



# **Creating an Outstanding Game Day Experience**

**Promoting Positive  
Player Behaviour**



These guidelines are for umpires to assist their understanding and appreciation of their role in making game days an outstanding experience for everyone involved.

## Introduction

In the recreational game, players and umpires come together to enjoy themselves, whatever the standard of the game. When that enjoyment wanes, they stop their involvement – simple! Currently the game is losing both players and umpires in numbers that are extremely concerning, so steps need to be taken to ensure that those still involved continue to enjoy themselves and that both playing and officiating are positive experiences.

The goal is for everybody to leave the ground inspired and motivated to be involved again the following week, and indeed the following season.

Promoting positive player behaviour is simply upholding the values defined in the Spirit of Cricket which, because it is contained as a preamble within the Laws of the game, underpins them. Central to this is showing respect for the opponents and the umpires.

## Umpires and captains working together

- Umpires are responsible for ensuring that the Laws are upheld and are the sole judges of fair and unfair play.
- Captains are responsible for ensuring that play is conducted within the spirit of the game and therefore for the behaviour of their players.
- Umpires and captains together are responsible for promoting positive player behaviour and managing situations appropriately when player behaviour falls short of the required standards.

A good relationship between umpires and captains is, therefore, essential to ensure that the game is played not only within the Laws and the playing regulations, but also within the spirit of the game.

Hence, it follows that umpires and captains who work together, **having already agreed the parameters that define the spirit**, will be more likely to use their influence to affect a positive outcome if a player's behaviour specifically, or the team's conduct, falls short of the required standard.

## Top tips

### 1. Before the game

Before the game begins, the umpires and captains should meet (usually at the toss) and agree how they can and will work together to manage a fairly contested, enjoyable match, and minimise the impact of negative behaviour.

### 2. During the game

Umpires and captains both need to exercise leadership.

**It is never acceptable for anyone involved in a game, be they a player, umpire, scorer or spectator, to be intimidated or abused in any way.**

If this occurs (or more importantly looks as though it is likely to occur), action must be taken. This does not necessarily mean that play is stopped; a look, a gesture or a word between overs by the umpire is often enough.

**If an umpire sees any activity or hears any language that he deems to be inappropriate he/she must intervene by instructing the captain to put a stop to it immediately.**

The threat of being reported (with the possible consequence of a fine and/or a suspension) should be a deterrent. However, if players do not heed initial warnings, or indeed go too far in the first instance, they **must expect** to be reported by the umpires, and the umpires **must** file a written report after the game.

### 3. After the game

- Umpires should not shirk their responsibility and should file a written report if one has been deemed necessary.
- In such circumstances, the captain of the player(s) concerned should be notified in person.

Even accepting the reasons why this guidance has been produced, the clear majority of games still take place in a positive spirit and without the need for any reports to be made – and long may this continue. But, it is equally clear that the enjoyment of the many is being spoiled by the actions of a few. Therefore, the few **must** be reported if we are to create that outstanding game day experience which we all want. Umpires must accept that the vast majority of players, clubs and leagues **want** them to help improve behaviour and will **support** them when they act to achieve this goal.

Remember, when a player is reported, this is not the result of an umpire's failure to control events, nor is it the umpire's fault. It is simply a required action as an outcome of what that umpire has seen and/or heard in contravention of the Laws of the game (Spirit of Cricket).

## Guidance in respect of specific incidents

### Contextual judgement

Context and judgement are the two most important words in this guidance. They go together in most decision making, whether it is giving a player out or not out, intervening quietly to calm matters down and prevent escalation, or intervening because player behaviour has crossed the line and has become unacceptable.

Contextual judgement can be defined as understanding the game, understanding what is said or done **and why**, and thus knowing instinctively when a line has been crossed.

#### Top tips

- The key to best umpiring lies in exercising sound contextual judgement (common sense).
- Umpires must trust their judgement.

### Dissent

Disappointment expressed in a controlled, non-offensive and non-directed manner is not a problem. However, serious dissent of an umpire's decision is always unacceptable and reportable.

If a player 'thinks' they have received a poor decision – or even 'knows' they have received a poor decision – one can see why they may be upset. This is entirely understandable, but it is not an excuse for serious dissent, abuse or anger.

#### Top tips

- After giving a batsman out, or turning down an appeal, umpires do not need to stare at the player(s) for an age (almost asking for a reaction). It is sufficient to make eye contact for a short period, then move on.

Umpires are often asked (even expected) to give a reason for their decision, but there is no obligation to respond. However:

- giving a reason for the decision is regarded as best practice, but to avoid a debate on every decision, it is recommended to always be brief and factual
- at this point, players **must** accept the outcome. Further questioning or commentary is unnecessary and should be avoided.

