



Policy Document: Zero Tolerance for Umpire Abuse
Approved by: [Executive Board]
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USAFL Zero Tolerance Policy for Umpire Abuse

The USAFL, in partnership with the Umpire's Association and Coaches Forum, reiterates a firm stance; There will be zero tolerance for umpire abuse. This policy outlines the escalation and penalties for both individuals and teams, and reflects a collaborative effort to ensure clarity and consistency in application across the league. The policy for enforcement is derived to directly support the Law 22 of the [AFL Laws Of The Game](#).

Definition of Umpire Abuse

Umpire abuse refers to any behavior, verbal, physical, or symbolic, that challenges, undermines or shows disrespect toward an umpire's authority, judgement, or decision-making during a game. It includes overt and covert actions or language that express disagreement, frustration, or hostility, and may be directed at the umpire or made indirectly in response to an umpire's decision.

Umpire abuse can escalate tensions on the field, undermine the umpire's control of the game, and create an unsafe or hostile environment for players, coaches, officials, volunteers and spectators alike.

As per 22.1.2 Other Appointed Persons, in addition to an umpire, a Controlling Body may authorize a person or persons to report any Player or Official who commits or engages in conduct which may constitute a reportable offense. In the USAFL, this policy is applicable to all umpires (field, boundary, goal) and umpire coaches. Any game umpire or umpire coach is authorized and may be responsible for reporting. The ultimate decision on whether a player's or club officials' action constitutes abuse is left solely to the umpire's discretion. A club official is anyone deemed to have a defined role for a specific club or clearly identified as being connected to that club. This includes coaches, water runners, team support staff, and any club members clearly identified as being connected to that club.

What IS and IS NOT Acceptable

Acceptable Behavior

Players May:

- Respectfully seek clarification on a decision, rule interpretation, or call without using aggressive, sarcastic, or dismissive language.
 - Example: "May I ask what that free kick was for?" said calmly and respectfully.
- Make eye contact or gestures for clarification, so long as the body language remains non-threatening and non-dismissive.



- Acknowledge a decision and walk away without further engagement.
- Team captains or coaches are the only people allowed to engage the umpires at quarter/ half time breaks to discuss rules interpretation. This must be conducted in a calm and respectful manner.

Unacceptable Behavior (Abuse)

The following behaviors will not be tolerated and may result in a Red Card for umpire abuse.

- Challenging or confronting an umpire's decision in an aggressive or abusive tone.
 - Example: Yelling, swearing, sarcastic or condescending remarks.
- Persistent questioning after the umpire responded to a clarification request or repeated minor disagreements or expressions of frustration.
- Gestures or body language that express abuse.
 - Example: Throwing arms up, shaking head, exaggerated body movements, clapping sarcastically, or mock applause.
- Indirect abuse.
 - Example: Muttering "That's a joke." Or making comments about the umpire to teammates within earshot. This may be observed by an umpire other than the field umpire.
- Sniping, verbal baiting, or eye rolling directed at the umpire or in response to a call.
- Intentional physical contact with the umpire.
- Any physical approach toward the umpire that could be interpreted as intimidating or threatening.
 - Example: Player needs to be conscientious about perception, when there is a physical size difference between player and umpire, gender difference, or power dynamic in the game.

Law 22.2, Reportable Offences as written, outlines interactions with the umpire (d-k):

22.2 REPORTABLE OFFENCES

22.2.1 Clarification

- (a) Where any of the Reportable Offences listed in Law 22.2.2 specify that conduct may be intentional or careless:
- (i) any report or notice of report which does not allege whether the conduct was intentional or careless shall be deemed to and be read as alleging that the conduct was either intentional or careless; and
 - (ii) the Tribunal or other body appointed to hear and determine the report may find the report proven if it is satisfied on the balance of probabilities that the conduct was either intentional or careless.
- (b) Notwithstanding any other provision in the Laws, in all circumstances a Player owes a duty of care to all other Players, Umpires and other persons (as applicable):
- (i) not to engage in conduct which will constitute a Reportable Offence being committed against that other Player, Umpire or other person; and
 - (ii) to take reasonable care to avoid acts which can be reasonably foreseen to result in a Reportable Offence

