

The statement below is being released to the media 6th November 2006

RFU TACKLES ABUSE OF PLAYERS AND MATCH OFFICIALS

The Rugby Football Union has announced that it is taking further steps to tackle the abuse of players and match officials. The RFU Management Board has introduced and approved an instruction for referees to enforce strictly the rules concerning verbal abuse of players and match officials and the use of obscene and offensive language at all levels of the game from Level 12 through to the Guinness Premiership.

The use of obscene and offensive language is contrary to the spirit and ethos of the game as set out in the International Rugby Board's Playing Charter and the RFU codes of conduct for players and spectators.

The Regulatory regime to deal with abuse already exists. RFU Rule 5.12 prohibits any "conduct which is prejudicial to the interests of the Union or the Game". IRB Law 6.A.5 demands that "all players must respect the authority of the referee".

IRB Law 10.4 (k) prohibits "acts contrary to good sportsmanship in the playing enclosure". That includes any form of verbal abuse and can lead to on field sanction and, in extreme cases, further disciplinary sanctions. Verbal abuse of opponents carries a recommended disciplinary sanction ranging from a low end of two weeks' suspension to a maximum of 24 weeks.

Verbal abuse of match officials carries a recommended disciplinary sanction ranging from a low end of six weeks' suspension to a maximum of 24 months.

Referees must also always report any unacceptable abuse or offensive language by coaches, spectators or others from the touchline.

Chief Executive of the RFU, Francis Baron OBE, said: "The Management Board has taken this decision and introduced these steps for all levels of the game from Level 12 through to the Guinness Premiership because it is important that the ethos and culture of the game is maintained.

"Although the cases of player to player and player to official abuse are not widespread they are increasing and that is why these initiatives are being introduced now as a preventative measure."

RFU Disciplinary Officer, His Honour Judge Jeff Blackett said "Clearly in a robust game there will be banter but there is a line that cannot be crossed where it becomes gratuitous and offensive abuse.

"That is unnecessary and reflects badly on the image of the Game, and players must be aware what is and not acceptable. Serious abuse of players and officials is unacceptable and I welcome the RFU Management Board's strong action to combat this issue."