The Football Association

Season 2020-2021

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THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION RULES AND REGULATIONS RELATING TO PLAYERS OF SCHOOL AGE

FA Rule C. Relating to Players

4. AGE GROUPS AND PROVISIONS RELATING TO PLAYERS UNDER 18 YEARS OF AGE

(A) Children Not Registered as Academy Players.
The following provisions apply to any child not registered as an Academy Player. All matches must be played in accordance with the correct version of the Laws of the Game appropriate for the format specified:

(i) Children Under 6 Years Old
A child who has not attained the age of six shall not play, and shall not be permitted or encouraged to play, in a match of any kind.

(ii) Children 6 Years Old and Over – Age Groups, Formats and Related Provisions
For the purposes of (a) and (b) below,

(a) The relevant age for each player is determined by his or her age as at midnight on 31 August of the relevant playing season. i.e. Children who are aged 6 as at midnight on 31 August in a playing season (together with those who attain the age of 6 during the playing season) will be classed as Under 7 players for that playing season. Children who are aged 7 as at midnight on 31 August in a playing season will be classed as Under 8 players for that playing season, and so on.

(b) Notwithstanding the above, a child is permitted to "play up" in the age group above his or her chronological age group, irrespective of any difference in format or competition structure, save that a child who attains the age of 6 after 31 August is permitted to play only in the Under 7 age group, and may not play in the Under 8 age group for that playing season. ***Note: Local, County and National Competitions may have rules in place that only cater for a one year age group competition. It is incumbent upon the team secretary / manager to check the individual competition rules before competing.*
The age groups that children are eligible to play in are set out in the table below, along with the permitted football formats for each of those age groups. Children shall not play, and shall not be permitted or encouraged to play, in a match between sides of more than the stated number of players, according to their age group:

Age on 31 August of the relevant playing season	Eligible Age Groups	Maximum Permitted Format
6	Under 7	5v5
	Under 8	
7	Under 8	5v5
	Under 9	7v7
8	Under 9	7v7
	Under 10	
9	Under 10	7v7
	Under 11	9v9
10	Under 11	9v9
	Under 12	

11	Under 12	9v9
	Under 13	11v11
12	Under 13	11v11
	Under 14	
13	Under 14	11v11
	Under 15	
14	Under 15	11v11
	Under 16	
15	Under 16	11v11
	Under 17	
	Under 18	
16	Under 17	11v11
	Under 18	
	Open Age	

(c) A child under the age of fifteen as at midnight on 31 August in a playing season, shall not be permitted to play in a match during that playing season where any other player is older or younger than that child by two years or more. ***Note: Local, County and National Competitions may have rules in place that only cater for a one year age group competition. It is incumbent upon the team secretary / manager to check the individual competition rules before competing.*

(d) However as exceptions to (c) above, The Association may in using its discretion::

(i) Enable disabled children to play football in an age group other than the groups dictated by their birth date, including 'playing down';

(ii) In accordance with a current FA dispensation policy, grant dispensation to enable a child to play football in an age group other than the groups dictated by their birth date, including 'playing down'.

(e) To play in an under eighteen competition, a child must have attained the age of fifteen as at midnight on 31 August of the relevant playing season.

(f) To play in an open age competition a child must have attained the age of sixteen.

(iii) Children Over 6 Years Old – Competition Structure

(a) *Under 7 and Under 8 Mini-Soccer*
Leagues may organise a maximum of three trophy events per season, each to be played over a maximum period of two weeks, and may publish the results of such events. The remainder of the season may consist of organised development fixtures only, for which leagues and clubs may collect the results and compile league tables, but must not publish either.

(b) *Under 9 and Under 10 Mini-Soccer*
Leagues may organise a maximum of three trophy events per season, each to be played over a maximum period of four weeks, and may publish the results of such events. The remainder of the season may consist of organised development fixtures only, for which leagues and clubs may collect the results and compile league tables but must not publish either.

(c) *Under 11*
Leagues may organise a maximum of three trophy events per season, each to be played over a maximum period of six weeks, and may

publish the results of such events. The remainder of the season may consist of organised development fixtures only, for which leagues and clubs may collect the results and compile league tables but must not publish either.

