



St Ives Junior AFL Club
A Layman's Look at the Law – 2011

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Parents: please print the document and go through pages 2 to 6 with a highlighter and make your own notes where appropriate. Next discuss what you believe is relevant with the Offspring and give them page 8 as a questionnaire to test their views. The answers on pages 9 and 10 are for your reference when reviewing the questions.

Dear St Ives Players, Officials and Spectators

In 2009, the Club played through the entire season without one Code of Conduct incident. In fact, the Club made it through a record 21 rounds and 247 games without major incident from March 2009 until May 2010. Whilst we can be proud of this achievement as a Club, we cannot rest on our laurels and we need to be ever vigilant in our behaviour.

As the game of Australian Rules continues to grow in Sydney, the Greater Sydney Juniors (GSJ) and the AFL continue to tighten the rules and regulations governing the competition. With that, this document covers a number of key points concerning the Code of Conduct that concerns all Players, Spectators and Officials.

This is about looking behind the scenes on the Code of Conduct so that everyone (Player, Official or Spectator) is aware of how it works and what it means to them... This is about putting some context around the content within the competition by-laws so that everyone knows the ramifications of unruly behaviour.

As a Club, we are determined to play the game within the spirit of the game, thereby setting an example across the competitions we play in. With that, we ask you to go through the following actions upon receiving this document:

[1] The Layman's Look at the Law is for all members especially from U12s and up. Parents are to go through the document with the Players and explain the details. The Players are to complete the self-assessment and Parents are to walk through the answers as reinforcement.

[2] Coaches are to remind everyone at the start of each game about the need for self-discipline and how important that is to team performance and the outcome of the match. If necessary, they are to remind Players again at crucial stages during the game.

[3] Coaches and support staff are to be vigilant when watching play and look to move players around or bring them off the field for a break at the first signs of trouble such as giving away a 50m penalty. This is also applicable to the Players who can help look out for each other.

[4] The Club will do what it can to educate all Players, Officials and Spectators about the implications of misconduct. Where appropriate, the Club will consider issuing internal penalties to reinforce the Club's position.

Our overall aim with this document is to make sure everyone can enjoy their footy. With that, I trust that this document will make Code of Conduct clear and initiate a healthy father-son discussion around discipline on and off the field. If you have any questions, then please direct them to me, or the junior or youth coordinators, so we can collate and share insights across the Club.

Regards

Terry Southwell

President

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That Moment of Indiscretion

Umpires are constantly monitoring the game for any unruly behaviour by Players, Officials and Spectators that may result in a breach of the Laws of the game. In this process it is up to the Umpire's discretion to issue penalties or warnings before resorting to a send-off and/or a report. In particular, the Umpire is concerned about misconduct that they interpret as intentional, reckless or negligent.

With that, we must give all umpires the respect they need to effectively control and administer the Laws of the game. There is no scope for intervening with this process no matter who you are, or who you know.

It is important to note that overly aggressive parenting behaviour, (as Officials or Spectators), is what Players will pick up on and mirror out on the field regardless of the age group or the level of competition. For example, when a coach berates a team aggressively for not getting first to the ball, the Players will take that attitude out onto the field and potentially give away penalties thereby resulting in a vicious circle with less possession of the ball and a call for even more aggression.

Unruly behaviour maybe unintentional and Spectators may seem to have the best interests of the team at heart, but it important to remember that we are not playing for sheep stations (or play stations) and if it goes unchecked, a culture can develop that is counter productive to the goals of the team and those of the Club.

We all know that Australian Rules is a contact physical sport, but when does physical contact become violent contact?

This is a question that is often answered through experience. That is, the older our kids get and the more junior sport they experience and we witness, the more alert our senses become as we develop an eye for what is fair play, rough play or simply foul play. That is, play that is overly aggressive or deliberately harmful, where tackles are intentionally late. With that in mind, the Code of Conduct covers violence as well as aggression and intimidation that may develop into violence or conduct that is simply inappropriate for the game we play.