22.2.2 Specific Offences

Any of the following types of conduct is a Reportable Offence:

- (a) intentionally or carelessly:
- (i) striking another person;
 - (ii) kicking another person;
 - (iii) kneeling another person;
 - (iv) charging an opponent;
 - (v) engaging in Rough Conduct against an opponent;
 - (vi) bumping or making forceful contact to an opponent from front-on when that Player has their head down over the football;
 - (vii) head-butting or making contact to another person using the head;
 - (viii) making unreasonable or unnecessary contact to the eye region of another person;
 - (ix) making unreasonable or unnecessary contact to the face of another person;
 - (x) scratching another person; or
 - (xi) tripping another person whether by hand, arm, foot or leg;

- (b) eye-gouging another person;
- (c) stomping on another person;
- (d) intentionally making contact with, or striking, an Umpire;
- (e) attempting to strike an Umpire;
- (f) spitting on or at an Umpire;
- (g) behaving in an abusive, insulting, threatening or obscene manner towards or in relation to an Umpire;
- (h) using abusive, insulting or obscene language towards or in relation to an Umpire;
- (i) unreasonable or unnecessary contact with an Umpire;
- (j) carelessly making contact with an Umpire;
- (k) disputing a decision of an Umpire;
- (l) spitting on or at another person;
- (m) attempting to strike another person;
- (n) attempting to kick another person;
- (o) attempting to trip another person whether by hand, arm, foot or leg;
- (p) making unreasonable or unnecessary contact with an injured Player;
- (q) engaging in a Melee or wrestling another person;
- (r) instigating a Melee;
- (s) pinching another person;
- (t) engaging in an act of staging;
- (u) using abusive, insulting, threatening or obscene language;
- (v) use of an obscene gesture;
- (w) engaging in Time Wasting;
- (x) interfering with a Player Kicking for Goal;
- (y) intentionally shaking, climbing or otherwise interfering with a goal or behind post;
- (z) failing to leave the Playing Surface when directed to do so by an Umpire;
- (aa) wearing boots, jewellery and equipment prohibited under Law 8; or
- (bb) engaging in any other act of misconduct or serious misconduct.



Umpire De-escalation Techniques

To prevent umpire abuse, this policy aims to set clear expectations for player, coach, club official, and team behavior while also holding individuals accountable for their misconduct.

For consistency of application across the league, all umpires will be taught the following techniques to de-escalate emotions on the field. Prior to penalizing a Red Card an umpire may:

- Prior to the start of a game, all players may be warned of a Zero Tolerance Policy for Umpire Abuse.
- Umpires will use clear communication, respect, and consistent application of the rules. They will prioritize explaining decisions, utilizing non-verbal signals, actively listen to players' concerns, enforce respect and maintain consistency throughout the game.
 - Clear communication helps players understand context and can reduce frustrations.
 - Concise language keeps explanations simple and direct, avoiding ambiguity.
 - Umpires will emphasize the relevant rule being applied, rather than opinion.
- Verbal Warning: An umpire may state explicitly, behavior is unacceptable and constitutes abuse.
- Per rule 18.13, a field umpire shall award a Free Kick against the player engaging in unacceptable behavior.
- A field umpire can award a 50-meter penalty against the player engaging in unacceptable behavior.
- Field umpires also have the authority to apply the send-off rule to remove players from the game if they are deemed to be disrupting the game or engaging in serious misconduct.

Definitions and Procedures

- Yellow Card (Caution): Player must leave the field for 15 minutes of game time and may be replaced.
- Red Card (Ejection): Player is removed from the game. The team may not replace the player for 15 minutes of game time. The player is mandatorily remanded to tribunal review.
- Card = Report: Every Yellow or Red card constitutes a formal report and is submitted via the USAFL Caution/Ejection Form at the field.
- For non-player club officials, the equivalent of a Red Card shall be administered, which either removes the official from the bench area (i.e. coach) or message/water runner from their respective duties. The offending individual would be subject to a disciplinary tribunal and be considered toward individual and team disciplinary assessment.



Individual Player Discipline for Umpire Abuse (Player History)

Per the USAFL [Tribunal Policy](#), the punishment for a yellow card is removal from the field for 15 minutes, where the player is replaceable, for any offense.

