

## **RFU Guidance on Social Media for Clubs**

In the RFU's opinion social networking, such as Twitter, Facebook, internet blogs and other online sites, offers tremendous opportunities for rugby to communicate and engage with a growing audience as well as its existing members, supporters and players.

The RFU is keen to promote the safe and responsible use of social networking technology but also to make its members aware of the potential risks and to share best practice.

Participants should be aware that comments which bring the game into disrepute, or are threatening, abusive, indecent or insulting, may lead to disciplinary action. Comments that include a reference to a person's ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, faith, gender, sexual orientation or disability may attract a high disciplinary sanction.

Comments can also attract civil and criminal action. Nearly 5,000 offences involving Facebook and Twitter were reported to police in 2012 and 653 people charged.

### **General Guidance**

- These are public forums, so treat them as such
- Individuals and organisations are strictly responsible for any posting on his/their account/s
- Re-posting or re-tweeting inappropriate content represents an endorsement of that content and can be actionable
- Do not use abusive, derogatory, vulgar or sexual language
- Do not criticise or imply bias in match officials
- At all times, exercise discretion and respect for clubs, players, fans and the game's partners
- Deleting or apologising publicly for an improper posting does not prevent disciplinary action being taken
- Consider "protecting" Tweets and changing security/visibility of Facebook accounts

### **Clubs and Constituent Bodies (For HCRC CB = Surrey Rugby)**

Clubs and Constituent Bodies (CBs) should be aware that they can be vicariously liable for material published by employees in the course of their employment, for example on an official website, Facebook site or Twitter feed, or published by employees outside work via a work email address or a work Twitter handle.

Clubs can also be liable for third party comments and postings made in their website forums or on their Facebook pages. We recommend that clubs and CBs:

- Clearly identify who is responsible for posting and maintaining social networking and internet sites
- Set standards for content generated in line with the RFU's Core Values and the guidelines above
- Establish protocols for monitoring output, moderating content in online forums and removing offensive postings
- Hold members to account for any breaches

### **Safeguarding**

The RFU's Safeguarding Policy advises against coaches having direct personal communication with children unless in exceptional circumstances and coaches and club officials should not communicate with children through social networking sites such as Facebook and Twitter, nor should they be "friends" with children or comment on their status.

The RFU works closely with the NSPCC's Child Protection in Sport Unit, which provides comprehensive guidance and resources relating to this issue here (PDF332kB)

### **Players and officials**

Individuals need to understand that they are personally responsible and liable for their comments and postings. At all times you should exercise discretion and be respectful of other players, teams, officials, organisations and brands. What you regard as "banter" could be regarded as embarrassing or hurtful by a wider audience and bring the game into disrepute.

In short, follow the general guidelines above and:

Don't comment if you have any concerns about the consequences

Don't link to unsuitable content

Don't get into disputes with audience

Don't share or elicit personal detail

But

Do show your personality and be approachable

Do share your achievements

Do let people know what it is like to be a player/official

Do post regular comments to grow and engage with an audience