Then there is the batsman who takes a 'long time' to leave when out. They inspect where they think their feet were, what shot they played, the mark the ball made on the bat etc. Is this dissent?

- This must be a matter of context and judgement for the umpire.
- Talking to the batsman is unlikely to help. Batsmen will eventually depart, but if they stay around a long time persisting with their role play or gesturing, then this is dissent, and for the umpires together to decide if it is reportable.

## **Banter or offensive language?**

Most umpires understand that some level of commentary about the events taking place in the game will occur and is perfectly acceptable. This might include the fielding team discussing their own performance and encouraging their teammates to try harder. It might include talking about how well a batsman is playing or is likely to play. Players might very well be disappointed at the decisions umpires give and they might equally be frustrated at their own inadequacies. With moderation of language and tone, all of this is usually acceptable and within the bounds of banter – **if it is not chatter used to distract the batsman.**

### **When does banter become offensive and unacceptable?**

Trying to specify which words/phrases/gestures are offensive is unhelpful. Different leagues and standards of play let alone different cultures, religions, nationalities and regions all have differing tolerance levels of what are essentially the same behaviours – and similarly differing interpretations of specific words and gestures. Contextual judgement remains the most important factor, however consistent we aim to be across the game.

But there are some behaviours that are unacceptable in all cricket:

- If language aimed personally and directly **at** another player or **at** an umpire is considered by the umpire to be inappropriate in tone or content, it is reportable.
- If possible be proactive, not reactive. (Being proactive can be defined as preventative officiating demonstrated by umpires who anticipate trouble and intervene at an early stage. Working with the captain in the process is good practice.)

### Offensive language

Players and umpires have different opinions about what is and what is not offensive language. The use of a swear word does not in itself necessarily make a remark offensive. Indeed, one person's foul and abusive language (which might involve liberal use of the 'F' word) is another person's usual mode of conversation, often described as industrial language. Also, in a multi-cultural sport, different cultures, religions and nationalities have their own values, interpretations and tolerance levels of certain words or phrases. A gesture, regarded as normal or non-offensive in one, might be highly offensive to another. In any event, umpires often find themselves listening to an on-field exchange in a foreign language they do not understand.

Again, contextual judgement is crucial in determining what is and what is not offensive language.

- It is never acceptable for any player to make an abusive or offensive remark or gesture **directly at or towards** another player, official or spectator.
- If in the opinion of either umpire, the language used, in either tone or content, is intended to be distracting or offensive, then it is. Any player using language or gesture in such a way must expect to be reported.

### The send-off

There is often an immediate reaction and/or the start of further problems if a batsman is given a 'send-off' by either bowlers or fielders. Send-offs are unacceptable. **Players who indulge in such activity must expect to be reported.**

We will all have witnessed a batsman given not out (most often for a caught behind) perhaps being advised at the time that they should have walked, or worse, when this has occurred, a send-off when the batsman is out can often be anticipated. Here, it is

important for both captains and umpires to show leadership and work together to prevent a send-off and/or escalation.

## Abuse of the ground/facilities/equipment

Ground, facilities and or equipment have either been deliberately abused, (smashing/throwing bats, kicking stumps/boundary markers) or they have not. This is not a judgement; it is a matter of fact. **Players who indulge in such activity must expect to be reported.**

## Duty of care – young players

Whenever players are under the age of 18, coaches and umpires have an increased duty of care. What **might** be acceptable at a Premier League game (when Under 18s are not playing), is not acceptable in school, youth or age-group cricket. Umpires and coaches in these games should have a pre-match meeting exactly as conducted with the captain before a league match, but guidelines agreed between them as to what is acceptable and what is unacceptable will be different – the bar will be higher.

Umpires in youth matches should always inform and consult with the coach if either a team or an individual player's behaviour is unacceptable.

# On-field management – best practice

When players and spectators say that they did not notice the officials during the game it usually means that the officials have got most things right, managed the game well and done a great job! It **does not mean they avoided doing anything they were required to do!** Most umpires are not officious or overzealous on the field. Most enjoy the challenge of the role, enjoy the cricket and the company, and have no wish to get too involved. Umpires come in all shapes and sizes, and encompass the whole gamut of personality traits. We do not want to develop clones; nevertheless, a quiet, understated style of officiating is a model of best practice and to be encouraged, provided of course that when action is needed, it is taken.



As so often in other areas of life, it is not so much what you do as how you do it.

