



14 June 2023

Chief Executive Officers / Presidents of all Member Unions

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Copy to: Presidents of all Referees' Associations

Dear fellow Executives / Presidents

Working better together to protect our Match Officials

I am writing to you with concerns about the increased number of instances of Match Official Abuse (MO Abuse), both on and off the field, reported this year.

Despite previous communications calling for action across the Game, including to all participants, volunteers, and administrators, the number of reported incidents of MO Abuse compared to this time last year has doubled.

These reports raise incidents of MO Abuse by players, coaches, support staff and spectators, and range from dissent and verbal abuse to physical abuse. In recent weeks, we have seen one player physically assault a Match Official on the field in an unprovoked attack and at a time when the Match Official was in an unprotected and vulnerable position. The player received an almost five-year suspension.

Abuse and harassment towards Match Officials is one of the biggest threats to our Game and must be stamped out. Match Officials at every level of Rugby have the right to feel - and be - safe and respected, week in, week out. Recruitment and retention of Match Officials is already an ongoing challenge for our sport and will only worsen should they continue to be subject to abuse or perceive that such incidents are not treated with the seriousness by the Rugby Body, or do not result in the strong sanctions, that they deserve.

Put simply, enough is enough. Without our Match Officials, there is no Game. Whilst Rugby AU knows we are all working hard to eradicate this problem, collectively we need to be doing more.





In this regard, I ask you to commit to the following:

1. To ensure this letter is distributed across every Sub-Union and/or Zone and to discuss its contents with your leaders.
2. To encourage the leaders in your Sub-Unions and/or Zones to disseminate the messages in this letter, strengthen the education around MO Abuse and respectful behaviours, and promote our Core Values of discipline, respect, integrity, passion and team work. *Everyone* – players, coaches, support staff, parents and spectators - is responsible for contributing to positive club culture and behaviour towards one another, and especially towards our Match Officials.
3. To review your match day processes and procedures with your Sub-Unions, Zones, and Clubs to ensure they are fit for purpose when it comes to putting appropriate protective and preventative measures in place to mitigate against the risks of MO Abuse. Consideration ought to be given to the appointment of suitably experienced Ground Marshalls, roping off pitches, positioning dedicated spectator areas away from sidelines, enforcing alcohol bans pitch-side, etc.
4. To proactively work with your Referee Associations to build positive working relationships and improve understanding of their role in the rugby community, including but not limited to; formalising regular meetings between Association, Member Union, and Competition Management staff; facilitating a coach and referee education forum prior to each season; recognising individual achievement and promoting positive Match Officiating news stories; and ensuring Match Officiating is prioritised as a standing item in each Board, Club Presidents, and staff, meeting.
5. To issue the **attached** directive to all Participants, Members and Clubs in your Union placing them on notice that increased sanctions will be imposed under the Disciplinary Rules (for on-field incidents) and Code of Conduct (for off-field incidents). This is to be a directive for the purposes of sanctioning under those Policies and should be provided to any and all Judicial Committees and Code of Conduct Committees hearing MO Abuse cases as well.

Rugby AU's Integrity Team is currently developing guidelines for the sanctioning of MO Abuse cases under the Disciplinary Rules and Code of Conduct to ensure greater consistency and strengthening of sanctions across the Game.

In the meantime, our message is clear; whether you are playing in a match or watching from the sidelines, **if you engage in MO Abuse, expect to spend time away from the Game.**

Thank you for sharing our concern and your efforts to protect our Match Officials and the Core Values of our Game.





The Rugby AU Integrity Team will remain on hand to assist you with any questions or concerns that you may have. In the meantime, I wish you all the best for the rest of this season and hope that together we can ensure Match Officials are given the respect they deserve.

Kind regards,

Andy Marinos

Chief Executive Officer