(d) *Under 12 to Under 18*
There is no restriction on the structure of competitions

(iv) Sanction Provisions
The written consent of The Association or of the relevant Affiliation Association or Associations shall be required pursuant to Rules B1 and/or B7 as appropriate for any competition for Under 18 age groups and below.

(v) Gender of Players in Under 7 to Under 18 Matches
A child in the age ranges Under 7 to Under 18 inclusive may play in a match involving boys and girls.

(vi) Disability Football – Gender of Players in Under 17 Matches and Above
In respect of disability football only, and only in accordance with a current Dispensation Policy, The Association may, in its discretion, grant a dispensation to permit any team playing at Under 17 level or above to field both male and female players in a match.

(vii) Priority for School Activities

(a) Priority must at all times be given to school or school Organisation's activities in accordance with the recommendations of the "Memorandum: Children of School Age and School Games" whilst a pupil is receiving fulltime education.

(b) All Clubs and Competitions, excluding those whose matches are played on Sundays, shall include in their rules a provision to the effect that the availability of a pupil must be consented to by the head teacher.

(B) PLAYERS OF SCHOOL AGE REGISTERED AS ACADEMY PLAYERS

(i) Players who reach the age of nine years during the academic year and who are in full-time education may register as an Academy Player.

(ii) The licensing authority for Academies shall comprise the PGB which shall operate under such Professional Game Youth Development Rules as shall be adopted from time to time.

(iii) It shall be deemed to be Misconduct for any Club or Club Official to induce any player of school age registered with a separate Club or Academy to leave school for the purpose of signing a contract of employment.

MEMORANDUM: CHILDREN OF SCHOOL AGE AND SCHOOL GAMES

One of the important aspects of games in school is the opportunity they afford of developing a pupil's sense of loyalty and honour. It is therefore of concern when interest in games outside the school conflict with a pupil's loyalty to the school and/or school organisations' activities.

1. It is usually the pupil of outstanding football ability whose services are sought by any Club, and the Player is most likely to be a member of the school or association team. While schools' matches are often arranged on Saturday mornings and Club matches take place in the afternoon, it is considered that a player should not play in two matches on the same day, for the one match is likely to affect play in the other.
2. An outside Club or organisation should consult the headteacher before selecting any child of school age to play for a team, and should accept the head-teacher's decision on these matters. Headteachers of schools should not restrain pupils, who are not selected for school games of any kind, from playing for an outside organisation during their free time.

GOALPOST AND PITCH SIZES

The FA receives many enquiries around pitch and goal sizes suitable for all age groups and therefore recommends the following should be applied where possible:-

Age grouping	Type	Recommended size of Goal Posts (Height x width) ft		Maximum Recommendation without runoff (Length x width) yds		Recommended size including runoff (Safety area around pitch) (Length x width) yds	
Mini-Soccer U7/U8	5 v 5	6	12	40	30	46	36
Mini Soccer U9/U10	7 v 7	6	12	60	40	66	46
Youth U11/U12	9 v 9	7	16	80	50	86	56
Youth U13/U14	11 v 11	7*	21*	90	55	96	61
Youth U15/U16	11 v 11	8	24	100	60	106	66
Youth U17/U18	11 v 11	8	24	110	70	116	76
Over 18 Senior Ages	11 v 11	8	24	110	70	116	76

Note: County FAs and Leagues may have defined rules for their own competitions and reference should always be made to their handbooks for additional guidance and compliance.

The FA recommends that run-off's for natural grass pitches should be a minimum of 3 yards (or 3 metres) all around the pitch. For those clubs playing in the football pyramid the minimum safety run off is 1.83 metres (6 feet) but ideally at least 2 metres.

The run-off must be of natural grass and must not be of tarmac or concrete construction, with no barriers or obstructions evident within the run-off area. If Football Turf (3G) is to be used as a run-off, this should be constructed to meet the performance standards of full size pitches and be green in colour.

