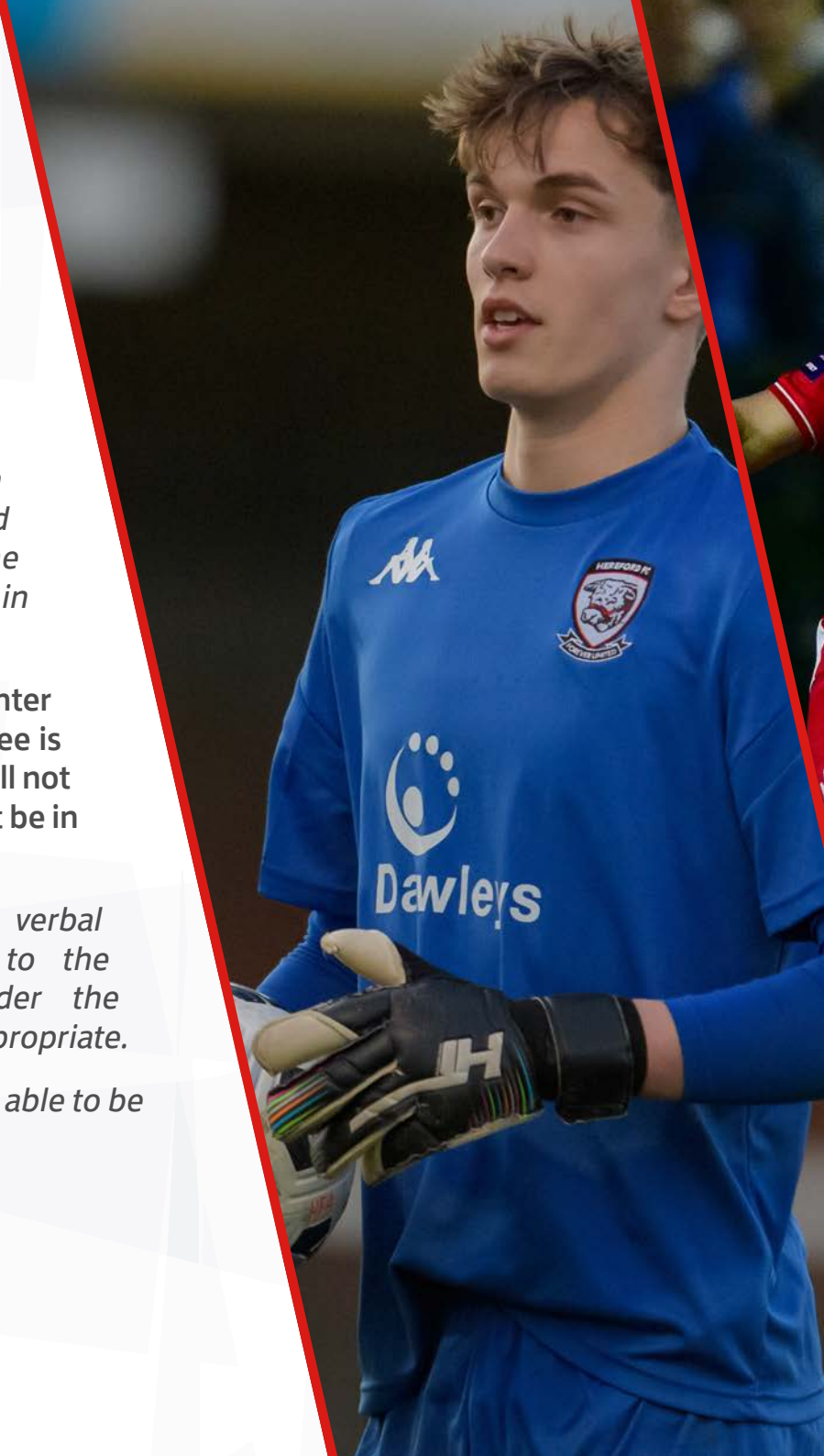
- A.** I am pleading guilty to the charge and I wish the case to be dealt with in my absence. I request any correspondence that I have submitted to be considered and I await the decision of the Disciplinary Commission as to my punishment.