Fair play is where a player goes in to contest the ball with the opposition. That is, to play the ball and not the man. In rough play, a player goes in with a priority to harm the opposition in order to get the ball. In these cases, the physical intentions of the player are directed at the opposition and not the ball. It is that element of malice of catching the opposition off their guard, that moment of vulnerability as they are concentrating on the play and the ball.

Foul play is rough play that goes unchecked over a period of time. It is when a culture of causing harm becomes the norm, even condoned by coaches as "part of the game". Ultimately, it is about causing harm and it has nothing to do with a fair contest in winning the ball or the game. It is often directed at the smallest or best player on the ground and it is nothing more than a cheap and cowardly act that drags the game into disrepute.

The most despicable examples of foul play occur behind play when players are least expecting it. It is also when the vast majority of spectators don't see the violence because their eyes are following the play further up the field. This is the smoking gun and such acts usually occur without a witness. They are despicable acts that are often too hard, too high, or too late.

To address rough play or foul play, the rules specifically define: Intentional, Reckless or Negligent. This wording covers behaviour that is: calculated, deliberate or planned (intentional), careless,



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irresponsible or wild (reckless) as well as oblivious, thoughtless or rash (negligent). (Accidental is not a definition in the Code of Conduct.) With that, there are a number of key areas for us to note:

[01] Sledging: a lot is said both on and off the field at a footy game. The majority of times it is friendly banter mixed with in harmless wit. Yet there are times when it develops quickly into a contest and a war of words. We need to be consciously aware of this and know when to pull away from it.

In the by-laws sledging is described as insulting or verbally intimidating a player or players and the AFL has a “no tolerance” attitude towards it. Repeated sledging both within or beyond the boundary line in the same match will see the Player, Official or Spectator reported.

[02] Audible Obscenities: we all have our thoughts on what we are experiencing and witnessing both on and off the field. Thoughts are private but once expressed, they become public knowledge, so for all intent and purposes we need to keep our thoughts quickly to ourselves and focus on the game.

Again the AFL has a “no tolerance” attitude towards swearing regardless to whom it is directed at and that includes berating yourself for a bad kick etc. If the obscenity (or back chat) is directed at the Umpire, or is a second offence, the Player, Official or Spectator shall be reported.

[03] Striking: we all know that push and shove is part of a physical game like footy, especially when contesting the ball. Yet if the frustration boils over and it becomes overly aggressive, it will be easily interpreted as striking the other Player. With that we must manage our aggression constructively at all times. Players must focus on channelling their efforts into the ball and not directly at opposition players.

The AFL is strict about striking, tripping, and throwing or charging an opponent. In particular, the AFL has a “no tolerance” attitude when the incident involves the head region of a Player. For example, striking charges usually incur a prescribed penalty, whereas striking the head of a Player leads to a Tribunal Hearing.

[04] Apologising: when the heat of moment subsides, it is recommended that the Player, Official or Spectator in question makes an apology to the opposing Player and Club demonstrate respect and remorse. Ideally, this would be face to face straight after the game, or if the situation is not appropriate, then it has to be as soon as possible after the game. Failure to apologise and proactively manage the situation will only reflect badly on that person, especially at a Tribunal Hearing.

As an extension of this, an apology needs to be made to our Club that is circulated to the coaches and team manager as well as a face-to-face apology to the Players in the team. This is important to help internalise the message and the lessons learnt.

At a broader level it is important that both clubs do not allow such a one off incident to damage the interclub relationship. An apology helps to maintain goodwill at both a club and team level and this important for subsequent games between the two teams and the clubs in general. Ultimately, it is in the interests of both clubs and both teams not to let an incident get in the way of playing fair footy.

[5] Retaliation: under no circumstances is it permissible for a Player to retaliate when they on the receiving end of rough or foul play. There is absolutely no provision in the Laws for “giving as good as you get” as two wrongs do not make a right. Attempting to get even is treated the same way as the original offence and it will be sanctioned the same.



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We must be disciplined not to react and thereby let the Law chart its own course accordingly. The worst case scenario here is that a Player is reported for the retaliatory action whereas the Player invoking the response gets away. This only adds insult to injury to reinforce how pointless retaliation can be for the reputation of the Player, the team and the Club.