Where pitches neighbour others within a confined area, the minimum run-off between both pitches should ideally be 6 yards to allow for spectators watching either match.

The Laws of the Game may be modified in their application for matches for players of under 16 years of age, for women footballers, for veteran footballers (over 35 years) and for players with disabilities.

Any or all of the following modifications are permissible:-

(a) the size of the field of play

(b) the size, weight and material of the ball

(c) the width between the goalposts and the height of the crossbar from the ground

(d) the duration of the periods of play

(e) substitutions

* If a pitch is to be provided for U13/14 it is recommended that 7 x 21 goalposts are provided. However, it should be noted that 8 x 24 would also be acceptable as not all sites will be able to provide specifically for this age group

* During the FA Youth Review consultation, leagues asked The FA to find a way to allow children that under the 2-year age banding had played up a year prior to U10, to be able continue to play with their friendship group beyond this age, where teams moved to the 9v9 format. With this in mind Rule C4(a) was changed. The change is not meant to be an open door for the formation of U11 divisions made up solely of U10s, it is there to support the development of a few individuals.

THIRD GENERATION (3G) FOOTBALL TURF PITCHES

There continues to be significant interest in the use of Third Generation Football Turf Pitches (3G) for clubs in the National League System and below.

Much of this interest, both from leagues and clubs within the non-League pyramid, seeks to understand The FA's position regarding the sanction of these pitches, particularly in FA Competitions.

The FA Board and Council have now approved the use of such pitches in all FA competitions.

- FA Cup
- FA Trophy
- FA Vase
- FA Youth Cup
- FA Women's Super League, FA Women's Premier League, FA Women's Cup and FA WSL Continental Cup
- FA Sunday Cup
- FA County Youth Cup

The use of such pitches is however dependent on compliance with conditions of use – a copy of these is available for download and should be read in association with these notes.

It has been agreed that matches for steps 3 - 6 of the National League System, Womens Super League and FA competitions may be played on 3G Football Turf Pitches that conform to the FIFA 1 star/Quality performance standard, or the equivalent International Artificial Turf Standard (IATS)/ International match standard (IMS). (see specific notes in the league rules relating to steps 1 and 2 and the FA Cup competition rules relating to first round 'proper' fixtures involving professional clubs)

To qualify for use, the pitch must be certified annually as meeting the FIFA 1 Star/Quality or IATS/IMS Standard and listed on the FA's Register of 3G Football Turf pitches. The relevant certificate or report must be supplied to The FA and relevant competition for approval before play is allowed.

3G Football Turf pitches are also allowed to be used for matches for Step 7 and below (including youth competitions) subject to the pitch meeting the correct performance criteria (relaxed from the FIFA 1 star /Quality standard) and appearing on the FA 3G register. A pitch must be tested (by an accredited test institute) every three years and the certificate or report passed to the FA. The FA will give a decision on the suitability for use and add the pitch to the Register.

Clubs should make their own risk assessment of whether such an installation is plausible or not given their individual circumstances and depending on the volume of use. There is a risk that pitches may deteriorate over time and may not achieve the required standards at each period of retesting especially if the pitch has significant use and is not maintained appropriately.

It is suggested that clubs negotiate suitable longevity warranties from the pitch manufacturers to ensure that the pitch will last in line with the club's business plan and intended usage levels. A sinking fund should be established to ensure sufficient funds are available when the surface needs replacing.

Clubs are encouraged to understand the full maintenance required, which may be necessary to validate any warranty. The FA have found that most pitches that fail the performance test have insufficient maintenance. These pitches are not maintenance free and it is recommended that 1 hours maintenance is provided for every 10 hours use. This should increase for high activity use such as youth competitions or school use.

The FA together with representatives from the industry have prepared information regarding the design, installation, construction, maintenance and testing of Football Turf Pitches and The FA Facilities team can also offer advice to clubs considering installation. This information can be accessed within the facilities section of The FA's website www.TheFA.com.

GOALPOST SAFETY GUIDELINES

Updated June 2017

The Football Association, along with the Department for Culture, Media and Sport, the Health and Safety Executive and the British Standards Institution, would like to draw your attention to the following guidelines for the safe use of goalposts.