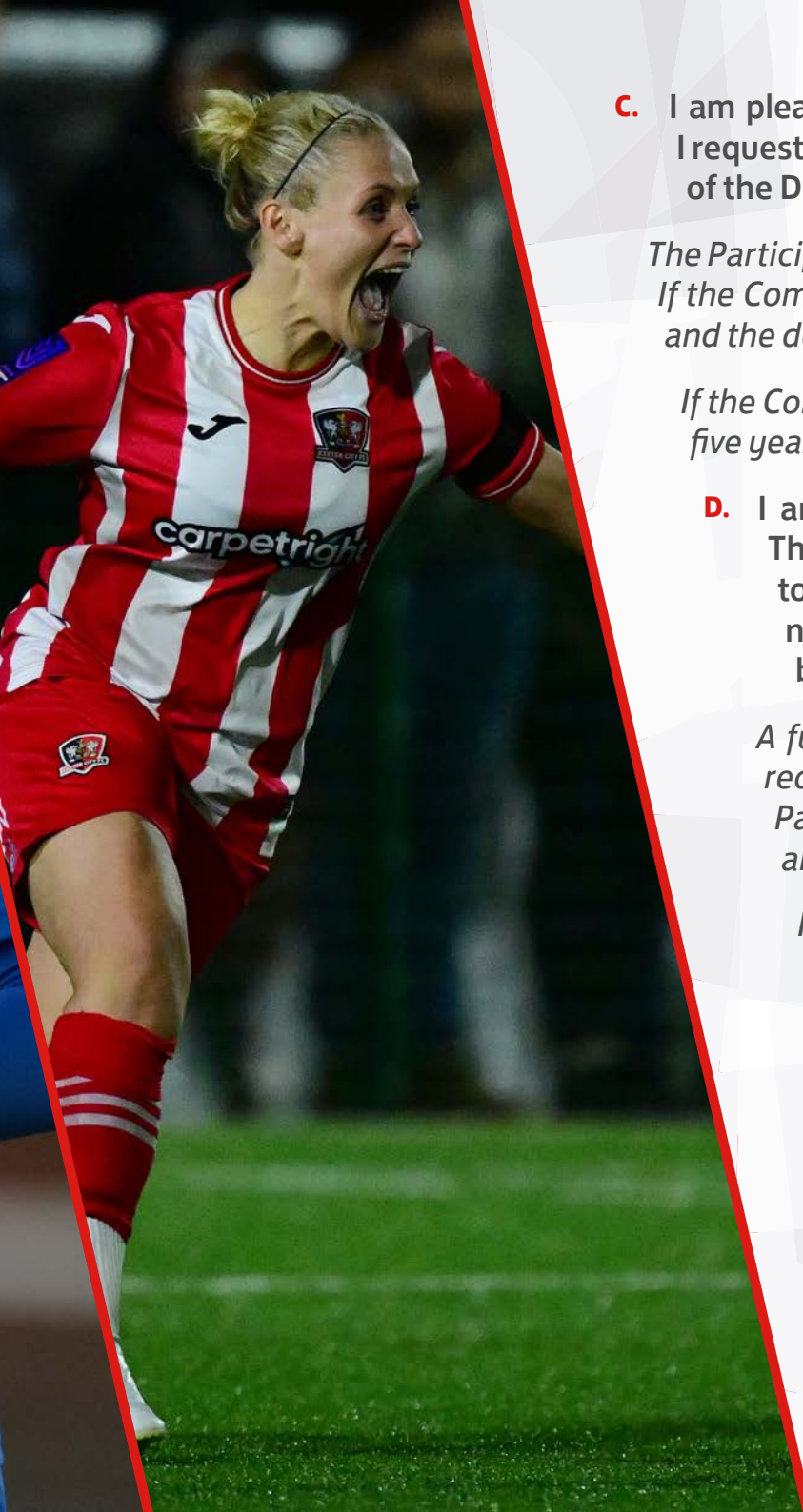
A Disciplinary Commission will consider the case, taking into consideration the Participant's/Club's disciplinary record from the previous five years and all documentation that has been sent to them in relation to the case. The Commission will come to a decision and the Participant(s) will be notified in writing by the County FA.

- B.** I am pleading guilty to the charge and I wish to attend a Discipline Hearing to enter a verbal plea for leniency. The hearing fee in addition to the administration fee is enclosed where applicable. I am aware that I am accepting the charge and I will not be able to question the basis of the charge and that the match officials will not be in attendance.

The participant, having already accepted the charge, will put forward verbal mitigation in relation to the case, which could include reference to the participants previous disciplinary history. A Commission will consider the participants submission and impose a sanction that they deem appropriate.