Dealing with the Consequences

After the game, the Umpire will document all issues from the game on the Match Report. Players, Officials or Spectators in serious breach of the Code of Conduct will be put on report for disciplinary action from the AFL.

It is also important to note that a Player, Official or Spectator may be cited by a Club for unacceptable behaviour in circumstances where the Umpire officiating at the game did not report the incident.

In both cases, an Incident Referral Form naming the Player, Official or Spectator and describing the incident as recounted by the Umpire or eye witnesses is sent to the AFL by 5:00pm on the Tuesday following the weekend incident. In turn, the AFL will assess the incident, notify the Club, and take the appropriate action.

From a club perspective, all Yellow Cards and Red Cards must be reported to the respective co-ordinator. For example: U12s to the Junior Co-ordinator and U13s to U16s to the Youth Coordinator. Any incident involving an ambulance must also be reported.

[06] Prescribed Penalties: in assessing the incident, the AFL may offer a prescribed penalty of a one or two match suspension. The aim of this is to cut back on the need for a Tribunal Hearing. It is possible to contest a Prescribed Penalty by taking it to the Tribunal. Examples of prescribed penalties are outlined under Section 8.3 in the Greater Sydney Juniors Competition By-Laws and generally range from one to two weeks; but may go up to four weeks.

[07] Tribunal Hearings: offences outside the Prescribed Penalty guidelines will result in a Tribunal Hearing. The cited Player, Official or Spectator will be required to attend the Tribunal Hearing (for players and usually on a Wednesday night) or a specially convened inquiry (for Officials or Spectators).

Tribunal Hearings are heard at Moore Park near the SCG or at Blacktown Olympic Park and will involve the Player, Official or Spectator on report as well as an Advocate (for example, the coach and/or an eye witness) as well as potentially the Junior/Youth Coordinator and/or the Club President according to availability and the seriousness of the offence.

The Hearings commence at 7:30pm and depending upon the order and number of cases, you may be first up or last up. Either way you look at it, you could be in for a long night before your case is heard and it is not just a big inconvenience for you, but others within the Club as well.

[08] Suspensions: for Tribunal Hearings held in the following week, the Club may elect to suspend the Player, Official or Spectator until the case is heard and use that sanction to help reduce the length of any penalties handed down by the Tribunal. The club may also elect to impose a penalty regardless of whether or not the incident was reported.

It is also important to note that wash out games are not included as part of the suspension and any form of suspension excludes a Player from the Best & Fairest voting at the end of the season both within the Greater Sydney Juniors and within the Club.



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Other Important Points

[09] Umpires: are strictly off limits. With that, the only Player on the field who can approach the Umpire is the team captain. A Spectator or Official may approach the Umpire by going through the Ground Manager. It is also important to note that teams can be penalised when Spectators abuse Umpires from the boundary line. Overall, the Umpire is a no-go zone.

Please spare a thought for the umpire. From the sound of the first hooter at the start of the game until the first, second, third and fourth blow of the whistle, they will be looking to stamp their authority on the game and to set the tempo. This is often not an easy thing to do and if they are unable to get comfortable with their level of control, then they will look for opportunities to assert themselves. Unfortunately, this could be against us as we maybe the easier side to manage.

[10] Yellow/Red Cards: the AFL MAY refer a Player to the Tribunal for a Yellow Card. A Player receiving a Yellow Card must sit with the Ground Manager and can be replaced immediately for the duration of their time off the field (one quarter).

The AFL MUST refer a Player to the Tribunal for a Red Card. A Player receiving a Red Card will automatically be reported, they will miss the remainder of the game, but they can be replaced after 15 minutes.

[11] On the Field: the field of play is strictly off limits to all spectators during the course of the game including situations where there is an injured player. Under these circumstances, players, umpires, trainers, first-aid attendants and runners are the only people allowed on the field.

For situations involving a serious injury, discretion needs to be applied before entering the field and this will be determined by the Umpire.

[12] Juniors v Youth: Players, Officials and Spectators reported in the development grades from U09s to U11s will be adjudicated by the Club. All other age groups are reported adjudicated by the AFL as per the process outlined in this document.