However, this being a Zero Tolerance Policy for Umpire Abuse, this policy specifies that ANY UMPIRE ABUSE WILL BE ASSESSED AS A RED CARD, and subject to the terms of this policy (and all inherent procedures) in accordance the USAFL Tribunal Policy.

Red Card (Ejection)

Per the USAFL Tribunal Policy (reference Table 5.2.1 Incident Classification), umpire abuse is considered a non-classifiable offense. Therefore, there will be no early plea option when a player receives a red card. This means the report of a red card for umpire abuse will be elevated directly to Tribunal by the Disciplinary Officer as standard practice.

Player History is not limited to only a single tournament. Player History refers to the complete career timeline of a player.

Player History	Tribunal (Plea 'Not Guilty'; Found 'Guilty')
No Disciplinary Record	Player is suspended for a minimum of 1 game, and will continue to be suspended from all games until successful completion of the 'AFL Vilification and Discrimination' online course. This includes during USAFL Tournaments, as the module can be completed online within 30 minutes.
Existing Disciplinary Record (not limited to umpire abuse)	Player is suspended for a minimum of 2 games, and will continue to be suspended from all games until successful completion of the 'AFL Vilification and Discrimination' online course. This includes during USAFL Tournaments, as the module can be completed online within 30 minutes.
Existing Disciplinary Record (prior umpire abuse)	Player is suspended for a minimum of 1 year, and will continue to be suspended from all games until successful completion of the 'AFL Vilification and Discrimination' online course. This includes during USAFL Tournaments, as the module can be completed online within 30 minutes.

Team Discipline for cards and Umpire Abuse (Per Tournament)

- Applies only to the specific team (Example: Men's D4, Women's D1) whose players are given red cards for umpire abuse.
- Other teams within the club are not penalized.
- Individuals may not transfer between teams within a club until all individual disciplinary requirements are fulfilled.
- The maximum penalty will be applied to the game in which the threshold incident occurs.
- Team discipline count will reset on a per tournament basis.
- If Team/Club discipline occurs in multiple tournaments within the same year, the Executive Board may take additional further disciplinary actions.



Cumulative Reports from Players on a Team

Number of Reports	Report (Any) (Found 'Guilty')	Report for umpire abuse (Found 'Guilty')
1 Individual Player Report	Team/Club Warning	Team/Club Warning
2 Individual Player Reports	Team considered for individual disciplinary action. Coach considered for individual disciplinary action.	The reported Team will forfeit their game. Game end score will be reported as points scored by opposition to 0, for percentage purposes. Coach suspended until successful completion of the 'AFL Vilification and Discrimination' online course. This includes during USAFL Tournaments, as the module can be completed online within 30 minutes.
3+ Individual Player Reports	The reported Team will forfeit their game. Game end score will be reported as points scored by opposition to 0, for percentage purposes. Coach suspended a minimum of 1 game.	The reported Team will forfeit their game. Game end score will be reported as points scored by opposition to 0, for percentage purposes. All members of reported Team will be required to complete the 'AFL Vilification and Discrimination' online course. Reported club will not be considered in good standing , and will not be able to participate in USAFL activities until all team members are compliant. Coach suspended a minimum of 2 games.

Disciplinary Records and USAFL Transparency

There is precedent in Australian leagues to publicize disciplinary and Tribunal outcomes online. Some relevant examples of community football leagues that follow this protocol include AFL Central Victoria, West Australian Football Commission, Ballarat Football Netball League, Sothern Football Netball League, and the Northern Football Netball League. To elevate the visibility of the disciplinary process in the USAFL and to highlight the consequences for infractions, after all major tournaments, all disciplinary reports (including on field and off field) will be:

- Publicly posted on the USAFL website: aussierulesusa.com
- Digitally recorded in PlayHQ. These records will remain permanently tied to a player's history, reinforcing accountability. Player History is not limited to only a single tournament. Player History refers to the complete career timeline of a player.

We hope the introduction of this policy will help keep all accountable for their own actions. We hope this policy will act as a deterrent to future infractions for all clubs and individuals within the USAFL.