The charge has already been accepted so the Match Officials report will not be able to be contested and neither will the Match Official/s be in attendance.





- C.** I am pleading not guilty to the charge, and I wish the case to be dealt with in my absence. I request any correspondence that I have submitted be considered and I will await the decision of the Disciplinary Commission.

The Participant/Club must submit the documentation that they wish the Commission to consider. If the Commission find the case not proven the case is concluded, with no further action taken and the details being removed from the Participant's record.

If the Commission decide the case is proven, they will consider the Participant/Club's previous five year history and decide on an appropriate sanction.

- D.** I am pleading not guilty to the charge, and I wish to attend a Disciplinary Hearing. The personal hearing fee and the administration fee are enclosed where applicable, together with written reasons as to why I am requesting a personal hearing and the number of witnesses I intend to represent me, along with any other documentation to be considered.

A full list of witnesses who will be attending and the reason why the hearing has been requested needs to be submitted to the County FA (and any other documentation the Participant wishes the Commission to consider at the hearing). The County FA will arrange the hearing.

If the Participant denies any aspect of the charge and report on which it is based, they must select option C or D.

Should the Misconduct charge be found proven, Participants are permitted to lodge an appeal against a decision of the County FA. They are required to adhere to FA Regulations for Appeals.

A Participant who receives a match suspension as a result of a Misconduct charge is unable to participate in any football within Category 5, including refereeing, until the team they were playing for when charged serves the qualifying number of fixtures, as imposed by a Disciplinary Commission.

SANCTION GUIDELINES

The Disciplinary Sanction Guidelines have been produced to improve consistency in the application of sanctions for Misconduct charges across all County FA.

In an ever-changing world of football, it is important that the processes of The Football Association and County Associations evolve to provide a safe, enjoyable environment for Players, Referees and Participants alike, whilst maintaining the need for a fair and transparent disciplinary process for all involved.

As well as sporting sanctions and fines, a Commission is also able to order Participants to attend various workshops or seminars to help improve poor behaviour. Discipline is not a matter of just issuing match bans and financial sanctions but is also a process to help educate people and encourage best practice.

APPEALING A COUNTY FA DECISION

A Participant charged can lodge an appeal against the decision of a County FA concerning their own case. Any Participant seeking to appeal their decision should contact Judicial Services (JudicialServices@TheFA.com) – the department who facilitate the appeal process – at the earliest opportunity for the relevant information regarding how to formally appeal.

An intention to Appeal must be submitted within 7 days of the written decision.

The full written submissions are required within 14 days of the written decision and should be sent to JudicialServices@thefa.com

Further details on the Appeals process can be found here:

FURTHER DETAILS ON THE APPEALS PROCESS





EDUCATION SANCTIONS

There are several alternatives to the traditional sanctions that may be used if a Disciplinary Commission considers they will be of benefit to the Participant.

Educational sanctions are a great tool when dealing with younger Players and the Club Welfare Officer can play a key role by discussing the 'rights' and 'wrongs' with the Participant during or following a disciplinary hearing. Only a Disciplinary Commission can enforce such an order on a Participant.

There are a variety of education sanctions that are available, and they are:

- RESPECT Courses
- Safeguarding Children Workshop
- Laws of the game course/presentation
- Mandatory Equality Education (Online & Face to Face)

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GROUND BAN

What is a ground ban? In simple terms, it is a ban from attending the ground during any match that a particular team participates.

This can also be applied to teams playing on public playing fields as the Participant charged agrees by their very participation to abide by the Rules and Regulations of The Football Association and therefore to any orders made by a Disciplinary Commission.

It is The FA's Policy that all County FAs issue ground bans instead of touchline bans as at grassroots level a touchline ban can be difficult to enforce given that games may be played on public playing fields. There can also be uncertainty regarding the distance required to be away from the touchline.

The FA has guidance to Participants who are serving a Ground Ban is to not have any involvement with the match from at least 2 hours before kick-off until at least 2 hours after full-time.

[TO VIEW THE FULL SANCTION GUIDELINES DOCUMENT PLEASE CLICK HERE](#)

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PERSONAL HEARINGS

There may be occasions when Participants are asked to attend to a Disciplinary Hearing – either as a Player charged with Misconduct, or attending as a witness to Misconduct, or as a Match Official giving evidence.