The Value of Hindsight

The key message for all Players, Officials and Spectators to take away from this are: DON'T GET SUCKED IN! The last thing you want is to all your reputation to be dragged down to a lower level of conduct.

- If you find yourself in a situation where there is sledging then it is better focus on the positives and talk up the game with your team mates.
- If you are frustrated with the game or your play, then vent your frustration quietly and look for positive ways to address the problem.
- If your opposing number is getting overly aggressive, signal your coach and ask to be moved to another position or request a break.
- If there are repeated off-the-ball antics or late tackles or holding the player, etc, then tell the coach at a break who will inform the Umpire via the ground manager.
- Where it is a growing concern, flag potential follow up matches in the draw so that we can inform the AFL and request experienced umpiring on the day.



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Players: when an opposition player is being aggressive and provoking you, it is generally a sign that they are unable to match your skills in the game. The best thing to do in these circumstances is to remember that and focus on your own game and keep an eye out for your teammates.

Remember: only chickens resort to foul play! When the opposition are scared or worried, it is because they don't have a "Plan B". The most common way to address that is to resort to foul play. When this happens we need to focus on playing a game based on skill.

Coaches: when you notice a player getting agitated out on the field, then please proactively move them or take them off for a break. If they give away a 50m penalty, then take them off for a 5 minute breather. Players receiving a yellow card should be given a longer break.

Remember: the players don't have the same level of experience at dealing with foul play. As coaches, set the expectation when the opposition are trying to unnerve the team so that it is not such a surprise when it happens. Draw upon personal experience to keep the players focused.

Spectators: if you notice a situation developing out on the ground, then please inform the ground manager so that the appropriate action can be taken. It is better to raise the issue before it escalates into something bigger.

Remember: remain calm as that will help the players on the field to remain calm. If you can focus on the footy so will the players.

Regardless of whether you are a Player, Official or Spectator, youthful exuberance or the avid support of youthful exuberance goes a long way when it is harnessed properly. Yet, when the harness comes off, misdirected exuberance gets you an unpleasant trip across the bridge or out west to face the AFL Tribunal. This is a time consuming experience no one wants as it is embarrassing for the individual, for the family in question, for the team and for the Club. Please refrain from misconduct that is intentional, reckless or negligent.

Overall, for us at a junior level we need to be ever vigilant as the responsibility for the Code of Conduct rests with each and every one of us. We need to be prepared to come forward to report foul play as part of doing our bit for the integrity of the competition. With that, there are a number of areas where we can make an impact:

Reporting Foul Play: this can be twofold. It could be formally reporting foul play by citing the incident to the AFL, or it could informally through directing feedback to the club in question. For the latter case, please advise the Junior or Youth Co-ordinator so that the Club can provide feedback to the President of the other club. To stamp it out, we must report it.

Ground Management: the importance of the Ground Manager cannot be understated when it comes to Code of Conduct violations. Their role is to support the umpire and their control of the game out on the field by controlling the situation off the field. Here the Ground Manager plays a key role of managing spectator behaviour and acting as an intermediary between all parties.

Team-Squad-Club Culture: whilst reporting violence and ground management are corrective in nature, the crux of everything we say, do and experience boils down to the culture promoted in the team, the squad and the Club. This is not just how other clubs see us, but it defines us in how we grow and develop as a Club.

The real value of hindsight will come later in life as the Players will draw upon their junior footy experiences to apply the principles of better judgement to life's dilemmas when personal values and beliefs are tested.



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For now though, Players know that there are just some situations that have trouble written all over them. They need to apply their judgement to such situations, learn from the experience, and enjoy their footy. The Players will ultimately be better people at the end of it!

