



# ANNUAL GRASSROOTS DISCIPLINARY REVIEW 2023 – 24 SEASON

**FOR ALL**

PUBLISHED: DECEMBER 2024



**FOR ALL**

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# INTRODUCTION



Football is the nation's game, with approximately 25% of the population (15.7 million people) across England playing football regularly, supported by a 1 million strong football workforce\*.

The grassroots game\*\* underpins the entire football network, contributing £15.9 billion to society annually in terms of direct economic value, healthcare savings and social value\*.

Despite the fact that the vast majority of the circa 4 million grassroots fixtures that take place annually are played in the right spirit, we know\*\*\* that 7 out of 10 people think that poor behaviour negatively impacts their grassroots football experience.

We care deeply about the impact poor behaviour has on our game and are committed to tackle this challenging area head on. This intent is highlighted in the way that The FA, working in partnership with our 50 County FAs, has prioritised tackling poor behaviour as a key strategic priority for 2024-28. Together, we will work tirelessly to apply tougher sanctions, promote positive behaviour and drive collective responsibility across the game to raise standards.

A key part of this work is the continued focus on addressing the most serious of cases. These include offences aggravated by reference to a protected characteristic, threats, physical contact or assaults on Match Officials and player on player assaults. Generically, we refer to these kind of offences as "Serious Cases". Whilst these offences only occur in 0.1% of all grassroots football annually, we know the serious impact these incidents have on those within the game. Although the majority of these cases take place on the field of play, an increasing number of offences are taking place online, which fall under the jurisdiction of The FA where there is a clear link to football participants.

The Grassroots Discipline Team at The FA oversee all cases of this nature, working in partnership with the County FA network. All charges are considered by an independent National Serious Case Panel, a diverse body of experts with 44% of members coming from areas underrepresented within the game.

Alongside a continued focus on this area, The FA has introduced a range of new initiatives to further develop our approach to tackling poor behaviour, such as the launch of a new Grassroots Code and penalty point accumulation charges, alongside existing tools, such as point deductions and ground closures.

We will tackle this area of the game together, continuing to promote the "Love Football, Protect the Game" and "Enough is Enough" campaigns.

The purpose of this annual report is to provide an insight into Serious Cases overseen by The FA's Grassroots Discipline Team, covering both the adult and junior grassroots game. The FA is keen to promote transparency in terms of this work, therefore has committed to providing this annually.

Thank you for taking the time to read this report.

**Alan Darfi**  
Senior Discipline Manager  
The Football Association

\*The Social and Economic Value of Grassroots Football in England Report – October 2024

\*\*Steps 5 and below of the men's football pyramid and Tiers 3 and below of the women's pyramid.

\*\*\*Grassroots Survey – A Conversation About Our Game – 2023

# OVERVIEW

## ALLEGATIONS – SEASON COMPARISON

### Note:

At the time of writing, there are a number of cases unresolved, therefore affecting the total proven/not proven outcomes.

Number of collective **serious case allegations** in 2023/2024: **4,277**

Number of **discriminatory allegations** in 2023/2024: **2,586**

Number of collective **serious case allegations** in 2022/2023: **3,636**

Number of **discriminatory allegations** in 2022/2023: **2,078**

Percentage change: **+17%**

Percentage change: **+24%**

### Commentary:

We know\* that for every case of discriminatory abuse reported, 2.19 incidents occur. We also know that participants believe that only 30% of reported allegations lead to a charge being issued. In fact, it is more than double this number.

The FA continues to focus on ensuring participants feel confident reporting misconduct and know how to do so. The FA therefore views the increase in allegations as positive, as it evidences that participants feel more confident in reporting allegations.

An increase was also anticipated due to there being more football played year-on-year.

\*2CV Independent Research – 2024

# OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

## CHARGES – SEASON COMPARISON

Total **serious case charges** in 2023/2024:

**2,561**

Total **proven serious cases** in 2023/2024:

**1,841**

Total **serious case charges** in 2022/2023:

**2,263**

Total **proven serious cases** in 2022/2023:

**1,858**

**Percentage change:**

**+13%**

**Percentage change:**

**-1%**

**Percentage of charges resulting in proven outcome:**

**71%**

### Commentary:

In line with the increase in allegations due to the reporting gap reducing and there being more football played year-on-year, there has also been an expected increase in terms of charges issued.

The FA continues to focus on making the reporting process easier and has created detailed guidance to support those who attend hearings, which are available via County FA websites.

An overall proven rate of 71% in the 2023-24 season is evidence both of that fact that participants are right to feel confident in the misconduct process, but also that those charged receive a fair hearing when allegations are challenged.

# OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

## OFFENCES AGAINST MATCH OFFICIALS – SEASON COMPARISON

Total serious offence allegations against Match Officials in 2023/2024:

**1,716**

Total serious offence allegations against Match Officials in 2022/2023:

**1,451**

Percentage change:

**+18%**

### Commentary:

In line with the overall increase in allegations as a result of the reporting gap reducing and there being more football played year-on-year, there has also been an expected increase in terms of serious offence allegations against Match Officials.

The FA has reviewed all of its sanction guidelines for serious cases against Match Officials and continues to have in place significant deterrents. Current recommended bans are between 5 and 10 years for assault and 3 and 5 years for attempted assault. Changes have also been made to the test necessary to satisfy a charge of threatening a Match Official, making these more straightforward to prove.

The FA recognises the impact on Match Officials that serious incidents have and has introduced a range of measures to deter offenders, including those set out in pages 28 and 29 of this report.

# OVERVIEW (CONTINUED)

## CASE CLOSURE TIMES – SEASON COMPARISON

Average days from **case notification to closure** in 2023/2024:

**47**

Average days from **case notification to closure** in 2022/2023:

**44**

**Percentage change:**

**+6%**

### Commentary:

Whilst there has been a slight increase in the average days from case notification to closure, this was anticipated given the overall increase in casework. This is importantly well below the time allowed for in regulations for a charge to be heard following receipt of an allegation (90 days). The FA will continue to ensure cases are resolved promptly, which we know is important both for those reporting allegations and those responding to charges.







# DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT

## Commentary:

As The FA continues to prioritise encouraging reporting from under-represented communities, it is anticipated that more allegations of discriminatory conduct will be reported. The FA continues to invest heavily in this area, including through the national anti-discrimination campaign, Enough is Enough.

The FA has in place a mandatory minimum of a 6-match suspension for first time offenders, alongside substantial fines and mandatory attendance on an educational course.

Each County FA is required to operate an Inclusion Advisory Board in accordance with The FA's Code of Governance for County FAs, a gold standard in terms of sports governance – see [here](#).

In terms of discriminatory conduct, offences referencing ethnicity, race and colour are the most prominent category and have been for the previous 6 seasons.

Offences referencing sexual orientation and disability have remained prominent and have increased again this year, indicating that participants continue to become more aware of unacceptable language in this area.

Offences referencing gender continue to increase, due to the growth of the women and girls game, both in terms of size and visibility.

Whilst still a very small percentage of discriminatory offences (66 allegations out of 2,685), there has been a significant increase this year in terms of offences referencing religion, largely related to antisemitic remarks. The FA has formed an antisemitism taskforce group, tasked with engaging positively with the Jewish community and addressing this growing area.

# DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2023/2024

## RELATED TO ETHNICITY/RACE COLOUR

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to ethnicity/race/colour:

**1,077**

Number of **charges** relating to ethnicity/race/colour:

**440**

Number of **proven charges** relating to ethnicity/race/colour:

**285**

Number of **not proven charges** relating to ethnicity/race/colour:

**151**

Average sanction: **7 matches**

# DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2023/2024 (CONTINUED)

## RELATED TO SEXUAL ORIENTATION

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to sexual orientation:

**678**

Number of **charges** relating to sexual orientation:

**398**

Number of **proven charges** relating to sexual orientation:

**333**

Number of **not proven charges** relating to sexual orientation:

**61**

Average sanction: **7 matches**

# DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2023/2024 (CONTINUED)

## RELATED TO DISABILITY

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to disability: **365**

Number of **charges** relating to disability: **206**

Number of **proven charges** relating to disability: **171**

Number of **not proven charges** relating to disability: **33**

Average sanction: **7 matches**

# DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2023/2024 (CONTINUED)

## RELATED TO GENDER

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to gender: **294**

Number of **charges** relating to gender: **171**

Number of **proven charges** relating to gender: **131**

Number of **not proven charges** relating to gender: **39**

Average sanction: **7 matches**

# DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2023/2024 (CONTINUED)

## RELATED TO NATIONALITY

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to nationality: **205**

Number of **charges** relating to nationality: **99**

Number of **proven charges** relating to nationality: **69**

Number of **not proven charges** relating to nationality: **30**

Average sanction: **7 matches**

# DISCRIMINATORY CONDUCT 2023/2024 (CONTINUED)

## RELATED TO RELIGION

Number of **serious case allegations** relating to religion: **66**

Number of **charges** relating to religion: **37**

Number of **proven charges** relating to religion: **30**

Number of **not proven charges** relating to religion: **7**

Average sanction: **7 matches**



# SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL

## Commentary:

Despite the fact that refereeing numbers are stronger than ever, The FA is fully aware of the impact that serious offences on Match Officials have on the referee workforce, with any official being lost from the game as a result one too many.

