



Amateur Football Combination

Spirit of Football

www.amateurfootballcombination.com

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Club Referees from September 2008 – Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act 2006

Introduction

If you already have a Club Welfare Officer (CWO) you will be aware that in September 2008 the Safeguarding Vulnerable Groups Act (SVGA) becomes Law. This will impact significantly on our football.

The Act identifies certain people as being involved in ‘regulated activities’ and according to the FA, a competitive football match is a regulated activity, and the referee is supervising it.

As such, the referee of **any** AFC football match is subject to the Act, unless refereeing no more than two games per month (any football, not just AFC matches), or unless the game cannot involve players under the age of 18 (so Veterans football is exempt, but not AFC games, which are ‘open age’).

CRB Checks

The Act requires that such referees have completed a CRB (Criminal Records Bureau) check suitable for football. These are commonplace, and anyone who has already registered as a referee or completed a FA Coaching badge will have already gone through the CRB process. It is also a requirement for Youth Club Coaches next season. Enclosed with this letter is a two page leaflet from the Football Association explaining what CRB checks involve for referees.

Registered Referees

Referees who are already registered with a County Football Association will have complied with the requirements of the SVGA which has been required since the start of the 2007-08 season as part of Referee Registration. Referees’ will also have completed the FA Child Protection Course.

Unregistered ‘Club’ Referees

Out of necessity, many clubs regularly or occasionally appoint unregistered referees. Some of these took a refereeing course many years ago and have allowed their registration to lapse. Others have never taken a refereeing course, but are prepared to referee on a Saturday and make sure the game happens.

These “club referees” will now need to complete a CRB check (which cost £12, are valid for at least 3 years, and also mean the referee is covered by Public Liability Insurance for all matches which are sanctioned by the Amateur Football Alliance – i.e. all AFC games). They do not need to do the child protection course, re-register with a County FA or take a Refereeing Course (though we’d be delighted if they did).

However, a club referee who has not had the CRB check, who is refereeing more than twice a month (regardless of whether it is different clubs, leagues etc), will be in breach of the SVGA, **and** so will be the club officer who appoints the referee.

What does the Amateur Football Combination Expect?

The AFC expects clubs to provide “a suitable person” for all of our games. Any AFC game can involve players who are aged 16-18. Even if your team won't include any 16 or 17 year olds, your opposition might. We expect all under-18 players to be free to play in any match and not be prevented because the home club haven't provided a suitable referee.

We shall not be asking for clubs for proof that their club referees are suitable – our duty is to inform clubs of the legal requirements and it is the responsibility of each club to ensure they provide suitable referees.

CRB Check – No Need to be Afraid

The CRB Check is nothing to be afraid of. Its purpose is to identify the small minority of people who may present a risk to youngsters and other vulnerable groups. As the FA guidance explains, there are no concerns over traffic offences, most youth offending and indeed a wide range of other offences. It's the more serious, recent offences such as assaults, drug use and supplying, racist offending, harassment, arson and sexual offences, especially any committed against children that might cause an issue.

If there is an issue with a disclosure, all details will remain confidential and won't be revealed to your club. They will be told simply about any restrictions on your eligibility to referee games involving players under a given age. If dissatisfied with the FA's ruling you will be entitled to appeal but any restrictions imposed will apply until such time as the appeal succeeds.

I've had a CRB Check, but not Football

Unfortunately, if you've already had a CRB check for another reason (such as for work, teaching, other sports, scouts, youth work) you still must have an FA CRB Check to referee. This is because disclosures are private to you and cannot be passed to other organisations. For example the Football Association cannot share your disclosure with the England Cricket Board, and nor can you.

The FA has been asking the Government to provide for the 'Portability' of Disclosures, but as yet this has not been taken up by them, so at the moment we're required to have a CRB Checks for each sport (and I write as someone who has done them for both football and cricket).

Need More Information

If any club, or club referee, wishes to have more information, then either contact the Amateur Football Alliance or myself, the AFC Welfare Officer. If your club already has a Club Welfare Officer, then that person may also be able to assist and help. I shall also be available at both Regional Meetings due to be held later in May 2008.

What Do You Need To Do?

Please can all clubs ensure a copy of this letter and the FA Guidance is passed to **all** of their club referees as a matter of urgency, and ascertain whether they already have a CRB Check, or whether they need one. A copy is also available on the AFC website within the referees section. If they need to take a CRB check, then the sooner they put it in motion the better – that is why I'm writing now at the start of the summer, not in September when the season is upon us.

Club Welfare Officers

There is no requirement at present from the Football Association for “open aged” (i.e. adult) clubs to have their own Club Welfare Officers, though the AFC recommendation is that each club should have one, to give a club contact for advice on these matters. For more information see pages 22 and 23 of the current Amateur Football Combination handbook, or the “Youth” section of the AFC website.

If you have any questions, or need more advice, please do not hesitate to contact me.

Yours sincerely



Danny McConnell (Amateur Football Combination Welfare Officer)