TO ALL CLUB SECRETARIES AND DISCIPLINE CHAIRS

Cc Northumberland Rugby Union Referee Society

At the start of last season I circulated a Discipline Manual to all clubs containing all of the key documents which clubs required to enable them to understand the disciplinary process. I alerted clubs to the fact that a major review of the RFU's regulatory framework for dealing disciplinary cases was being undertaken as part of a two year project. The first part of that project is now complete.

RFU Regulation 19 continues to provide the framework for the disciplinary process in England. It is updated every summer and is supplemented by seven appendices. One of these, Appendix 6 (Age Grade Disciplinary Process) has five appendices of its own. Regulation 19 has now been completely re-written and work has commenced on a review of the appendices. I have attached a Note from the RFU Head of Discipline, David Barnes, explaining the work that has been undertaken by the Regulation 19 Review Group and summarising the main changes to Regulation 19 which have been approved by RFU Council for implementation in advance of the new season.

Whilst the changes are significant and, I hope, a major improvement, the formal process for determining sanctions for disciplinary offences cannot change as it is prescribed by World Rugby for adoption at all levels of the game. There will be no need, therefore, to make any significant changes to the way in which we conduct disciplinary hearings in Northumberland. I attach an updated Note summarising the procedure that will be adopted. All clubs are asked to familiarise themselves with this as strict compliance will be essential to the continued smooth operation of the disciplinary process.

Although the procedures for hearings will not change those of you who have attended a disciplinary hearing in recent years will appreciate that the process for determining sanctions has become quite formulaic so that in many cases the outcome is almost predictable. The RFU have acknowledged this and as you will see from David Barnes' Note that they are proposing 'licensing' individual CBs to adopt an expedited process in suitable cases which would enable those cases to be dealt with and appropriate sanctions to be imposed without the need for a formal hearing. I am keen on adopting an expedited process here in Northumberland as it will enable cases to be dealt with more speedily and with reduced admin costs. I will be working with David Barnes and the Regulation 19 Review Group in the hope that some form of expedited process can be introduced here in the not too distant future. For any form of expedited process to work effectively the co-operation and buy in of clubs and referees will be essential and so detailed guidance will be circulated if and when such a process is approved in Northumberland. It is likely that a training programme for club discipline chairs will also be devised.

In light of the growing complexity of the disciplinary process the RFU has produced a number of online resources to assist clubs and referees in negotiating their way through the disciplinary process. These are currently in the process of being uploaded onto the RFU's new website.

It has long been my practice to write to clubs in August to remind them of the actions they must take in the event that one of their players receives a red card. As a matter of best

practice clubs should conduct speedy internal disciplinary proceedings in respect of players who are shown a red card. Whilst acknowledging that clubs might not always be in possession of all of the information they require they should where possible adopt the same processes to determine sanction as are applied by CB disciplinary panels. I attach a 'Guidance Note for Clubs' setting out those processes.

Finally, can I remind clubs that my role is restricted to adult discipline with Chris Davy having responsibility for age grade discipline but there is a cross-over between the two. For example, disciplinary cases brought in respect of breaches of the age grade playing up and down regulations will be brought against the clubs concerned and not the players themselves and so will be dealt by a CB (Adult) Disciplinary Panel as will cases involving allegations of misconduct by adults at age grade matches.

The majority of rugby players go through an entire career without ever having to engage with the disciplinary process. It is understandable that those required to appear before a panel will be unfamiliar with the process. Although my principal role is to oversee the administration of the disciplinary process in Northumberland I remain available as a source of advice in relation to disciplinary matters and can be contacted using the details set out below.

Regards,

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