Several serious injuries and fatalities have occurred in recent years as a result of unsafe or incorrect use of goalposts. Safety is always of paramount importance and everyone in football must play their part to prevent similar incidents occurring in the future:

1. For safety reasons goalposts of any size (including those which are portable and not installed permanently at a pitch or practice field) must always be anchored securely to the ground or have a weighted back bar.
    - Portable goalposts must be secured as per the manufacturer's instructions; this is also a requirement for the Laws of the Game.
    - Under no circumstances should children or adults be allowed to climb on, swing or play with the structure of the goalposts;
    - Particular attention is drawn to the fact that if not properly assembled and secured, portable goalposts may overturn; and
    - Regular inspections of goalposts must be carried out to check that they are properly maintained.
2. Portable goalposts should not be left in place after use. They should be either dismantled and removed to a place of secure storage, or placed together and suitable fixings applied to prevent unauthorised use at any time.
3. The use of metal cup hooks on any part of a goal frame was banned from the commencement of season 2007-08 and match officials have been instructed not to commence matches where such net fixings are evident for safety reasons. Nets may be secured by plastic fixings, arrow head shaped plastic hooks or tape but not by metal cup hooks. Any metal cup hooks should be removed and replaced. New goalposts purchased should meet the relevant British Standards.
4. Goalposts which are "home made" or which have been altered from their original size or construction should not be used under any circumstances as they potentially pose a serious safety risk
5. There is no BS/CEN standard for wooden goals and it is unlikely that wooden goals will pass a load or stability test. The FA recommends that wooden goals should be replaced with British Standard compliant metal, aluminium or plastic goalposts. All wooden goals previously tested by independent consultants have failed strength and stability tests.

For reference, you should note that The FA and BSI, in conjunction with the industry, have developed two standards for goalposts – BSEN 748 (2013) BS 8461:2005 +A1: 2009 and BS 8462: 2005 +A2: 2012. It is strongly recommended that you ensure that all goals purchased comply with the relevant standard. A Code of Practice BS 8461 has also been completed and copies of all of these standards are available from the BSI.

Funding for the replacement of unsafe goals is available via the Football Foundation and eligibility criteria and further details can be obtained from their website.

The FA together with representatives from the industry, sports governing bodies and Government have prepared guidance notes for pitch users and pitch providers, which summarise the key priorities of the BSI's Code of Practice and provide further details on the information included above. These details are featured within the facilities section of The FA's website – www.TheFA.com

REMEMBER TO USE GOALPOSTS SAFELY AT ALL TIMES

THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION EQUALITY POLICY

The Association is responsible for setting the standards and values to apply throughout football at every level. Football is for everyone; it belongs to, and should be enjoyed by, anyone who wants to participate in it.

The aim of this Policy is to ensure that everyone is treated fairly and with respect and that The Association is equally accessible to all.

All Participants should abide and adhere to this Policy and to the requirements of the Equality Act 2010.

The Association's commitment is to promote inclusion and to confront and eliminate discrimination whether by reason of age, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation, marital status or civil partnership, race, nationality, ethnic origin, colour, religion or belief, ability or disability, pregnancy and maternity and to encourage equal opportunities.

This Policy is fully supported by the Board of The Association and the Director of Football Regulation and Administration is responsible for the implementation of this Policy.

The Association will ensure that it treats people fairly and with respect and that it will provide access and opportunities for all members of the community to take part in, and enjoy, its activities.

The Association will not tolerate harassment, including sexual harassment, bullying, abuse or victimisation of a Participant, which for the purposes of this Policy and the actions and sanction applicable is regarded as discrimination, whether physical or verbal. The Association will work to ensure that such behaviour is met with appropriate action in whatever context it occurs.

The Association commits itself to the immediate investigation of any allegation, when it is brought to their attention, of discrimination and where such is found to be the case, The Association will require that the practice stop and impose sanctions as appropriate.