The FA has produced a guide to help Participants prepare for the Personal Hearing and let them know what to expect covering topics such as:

- What should I bring to the hearing?
- What should I wear?
- Can I bring witnesses with me?
- How long do Personal Hearings normally last?
- What happens if I am not happy with the result of my hearing?
- Procedures for young people

This can be downloaded for clicking on the red bar below.

PERSONAL HEARING SUPPORT GUIDE



MULTI PLAYER MISCONDUCT CHARGE

Any Club who has six or more individual Players cautioned or dismissed from the field of play in the same match will be automatically fined as per the table below. Please note that the team must be playing at the level detailed below to be subject to the fines.

For each time you have more than half of your Team disciplined in a game the fine will increase.

	1 st Occasion	2 nd Occasion	3 rd Occasion	4 th Occasion
Step 5 & 6 National League System	£150	£300	£450	£600
Outside National League System	Warned as to future conduct	£25	£50	£75

EXAMPLE

Players 1, 2, 3, 4 and 5 are cautioned and Player 6 is sent from the field of play.

The Club (depending on the level) will be dealt with as detailed above for 1st Occasion in a Season.

Players 1, 2, 3 and 4 are cautioned and Players 2 and 3 are then sent off for persistent Misconduct.

The Club would not be fined as only four Players have been disciplined during the match. For the above fines to be enforced you must have six different individuals disciplined in the game.

There is no appeal process against a Multi-Player Misconduct charge. However, in exceptional circumstances a plea of mitigation can be put forward to a Disciplinary Commission who will consider the evidence before them.

CUMULATIVE MISCONDUCT

E1.2 charges will be issued to Clubs with a poor disciplinary record based upon the number of disciplinary cases and repetition of particular offences. To ensure an appropriate process is in place, each offence will have an automatic standard penalty points attributed to it.

The penalty points for each offence are set out below:

CAUTIONS

- C2 (Sin Bin), C2 Dissent, SOW04 Dissent – 4 points

SEND OFFS

- S2 Violent Conduct – 7 points
- S3 Spitting – 10 points
- S6 Use of offensive, or insulting or abusive language – 7 points
- S7 Receiving a Second Caution in a Match (where both Cautions are for Dissent) – 10 points

MISCONDUCT CHARGES

- 5-10 points at the discretion of the Disciplinary Commission or 7-10 points where the charge is dealt with by the National Serious Case Panel

A CHARGE UNDER FA RULE E1.2 WOULD BE RAISED AGAINST A CLUB IN ANY OF THE FOLLOWING CIRCUMSTANCES:

- Any Team's points tally reached 50/100.
- A Club has four or more incidents of violent conduct in a playing season.



POINT DEDUCTIONS

The FA has introduced point deductions for teams across the grassroots game if their players or coaches commit repeated offences of serious misconduct, making clear to clubs that this kind of behaviour will not be tolerated.

Point deductions will apply to clubs below the National League System, and clubs across Tier 3 and below in the women's pyramid, which commit cumulative incidents of serious misconduct.

A club will receive a charge if a team has two proven cases of aggravation/discrimination in the same season (breach of Rule E3.4.), or it has two proven charges of serious offences on a match official which include assault or attempted assault, or physical contact or attempted physical contact against a match official (breach of Regulation 92.2.)

The sanctions are:

RULE E3.4

1 st breach of Rule E3.4 (two Aggravated Breaches by Participants from a Club)	2 nd breach of Rule E3.4 (three Aggravated Breaches by Participants from a Club)	3 rd breach of Rule E3.4 (four Aggravated Breaches by Participants from a Club)
3 points to 6 points	4 points to 9 points	6 points to 12 points
Immediate	Immediate	Immediate

REGULATION 92.2 OF PART D OF SECTION THREE OF THE DISCIPLINARY REGULATIONS

1 st breach of Reg 92.2 (two 96.2/3 offences by Participants from a Club)	2 nd breach of Reg 92.2 (three 96.2/3 offences by Participants from a Club)	3 rd breach of Reg 92.2 (four 96.2/3 offences by Participants from a Club)
3 points to 6 points	4 points to 9 points	6 points to 12 points
Immediate	Immediate	Immediate





USE OF SMOKE BOMBS, FLARES OR FIREWORKS

The FA recognises a worrying recent trend regarding the possession and/or use of smoke bombs, flares or fireworks at Grassroots Football matches.