Personal Notes

Parents – hopefully after reading through this material, you will have your own anecdotal stories that you can draw upon to reinforce the importance of Code of Conduct... Make your notes here:



Self Assessment Questionnaire

Q01	A yellow card is a warning, whereas receiving a red card during the game means that the Player will automatically be suspended.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q02	A Player receiving a yellow or red card can be replaced. For the yellow card it is immediately, whilst for the red card it is after 15 minutes.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q03	The Player that retaliates will get a lesser charge from the Tribunal because they were only trying to get even for the original offence.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q04	A Player can only approach the Umpire on the field through the Team Captain or off the ground through the Ground Manager.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q05	When a game is washed out due to wet weather that is beyond the control of the AFL, it does not count as part of a Player's suspension.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q06	If the Umpire doesn't see a Player strike an opposing Player behind play, then that Player has nothing to worry about because they will not be reported.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q07	A Player can swear at themselves when they mess up a passage of play; so long as they don't swear at someone else, they will be OK.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q08	It is OK for anyone to tease the opposition Players during the game so long as you don't use swear words or "audible obscenities".	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q09	A Player that is suspended will be excluded from Best & Fairest voting at the end of the season for the GSJ presentation night as well as the Club.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q10	A Player receiving yellow cards in the Opening Round and Preliminary Final can still play in the Grand Final because the 2 cards were more than half a season apart.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q11	Anyone can enter the field of play during the course of the game to assist a Player when they are down injured and in need of medical assistance.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False
Q12	An Official or Spectator cannot approach the Umpire during the game when there is a break in play to seek clarification on umpiring decisions and the rules of the game.	<input type="checkbox"/> True	<input type="checkbox"/> False



Self Assessment – Questions & Answers

Q01 A yellow card is a warning, whereas receiving a red card during the game means that the Player will automatically be suspended. True or False?

False. A Player can be automatically suspended on both a red card or a yellow card. The colour of the card impacts the send off at that point in time, but not the final judgement.

Q02 A Player receiving a yellow or red card can be replaced. For the yellow card it is immediately, whilst for the red card it is after 15 minutes. True or False?

True. A Player can be replaced for both a yellow or red card. For the red card the Player can no longer take part in the game and the team will be one short for 15 minutes.

Q03 The Player that retaliates will get a lesser charge from the Tribunal because they were only trying to get even for the original offence. True or False?

False. The AFL treats all breaches of the Code of Conduct the same regardless of who acted first. Two wrongs do not make a right.

Q04 A Player can approach the Umpire on the field through the Team Captain or off the ground through the Ground Manager. True or False?

True. For practical purposes, the Player will find it easier to approach the Umpire through the Team Captain. Non-Players must go through the Ground Manager.

Q05 When a game is washed out due to wet weather that is beyond the control of the AFL, it does not count as part of a Player's suspension. True or False?

True. Wash outs are not classed as playable rounds and therefore they cannot be counted as part of the suspension.

Q06 If the Umpire doesn't see a Player strike an opposing Player behind play, then that Player has nothing to worry about. True or False.

False. Although an Umpire may not see or report the misconduct, a player can still be cited by the opposing club, an official or a spectator, etc.



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Q07 A Player can swear at themselves when they mess up a passage of play; so long as they don't swear at someone else, they will be OK. True or False?

False. Audible obscenities are a no-no no matter who they are directed at. Ultimately, bad language is bad language no matter what the circumstances.

Q08 It is OK for anyone to tease the opposition so long as you don't use swear words or what the AFL calls "audible obscenities". True or False?

False. Teasing is sledging and it is regarded as a form of bullying. Swearing is not the only form of sledging.

Q09 A Player that is suspended will be excluded from Best & Fairest voting at the end of the season for the GSJ presentation night as well as the Club. True or False?

True. Suspension and automatic exclusion from the Best & Fairest voting and it can be triggered by receiving 2 yellow cards within the season.

Q10 A Player receiving yellow cards in the Opening Round and the Preliminary Final can still play in the Grand Final because the 2 cards were more than half a season apart. True or False?

False. A player receiving 2 yellow cards during the season will automatically receive a one week suspension regardless of when they occur during the season.

Q11 Anyone can enter the field of play during the course of the game to assist a Player when they are down injured and in need of medical assistance. True or False?

False. Only players, umpires, trainers, first-aid attendants and runners are allowed on the field. This is to avoid potential flare ups and confrontations out on the field.

Q12 An Official or Spectator cannot approach the Umpire during the game when there is a break in play to seek clarification on umpiring decisions or the rules of the game.

True. The Umpire will approach Officials and the Players at the start of the game to do boot check and clarify the rules. Under no circumstances can the Umpire be approach after that.