The Association is committed to inclusion and anti-discrimination and raising awareness and educating, investigating concerns and applying relevant and proportionate sanctions, campaigning, achieving independently verified equality standards, widening diversity and representation and promoting diverse role models are all key actions to promote inclusion and eradicate discrimination within football.

The ESFA fully supports this FA policy

ESFA Safeguarding Children Policy

Every child or young person, defined as any person under the age of 18, who plays or participates in football should be able to take part in an enjoyable and safe environment and be protected from abuse.

This is the responsibility of everyone involved in football thus every Association is required to endorse and adhere to ESFA's Safeguarding Children Policy. ESFA recognises its responsibility to safeguard the welfare of all children and young people by seeking to protect them from abuse and harm.

This means creating a safe and inclusive atmosphere where everyone works together to tackle both bullying and discrimination, ensure safer recruitment, and tackle poor practice which leads to harm and reduces equal opportunities. Best practice in inclusion, anti-bullying, equality and the respect agenda are all part of making safer cultures and prevention of harm and abuse.

ESFA is committed to working to provide a safe environment for all children to participate in the sport to the best of their abilities for as long as they choose to do so.

The ESFA Safeguarding Children Policy key principles are:

- The child's welfare is, and must always be, the paramount consideration
- All children and young people have a right to be protected from abuse regardless of their age, gender, disability, culture, language, racial origin, religious beliefs or sexual orientation
- All suspicions and allegations of abuse will be taken seriously and responded to swiftly and appropriately
- Working in partnership with other organisations, children and young people and their parents and carers is essential.
- Sound recruitment and selection procedures will help to screen out those who are not suitable to work in football
- ESFA local Associations with representative teams must appoint a Welfare Officer in line with ESFA affiliation requirements

The safeguarding of children whilst under the supervision of a school is the responsibility of that school as outlined in their governance policies. Safeguarding in schools is underpinned by the relevant DfE Guidance "Keeping Children Safe in Education" prevailing at the time of the activity.

ESFA is committed to working in partnership with the Police, Social Care Departments, and Local Safeguarding Children's Boards (LSCB) and the Disclosure and Barring Service (DBS) in accordance with their procedures. This is essential to enable these organisations to carry out their statutory duties to investigate concerns and protect all children and young people.

The ESFA Safeguarding Children Policy is in response to Government legislation and guidance, developed to safeguard the welfare and development of children and young people.

It is noted and accepted that The Football Association's Safeguarding Children Regulations (see The FA Handbook) applies to everyone in football whether in a paid or voluntary capacity.

ESFA supports The FA's Whistle Blowing Policy. Any adult or young person with concerns about an adult in a position of trust within football can 'whistle blow' by contacting The FA Safeguarding Team on 0800 169 1863, by writing to The FA Case Manager at The Football Association, Wembley Stadium, PO Box 1966, London SW1P 9EQ, by emailing Safeguarding@TheFA.com or alternatively by going direct to the Police, Children's Social Care or the NSPCC.

RESPECT

Respect is The FA's response to a clear message from throughout the game that the health of football depends upon high standards of behaviour on and off the pitch.

- Respect is a behavioural code for Football
- Respect is about recognising that the integrity of the game is more important than the result of the match
- Respect is about creating an understanding of what is acceptable and unacceptable behaviour in Football
- Respect is about those involved taking responsibility for the consequences of their own actions
- Respect is about supporting match officials to do their job. Without them we don't have a game
- Respect is not a slogan. It is a collective responsibility of those involved in football to create a fair, safe and enjoyable environment in which the game can take place.

The following Respect Codes of Conduct outline the types of behaviour that will support a fair, safe and enjoyable game in this country. They also identify a range of sanctions which may be taken if these codes are not abided by.