- **Use down time.** A quiet, unobtrusive word is often more than enough to effect behaviour change, whether to the batsman at the non-striker's end, the bowler as he completes an over or walks back to his mark, or the captain between overs or at the fall of a wicket.
- **Work with your colleague.** Umpires getting together at the fall of a wicket is commonplace, but ceasing play (briefly) when things are getting edgy is a powerful tool. The mere act of umpires coming together will often trigger captains and players to ask themselves if there is a problem – which is exactly what is wanted.
- If an umpire wants to talk to a captain or a batsman about behaviour that is getting close to the line, or that has gone beyond it, he should always do so with his colleague. This shows everyone that there is teamwork, agreement and a real sense of purpose.

If an incident occurs in a match that is unacceptable, act immediately.

- Make it clear to the captain that the incident is unacceptable.
- Write a brief note, which should include:
  - the time of the incident
  - a note of the key facts – if offensive language has been used, write down exactly the words spoken
  - any events that you deal with at the time that do not warrant a report but might lead to one if further events occur.

# Disciplinary codes and writing reports

The ECB has published a disciplinary code that applies to all matches in its competitions. This is available from the ECB website. Many leagues have either adopted this code, or adapted it to meet their specific requirements. Some leagues prefer to use their own code of practice and there are different arrangements for schools and youth cricket. ECB/County Board games and most leagues/cups will have some formal disciplinary process. Umpires need to be aware of what this is and how it works, to ensure they always follow the defined process.

Usually there is a process and a timescale for reporting. Umpires are normally expected to inform both the player and his captain that a report will be produced before all parties leave the ground. They are then required to submit a written report. Most leagues, clubs and even players, trust umpires to report incidents **when** it is necessary and accept their reports to be a fair and factual representation of what took place.

Too often, the writing of a report is regarded as an unnecessary chore and something to be avoided if possible. This is the wrong approach. Writing reports goes with the territory and is an important part of an umpire's roles and responsibilities. Failure to submit a report when one is needed is a dereliction of duty and places an unfair burden on colleagues who will be officiating the player and/or the club the following week.

Too often, the writing of a report is regarded as a 'weakness' on the umpires' part in the sense that having to report anyone is the outcome of the umpires failing to do their job properly and a pre-cursor to a poor mark from captains. Again, this is wrong. Although a lot has been written about contextual judgement, writing a report is evidential: stating the facts usually as a neutral observer. It has nothing to do with weakness or poor umpiring and nothing to do with captains' marks.

## Top tips

### How to write the report when one is needed.

There are only four rules:

- **Be brief**
  - Do not write an essay – write only what needs to be said. Usually there is no need to provide anything more than the most basic of background information.
- **Be factual**
  - Facts make it easy to arrive at conclusions. Say precisely what was observed, what was said and/or what was done, and when. No more, no less.
- **Be neutral**
  - It is not your role to be judge and jury. You are a witness; somebody else will make the decision.
- **Be consistent**
  - Ensure that the notes made by you and your colleague correspond such that should either of you be asked a question subsequently, you would give the same response that matches your notes and written report.

## The post-match apology

### How often does this occur?

An unacceptable and reportable incident has taken place on the field. In the dressing room, at tea or the close of play, there is a knock on the door. In comes the offending player, often with his captain, or club secretary, to apologise. ‘Just got worked up ump, I’m very sorry. I will not do it again and have learned my lesson. The club will take action, surely this can be the end of the matter.’

What is required is that players, in the ‘heat of the moment’, show the maturity to accept decisions and get on with the game. This is the essence of the Spirit of Cricket. Failing to control the emotions and then hoping an apology an hour or more later when they have calmed down (or quite often been told to calm down) is not what is needed. This is the time when good umpires show their leadership and mettle. It is far too easy to accept this ‘heartfelt’ apology and let the matter go.

Umpires must not be manipulated in this way. Failure to submit a report when one is needed is a dereliction of duty and places an unfair burden on colleagues who will be officiating the player and/or the club the following week. Accept the apology, but don’t let it go.

# Conclusion

Law 2.6 states 'the umpires shall be **the sole** judges of fair and unfair play'.

This gives the umpires total responsibility such that anything an umpire considers unfair is unfair! It does not matter what this is, or whether the same thing, viewed by another person, is considered acceptable. If an umpire thinks it's unfair, then the Laws empower and require the umpire to act. Good game- and man-management requires umpires to be aware of what is happening on the field between the players. There is always a balance to be had such that words said, gestures made, parentage questioned and actions taken are all considered in the context within which events are unfolding. Umpires must be mindful of the full range of preventative actions at their disposal, as well as the sanctions.

When people are unable to contain their behaviour to reasonable limits, umpires have a duty to intervene and, when necessary, report them. They have a duty to be consistent in their approach to this. They also have a particular duty of care when there are Under 18s playing. By exercising this duty properly, umpires will help evolve the culture of the game and help promote positive player behaviour and create an outstanding game day experience for all.