

30 June 2015

The Chairman
Mainland Football
Christchurch

Dear Craig

Further to my letters of August 2013 and May 2014, outlining my concerns over behaviour towards match officials, it appears timely to reiterate the stance of the Disciplinary Panel towards such cases.

In 2013 I dealt with around 17 cases, the vast majority of which were related to abuse of referees, both physical and verbal. In 2014 the number of cases that required my attention reduced to around 7. To date this year I have dealt with in the region of 6 cases. It is important that we recognise the improvements made, but at the same time acknowledge that there was no other way for football in the Mainland region to go.

I think that it is now germane that I write to you to ask that you remind all clubs of their ongoing responsibilities to the game, especially with regards their responsibilities with regards the behaviour of their players, support staff and supporters towards the match officials. The NZ Code of Conduct outlines what is expected and that should be adhered to by each and every club.

There does also still seem to be ignorance in some quarters as to the mandatory penalties to be imposed on any finding of misconduct towards an official. It is not uncommon to see submissions essentially accept an offence and then go on to state that a 1 game suspension is all that is required. Such submissions merely display the author's lack of knowledge of the mandatory penalties that are then required to be imposed by the NZF Disciplinary Code. I would accordingly be grateful if you would bring to your members' attention clause 27 of the Code.

27.1 Including the automatic suspension incurred in accordance with provision 11.4, any recipient of a direct red card for misconduct against a Match Official shall be:

27.1.1 At least four playing days for unsporting conduct (including but not limited to using offensive, insulting or abusive language and/or gestures) towards a match official.

27.1.2 At least six months for assaulting (elbowing, punching, kicking etc.) a match official.

If a charge is proven then there is **no ability** to impose a penalty below these minimum sanctions.

Whilst I do realise that teams do take these games very seriously, and that frustrations will inevitably occur, team officials, players and spectators do need to understand that if they direct abusive words directly at match officials, then they are either putting themselves in serious jeopardy of an extended suspension and/or their club in jeopardy of a significant fine or loss of competition points.

I'd also like to add in a brief word about junior and youth football. Over the past 3 years I have had to deal with a number of matters that revolved around these levels of football, the youngest being 12th grade. In virtually all those matters it was the adults that caused the disciplinary complaint, not the players. It is incontrovertible that children learn from their role models. If a coach encourages anger then no doubt the children will learn to play with anger and this unfortunately pervades the higher grades as those children grow older. I would urge all clubs to ensure that their coaches approach junior and youth football in a wholly non-confrontational manner and that they also remind parents of their responsibilities to all the children playing the game, not just their own.

With regards the Judicial Process I would like to again reiterate my previous words with regards any submissions made on behalf of alleged offenders. I do not expect to see expressions as to the abilities of the match officials. It would appear that some coaches and players still labour under the misapprehension that their view of a match official's performance is a relevant consideration in any decision making. These views are totally and utterly irrelevant within the Process and instead should be addressed to the relevant referees co-ordinator. We are a Judicial Panel not a referee assessors' panel. As I have said before, those comments are best left unsaid. As an aside it should be noted that for submissions to be considered they should be from a named individual. Anonymous submissions will not be considered, unless there are extenuating circumstances.

I also still have concerns with regards online comments. Any postings on forums or social media are public postings and if they find their way to the mainstream then

they could be the subject of potential disciplinary action under the NZF Code of Conduct. I am aware that most clubs have websites or Facebook pages and would urge that comments on those sites are measured and not able to be construed as abusive of match officials. Clearly forums where people use pseudonyms are almost impossible to police.

There are a sparse number of match officials at present and anything that denudes that number simply fast forwards the day where there are no match officials and all teams provide a referee for each half – I do not see that as being an ideal situation.

In the main I have been happily redundant this season, although the past few weeks have unseen a number of unfortunate incidents come to light. It would be remiss therefore not to mention that in the main standards of behaviour have improved dramatically from where they were in 2013. Whilst it would be Panglossian in the extreme to suggest that everything in the garden is rosy, there will always be some that cannot treat the game with a degree of perspective, I do feel confident that a new attitude has been achieved through the boards of the constituent clubs. To further assist in stamping out abuse of match officials, I wonder whether it would be appropriate for Mainland to put in place a system of referee liaisons, one to be supplied by each club. The liaisons would jointly be responsible for the referees at the ground and for ensuring that nothing untoward occurred. I would anticipate that each person would be a senior club member.

Just to reiterate, attitudes towards officials are improving, however we should be vigilant to ensure that we to continue to strive towards a season in which I have no referred complaints with regards abuse of match officials.

I would be grateful if you could direct this correspondence to your Board and also your wider membership.

Yours sincerely

A handwritten signature in black ink, appearing to read 'Paul Bradford', written in a cursive style.

Paul Bradford
Chair, Mainland Judicial Panel