YOUNG PLAYERS

When playing football, I will:
Always play to the best of my ability and for the benefit of my team
Play fairly – I won't cheat, dive, complain or waste time.
Respect my team-mates, the other team, the referee or my coach/team manager.
Play by the rules, as directed by the referee
Be gracious in victory and defeat – I will shake hands with the other team and referee at the end of the game
Listen and respond to what my coach/team manager tells me
Understand that a coach/team manager has to do what is best for the team and not one individual player
Talk to someone I trust or the club welfare officer if I'm unhappy about anything at my club.
I understand that if I do not follow the Code, any/all of the following actions may be taken by my club, County FA or The FA:

I may:

- Be required to apologise to my team-mates, the other team, referee or team manager
- Receive a formal warning from the coach/team manager or the club committee
- Be dropped or substituted
- Be suspended from training
- Be required to leave the club
- In addition:
- My club, County FA or The FA may make my parent or carer aware of any infringements of the Code of Conduct
- The FA/County FA could impose a fine and suspension against my club

SPECTATORS

We all bear a collective responsibility to set a good example and help provide a positive environment in which children can learn and enjoy the game.
Play your part and observe The FA's Respect Code of Conduct for spectators at all times

I will:

- Remember that children play for FUN.
- Applaud effort and good play as well as success.
- Respect the Referee's decisions even when you don't agree with them
- Appreciate good play from whatever team it comes from
- Remain behind the touchline and within the Designated Spectators' Area (where provided)
- Let the coach do their job and not confuse the players by telling them what to do
- Encourage the players to respect the opposition, referee and match officials
- Support positively. When players make a mistake offer them encouragement not criticism
- Never engage in, or tolerate, offensive, insulting, or abusive language or behaviour
- I understand that if I do not follow the Code, any/all of the following actions may be taken by my club, County FA or The FA:

I may be:

- Issued with a verbal warning from a club or league official
- Required to meet with the club, league or CFA Welfare Officer
- Required to meet with the club committee
- Obliged to undertake an FA education course
- Obliged to leave the match venue by the club
- Requested by the club not to attend future games
- Suspended or have my club membership removed
- Required to leave the club along with any dependents

In addition:

- The FA/County FA could impose a fine and/or suspension on the club

COACHES, TEAM MANAGERS AND CLUB OFFICIALS

We all bear a collective responsibility to set a good example and help provide a positive environment in which children can learn and enjoy the game. Play your part and observe The FA's Respect Code of Conduct at all times.

On and off the field, I will:

- Use my position to set a positive example for the young people I am responsible for
- Show respect to others involved in the game including match officials, opposition players, coaches, managers, officials and spectators
- Adhere to the laws and spirit of the game
- Promote Fair Play and high standards of behaviour
- Respect the match official's decision
- Never enter the field of play without the referee's permission
- Never engage in, or tolerate, offensive, insulting or abusive language or behaviour
- Be gracious in victory and defeat
- When working with players, I will:
- Place the well-being, safety and enjoyment of each player above everything, including winning
- Never engage in or tolerate any form of bullying
- Encourage each player to accept responsibility for their own behaviour and performance

- Ensure all activities I organise are appropriate for the players' ability level, age and maturity
- Co-operate fully with others in football (e.g. officials, doctors, physiotherapists, welfare officers) for each player's best interests
- I understand that if I do not follow the Code, any/all of the following actions may be taken by my club, County FA or The FA:

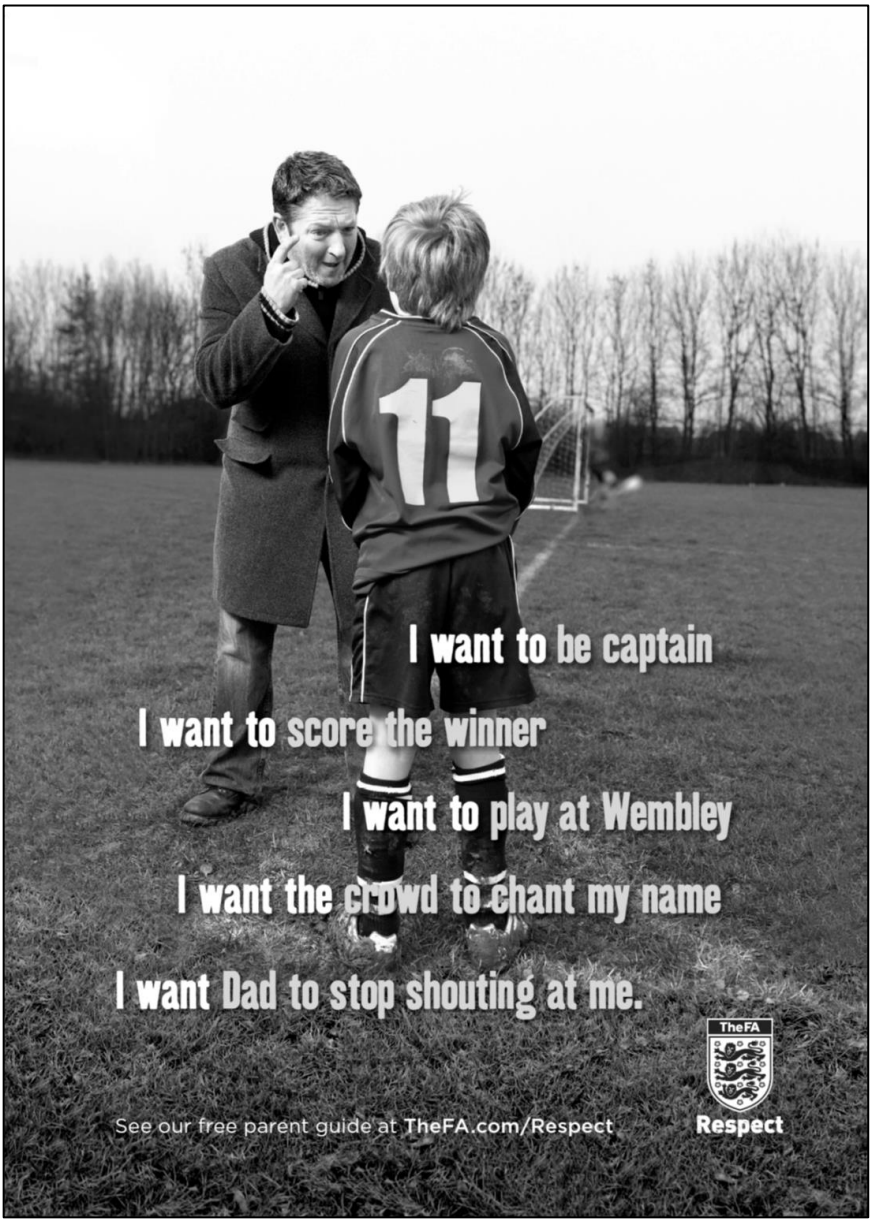
I may be:
- Required to meet with the club, league or County Welfare Officer
- Suspended by the club from attending matches
- Suspended or fined by the County FA
- Required to leave or be sacked by the club

In addition:
- My FA Coaching Licence may be withdrawn

MATCH OFFICIALS
We all have a responsibility to promote high standards of behaviour in the game.
The behaviour of the match officials has an impact, directly and indirectly, on the conduct of everyone involved in the game – both on the pitch and on the sidelines.
Play your part and observe The FA's Respect Code of Conduct of match officials at all time.

I will:
- Be honest and completely impartial at all times
- Apply the Laws of the Game and competition rules fairly and consistently
- Manage the game in a positive, calm and confident manner
- Deal with all instances of violence, aggression, unsporting behaviour, foul play and other misconduct
- Never tolerate offensive, insulting or abusive language or behaviour from players and officials
- Support my match official colleagues at all times
- Set a positive personal example by promoting good behaviour and showing respect to everyone involved in the game
- Communicate with the players and encourage fair play
- Respond in a clear, calm and confident manner to any appropriate request for clarification by the team captains
- Prepare physically and mentally for every match
- Complete and submit, accurate and concise reports within the time limit required for games in which I officiate.
- I understand that if I do not follow the Code, any/all of the following actions may be taken by my County FA or The FA:

I may be:
- Required to meet with The FA/County FA Refereeing Official
- Required to meet with The FA/County FA Referees Committee


I want to be captain
I want to score the winner
I want to play at Wembley
I want the crowd to chant my name
I want Dad to stop shouting at me.
See our free parent guide at TheFA.com/Respect
TheFA
Respect