This guidance serves as reminder that possession and/or use of such items could be a criminal offence in addition to a breach of disciplinary regulations.

You don't have to let off a flare inside a stadium for it to be a criminal offence. Possession of a smoke bomb or flare is itself a crime if you even attempt to enter a stadium, and that can include possession en-route to the match. The law does not distinguish between smoke bombs, flares or fireworks either.

Anyone found guilty of a criminal offence relating to smoke bombs, flares or fireworks could be subject to a custodial sentence as well as a football banning order.

A club could also be charged with a breach of FA Rule E21 if disciplinary charges are pursued by a County FA. This could result in a sizeable fine in addition to other orders at the discretion of the Disciplinary Commission.

The dangers of using these items are widespread, and include:

- Serious injuries, such as loss of limb or fingers
- Severe burns, due to temperatures of up to 2,000°C
- Breathing problems, due to smoke inhalation
- Loss of hearing or sight, because of the explosive power

The FA acknowledges these dangers and will look to work with County FAs to actively address the issue using both criminal proceedings and disciplinary regulations.

We encourage Clubs to be vigilant and proactive to protect themselves against a possible charge. Such steps could include:

- Clear communication to Supporters that smoke bombs, flares or fireworks are prohibited at football matches
- Detail that anyone found in possession of such an item could be subject to criminal and disciplinary proceedings
- Highlight the dangers of using the items
- Clubs to issue their own banning orders against Supporters found in possession



ALL





LEAGUES

Leagues form an integral part of the football family, which allows Clubs to play football under strict rules and regulations. All Leagues are formed by a League Management Committee (LMC) and the members are voted in at the AGM by the Member Clubs.

Leagues are governed by their County Association or The Football Association, who affiliate the Leagues each season and sanction the rules for their competition.

A League's responsibility is to enforce their competition rules and allow Players to participate in the correct environment and ensure that it is fair and equal for all involved within the League. Should a Club breach a competition rule the League may charge the Club and hear the case following their response. The League is not permitted to deal with matters of misconduct, which are the responsibility of the County Association or The Football Association.

The League can take several steps to assist Clubs/Individuals with improving their behaviour in football. Working with Clubs/Individuals is crucial in addressing what the problem is and working together in rectifying the problem.

The LMC can make an application to refuse or cancel a registration of a Player if they have received suspensions in excess of 10 matches/112 days in a period of 2 years or less from the date of the first offence. The punishment must be across at least two offences.

A Player who has previously had their registration removed is permitted to compete within the League again upon completion of the punishment the League imposed. However, the Player is only registered to compete within the League under probation period of 12 months, and should the Player receive further act of proven Misconduct (excluding Standard dismissals) the League are empowered to consider a further charge of bringing the Competition into disrepute.

Leagues should always be willing to work with teams and individuals in order to improve behaviour on and off the field, and if they believe that further training or help is required they should address this to their County Association who could assist.

There may be occasion where the league uses evidence against a member club, such as proven misconduct charges, deduction of points orders, to put forward a motion to vote on the member clubs membership at an EGM or AGM, but the league must ensure that the process is followed correctly and fairly. Guidance on League AGM's can be found by clicking on the below:

LEAGUE AGM GUIDANCE

Clubs, Officials, or Players have a right of appeal against a League's decision to the relevant sanctioning authority (Clubs in Step 5 and 6 of the National League System appeal through The FA, all other clubs appeal through the County FA).

Within 14 days of the posting of written notification of any decision by the Management Committee or the Competition, a Club, Official, or Player against whom such action is being taken must appeal against such decision by lodging particulars with their relevant County FA, along with any required fee, for the adjudication of a Board of Appeal.

The grounds of appeal shall be in accordance with FA Rules.

For the full guidance document to Leagues click on the red bar below:

WHAT LEAGUES NEED TO KNOW 2025-26





HANDLING DISCRIMINATION AND SERIOUS CASES

As part of The FA's commitment to deliver a game free from discrimination, we have enhanced the way in which discriminatory and serious cases are investigated and heard at grassroots level.

County FAs are responsible for all cases arising in category 5 football, and the details of Serious Cases will also be reported centrally to The FA.

This is part of a wider project within The FA whereby Discipline is now housed within the Grassroots Division. This is led by the team of staff highlighted in the introduction on page 3.

