

Law 5 – The Referee

Law 5, the authority of the referee states that each match is controlled by a referee who has full authority to enforce the Laws of the Game in connection with the match to which he has been appointed. The referee must provide a relevant report to the Football Federation Victoria on matters such as incidents that occurred before, during or after the match.

As stated in the 'Notes' section on the laws of the game, when applying the laws Those who are educating match officials and other participants, should emphasise that:

- referees should apply the Laws within the 'spirit' of the game to help produce fair and safe matches
- everyone must respect the match officials and their decisions, remembering and respecting that referees are human and will make mistakes

Players have a major responsibility for the image of the game and the team captain should play an important role in helping to ensure that the Laws and referees' decisions are respected.

Offensive Language including racially or sexually based taunts

Law 12 provides the referee with appropriate action in cases where offensive, insulting or abusive language and /or gestures occurs from a person listed on the team sheet and identified by the match officials.

There are however, incidents where the on field offender or an off field offender (spectator group or other club associates) cannot be identified. Offensive language can be directed at the match officials or at players, coaches or other game participants.

The impact of directed malicious taunts can affect the quality of decision making by officials by distracting them, prevent individual players from playing to their full merit and seek to create an unfair advantage. In many cases the language is illegal under Australian law as well as Law 12 of the Laws of the Game.

The environment created by these few offensive offenders is undermining the image of the game and forcing spectators, parents and new potential players away from clubs, further undermining their viability. It is not a suitable environment for players to compete fairly to their best ability.

Guidelines for dealing with unidentified offensive language

ALWAYS keep a copy of relevant reports that you submit.

Where the person responsible for offensive language, including racially or sexually based taunts, cannot be identified on the field, or is part of a spectator or other club associates group, the referee should take reasonable steps to stop the offensive behaviour. In doing this they need to work with key people involved in the match to ensure that the match is not jeopardised unless otherwise unavoidable.

- 1) Before the match commences each team & coach should be advised that offensive language will be acted on in all cases including where a specific offender is not clearly identified. They should be advised that the match may be terminated under Law 5 if persistent offending continues.
- 2) During the match the referee should consider any advice from Assistant Referees in relation to what they have specifically heard, as well as what they hear themselves directly.
- 3) Offensive language for these purposes occurs from a group of persons off field, behind play or out of line of sight of officials, and includes a single occurrence where action is warranted due to the significance of what is said or the explicit nature of a racial or sexual taunt. The impact on players, coaches and spectators is to be considered as part of the definition of what is "offensive".
- 4) At the first occurrence of a racial or sexual taunt or where offensive language is developing from an unidentified source, the referee should **use the following procedure**:
 - a) Stop the match
 - i. Care should be taken in regard to the state of an attacking move as the taunt may be a deliberate attempt to stop play and break up the attack
 - ii. Play should be stopped and the ball position noted for a drop ball restart. If the ball travels out of play before the stoppage then the natural break in play should be used and the restart will be in accordance with that event.
 - b) The referee should call together Assistant Referees, club lines, both captains and move towards the coaching area inviting coaches (**if present, club marshals**) to come over.
 - c) Explain what has been heard and clearly gesture towards the area from where the offence occurred.
 - d) Advise that if there are further occurrences of racial or sexual taunts or ongoing offensive language after the restart, then the game may be terminated.
 - e) **Allow a club official time to rectify the concern.** Allow up to 2 minutes total stoppage which will NOT be added on time for the game. This provides an opportunity for clubs or coaches to take their own responsible actions to prevent further occurrence.
 - f) Restart the match with a drop ball or using the natural restart from a ball out of play.
- 5) If further taunting or offensive language is heard (unidentified source) then the referee should stop play and end the game. **Club marshals or officials should be on hand to assist the officiating team to leave the field of play in a safe manner.**
- 6) Coaches and team captains should be clearly advised that the reason for terminating the game under Law 5 in regard to outside interference in the game or persistent infringement from unidentified player(s).
- 7) A report detailing the actions taken should be forwarded to FFV including the times of the 2 stoppages and what was specifically heard at each point in time.
- 8) NO advice should be given to clubs as to the outcome of the game beyond that the result will be considered by the FFV Competitions team and advised to both clubs.