

To: SMJFL Club Presidents & Secretaries
From: Matthew Brown, CEO
Date: Tuesday, August 15, 2023
Re: SMJFL Board approved additional Bylaws for 2023 Finals Series

It is extraordinary that we find ourselves with but four weeks remaining in the 2023 Season, halfway through Lightning Carnivals and with the 2023 OpenCorp Finals Series' firmly in sight.

On behalf of the SMJFL, I take this opportunity to express our gratitude to our Member Clubs in getting the season to where it is now and extend our thanks to those Clubs who are hosting fixtures over the next four weeks. It is a considerable undertaking to successfully host our marquee events and we both recognise and appreciate the commitment you have all shown.

Approaching any Finals Series, let alone your first, can be something of a nervous time for Players and their families, supporters and Coaches and Club Officials as the pressure of qualifying for a finals berth mount. Often this pressure manifests through an increase in disappointing on and off-field behavioural issues.

Sadly, 2023 has been no different with numerous incidents reported to the SMJFL over recent weeks. Most alarming has been the abject disregard for and abuse of our Umpires.

As a result the SMJFL Board has, approved a recommendation from the SMJFL Executive, to amend the SMJFL Bylaws and I take the opportunity to communicate this to you now.

DECISION

The SMJFL Board has approved the following addition to **Clause 42 Appendix 2 – Set Penalties**, effective 21 August 2023, for the period of the SMJFL's 2023 OpenCorp Finals Series' as follows:

All Reportable Offences during the 2023 Finals Series

If a Player or Official is found guilty of any Reportable Offence as per the Laws of Australian Football, during the 2023 Finals Series, the Base Sanction and Early Guilty Plea Offer (EGPO) will be doubled that which is prescribed under Clause 42. Appendix 2 – Set Penalties, Category 1 – Verbal Offences and Offensive Gestures, and Category 2 – Physical Contact Offences.

Notes:

- further information is included as Appendix A (overleaf) and
- this amendment will be reviewed in the post-season.

APPENDIX A

BACKGROUND & RATIONALE

This additional By-law has been introduced based on three critical factors:

1. An increased number of disciplinary issues arising from recent Rounds of the SMJFL season, including a noticeable growth in Umpire related reportable offences
2. Aspiring to attain a safer and more supportive environment for participants throughout the remainder of the 2023 season; and
3. Supporting the retention of SMJFL Umpires.

The SMJFL's 2022-2024 Strategic Plan states the mission of the league is to provide kids with a safe, supportive and inclusive environment while promoting health & wellbeing and maximising participation in Australian Football.

This mission extends to the SMJFL Umpire Academy, of which approximately 85% of the registered Umpires are under the age of 18 and circa 30% of those Umpires are new to the Academy in 2023.

It is the duty of the SMJFL Umpires to report any offences they witness on match day consistent with the Laws of Australian Football and further the responsibility of the SMJFL CEO's office to assign penalties to offences he or she becomes aware of consistent with the SMJFL By-laws.

1. AN INCREASED NUMBER OF DISCIPLINARY ISSUES FROM RECENT ROUNDS OF THE SMJFL SEASON, INCLUDING A NOTICEABLE GROWTH IN UMPIRE RELATED REPORTABLE OFFENCES

The SMJFL has had a concerning number of reports recently, that has continued to increase since the start of the SMJFL season.

It is the responsibility of one of the Field Umpires from each match (on behalf of all the appointed Umpires) to submit the Competition Match Report (CMR) through OfficialsHQ.

The information from the CMR's of each Round are submitted to the SMJFL Football Operations Department, and includes:

1. Player/Official/Spectator behaviour ratings
2. Yellow Cards issued
3. Red cards issued; and
4. Any other relevant / important information of which the league should be aware.

As illustrated through the weekly disciplinary summaries the SMJFL Football Department conducts every Monday post-match day, each of the four categories noted above have had concerning increases over the last 5 weeks in particular.

The most concerning trend has been since Round 9, 40% of the reports issued and penalised have been in relation to umpire specific reportable offences as below:

- 22.2.2 (d) intentionally making contact with, or striking, an Umpire
- 22.2.2 (e) attempting to strike an Umpire
- 22.2.2 (f) spitting on or at an Umpire
- 22.2.2 (g) behaving in an abusive, insulting, threatening or obscene manner towards or in relation to an Umpire
- 22.2.2 (h) using abusive, insulting or obscene language towards or in relation to an Umpire
- 22.2.2 (i) unreasonable or unnecessary contact with an Umpire
- 22.2.2 (j) carelessly making contact with an Umpire
- 22.2.2 (k) disputing a decision of an Umpire

2. ASPIRING TO ATTAIN A SAFER AND MORE SUPPORTIVE ENVIRONMENT FOR THE KIDS THROUGHOUT THE REMAINDER OF THE 2023 SEASON

The Finals Series is an exciting time for the SMJFL and the wider community, with larger crowds in attendance to watch relatives and friends playing in finals.

As a result, the nerves of the Players, Officials, Spectators and Umpires are all at a heightened level in the lead up and on field during every Finals match.

Umpires already have a difficult task, without the additional concern of:

- External “noise” from within or outside of the fence;
- Managing on-field physical altercations; or
- Verbal interactions from Players and/or Officials.

If any of the three situations above are prevalent on match day, it can lead to the Umpires becoming distracted and subsequently making incorrect decisions or lacking strong match management.

The SMJFL has a duty to provide a safe and supportive environment for the kids. If poor Player, Official, and Spectator behaviour is not curbed immediately, the environment for the Players and Umpires in the Final's Series will be a major issue as we close out the 2023 season.

3. SUPPORTING THE RETENTION OF SMJFL UMPIRES

One of the main reasons why Umpires don't return to the field is due to the environment and abuse that they have faced whilst on field during a match.

The SMJFL currently has 713 registered Umpires and is nearing the historical high 724 Umpires registered in 2019. It is a continued focus of the SMJFL's Football Operations Department to find ways to retain our existing cohort of Umpires whilst trying to recruit new ones for 2024.

The SMJFL wants to create a positive Finals experience for the Umpires, so they leave the 2023 season feeling like they have been supported by the League, had the opportunity to excel and develop in their role and earn a bit of money whilst doing it.

The SMJFL doesn't want Umpires second guessing whether or not they re-register for 2024. It is likely their decision to continue will be heavily influenced their most recent experiences in Umpiring i.e., the Finals Series where they may have been subject to poor behaviour.

We want to support the Umpires in any way possible, whilst calling out unsavoury behaviour. We believe this is an important next step in creating a better game day environment and complements the "Let's Call Time on bad behaviour in sport" campaign run earlier in the 2023 season.

END