Investigations will be managed by the relevant County FA and, where appropriate, charges will be raised upon completion of a thorough investigation. The Regional Discipline Managers will assist and advise the County FAs during this process.

This process is summarised in the:

SERIOUS CASE FLOWCHART

The FA has also established a diverse Serious Case Panel who will be selected to hear grassroots Serious Cases. All members of the Panel undertake annual training and assessment to ensure the highest standards.

The FA will appoint all members of the Panel to hear cases concerning Assault or attempted Assault on a Match Official, Physical Contact or attempted Physical Contact on a Match Official, Assault by Participant on Participant, Aggravated Breaches of FA Rules E3 and E20, and FA Rule E4.





SANCTIONS FOR AGGRAVATED BREACHES

Discriminatory behaviour is unacceptable and there is a Sanction Range of between 6 and 12 matches for a first offence, plus a mandatory education programme where an “Aggravated Breach” of FA Rule E3 is found proven.

RULE E GENERAL BEHAVIOUR

E3.1. A Participant shall at all times act in the best interests of the game and shall not act in any manner which is improper or brings the game into disrepute or use any one, or a combination of, violent conduct, serious foul play, threatening, abusive, indecent or insulting words or behaviour

A breach of Rule E3.1 is an “Aggravated Breach” where it includes a reference whether direct or indirect to any one or more of the following: - ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion or belief, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation or disability.

For a first offence of discriminatory abuse the sanction will be within the Sanction Range between 6 and 12 matches. The lowest end of the Sanction Range, i.e. 6 matches, will operate as the Standard Minimum punishment. This sanction may be increased depending on the specific facts of any case and any further such offence will carry a mandatory minimum suspension of no fewer than 7 matches.

A Regulatory Commission may only consider imposing a suspension below the Standard Minimum where the following specific (and exhaustive) circumstances arise such that the Regulatory Commission determines that the Standard Minimum would be excessive:

Where the offence was committed in writing only or via the use of any communication device and:

- Where the Regulatory Commission is satisfied that there was no genuine intent on the part of the Participant Charged to be discriminatory or offensive in any way and could not reasonably have known that any such offence would be caused; or
- The age of the Participant at time of the offence (e.g. where the Participant was a minor at the time the offence was committed); or
- The age of the offence (e.g. a social media post made a considerable time ago)

Club will be liable to be sanctioned if two or more of its Participants commit an act of discriminatory abuse in any twelve-month period.

In all cases the Participant may be fined as well as suspended and will be required to undergo an education programme.



HOW DO I REPORT?

If you feel that you have been the victim of discrimination, or that you have witnessed discriminatory behaviour towards others, then we encourage you to report your concerns.

We understand this can be a daunting process, County FA's are on hand to guide you through this process, please contact your County fa should you require support.

Please click on the red bar below which will direct you to the reporting form.

GRASSROOTS DISCIPLINE DISCRIMINATION REPORTING FORM

Incidents can also be reported to Kick It Out via their online reporting form, click on the red bar below to go direct to their form:

KICK IT OUT REPORTING FORM





SPORTING CHANCE SUPPORT FOR VICTIMS OF DISCRIMINATORY ABUSE

The FA have secured dedicated and specialist support for all victims of discrimination, following the request of many stakeholders.

Sporting Chance now offer free support to victims of discrimination from the point where the allegation is made.

When a County FA respond to an allegation of discrimination, it is expected that a letter will be included in the correspondence to ensure all victims get the opportunity to reach out for support if needed.

As this support is available from the point of allegation it should be sent immediately and must not be withheld until an investigation is underway.

This service agreement with Sporting Chance will not only provide high quality support to victims but it will also reduce much of the time County Football Associations currently spend on after care matters with victims of discrimination.

However, it is important this runs in tandem with their continued contact with victims to keep them updated, ensuring they are listened to and empathised with throughout the process.

Please note that Sporting Chance offer is for those aged 12 and over. For those aged under 12 the County FA will be able to offer advice and support.

GRASSROOTS DISCIPLINE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

The FA Grassroots Discipline Team have implemented a new Grassroots Discipline Complaints Process for the 2025-26 season. Full details are available from the link below:

GRASSROOTS DISCIPLINE COMPLAINTS PROCESS

The document outlines The FA's commitment to dealing with complaints about disciplinary matters, and provides information on how the process will be managed.

FOR



ALL





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TheFA



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