The FA has implemented lengthy suspensions and substantial fines for offences of this nature, which have recently been reviewed and strengthened further. These are clearly set out in the sanction guidelines on page 29, for all offences. Alongside this approach, all proven offenders are required to complete an educational course prior to being eligible to recommence participation.

The FA provides support via the National Refereeing Manager to every official who reports an allegation of assault or attempted assault and we work with County FA's to ensure support is provided to all officials whenever a serious offence against an official is reported. For an allegation of assault or attempted assault on a Match Official to be proven, it must be evidenced that actions or attempted actions took place that caused or attempted to cause injury to an official, whether or not it did in fact cause injury.

For an allegation of physical contact or attempted physical contact on a Match Official to be proven, it must be evidenced that actions or attempted actions took place that were unlikely to cause injury to the Match Official, but were confrontational.

For an allegation of threatening behaviour on a Match Official to be proven, it must be evidenced that a Match Official was threatened either through actions or words, whether or not the official believed they had been threatened.

The FA reviews these sanction ranges annually and hopes to see a decrease in offences, given the increased sanctions and range of interventions in place to promote positive behaviour.



# **SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL**

**(CONTINUED)**

## **ASSAULT/ATTEMPTED ASSAULT**

Total serious case allegations relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2023/2024: **95**

Number of charges relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2023/24: **87**

Total serious case allegations relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2022/2023: **72**

Number of proven charges relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2023/24: **59**

Percentage change: **32%**

Number of not proven charges relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2023/24: **28**

# SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL

(CONTINUED)

## PHYSICAL CONTACT/ATTEMPTED PHYSICAL CONTACT

Number of serious case allegations relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a Match Official in 2023/2024:

**454**

Number of charges relating to assault/attempted assault on a Match Official in 2023/24:

**304**

Number of serious case allegations relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a Match Official in 2022/2023:

**391**

Number of proven charges relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a Match Official in 2023/24:

**211**

Percentage change:

**16%**

Number of not proven charges relating to physical contact/attempted physical contact on a Match Official in 2023/24:

**93**

# SERIOUS OFFENCES AGAINST A MATCH OFFICIAL

(CONTINUED)

## THREATENING BEHAVIOUR

Number of **serious case allegations relating to threatening a Match Official** in 2023/2024:

**1,096**

Number of **serious case allegations relating to threatening a Match Official** in 2022/2023:

**988**

**Percentage change:**

**10%**

Number of **charges relating to threatening a Match Official** in 2023/24:

**779**

Number of **proven charges relating to threatening a Match Official** in 2023/24:

**521**

Number of **not proven charges relating to threatening a Match Official** in 2023/24:

**258**

# ASSAULTS COMMITTED BY A PARTICIPANT ON A PARTICIPANT



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## Commentary:

Serious injury must be inflicted for an assault (participant on participant) to be proven. It is pleasing to see a decrease in this area and The FA will continue to deal with incidents of this nature seriously, with lengthy recommended sanctions as set out in the sanction guidelines on page 29 and through working with the Police as required.

Total serious case allegations relating to participant-on-participant assault in 2023/2024:

**80**

Number of charges relating to participant-on-participant assault in 2023/24:

**37**

Total serious case allegations relating to participant-on-participant assault in 2022/2023:

**107**

Number of proven charges relating to participant-on-participant assault in 2023/24:

**24**

Percentage change:

**-25%**

Number of not proven charges relating to participant-on-participant assault in 2023/24:

**13**



# GENERAL MISCONDUCT

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## Commentary:

It is pleasing to report a decrease in cautions for dissent and an increase in the use of 'sin bins', which were simplified and relaunched in the 2023-24 season to ensure consistency in 'sin bin' application.

For the first time this season we are able to report SOW (Stage One Warning) offences, which are cautions issued to non-players such as coaches, managers and officials. This incentive has provided Match Officials with the ability to take immediate action against offenders during a match, which has had a positive impact in terms of ensuring misconduct does not escalate further.

## Cautionable misconduct

CAUTION CODE	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2022/2023)	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2023/2024)	PERCENTAGE CHANGE
C1 – Unsporting Behaviour	267,648	273,453	+2.1%
C2 – Dissent	7,319	6,183	-15.5%
C2 – Dissent (sin bin)	33,034	36,129	+9.3%
C3 – Persistent Offending	19,037	18,480	-2.9%
C4 – Delaying Restart	24,899	37,442	+50%
C5 – Failed to respect required distance	1,281	1,261	-1.5%
C6 – Entering/re-enters without Match Official permission	1,027	1,175	+14.4%
C7 – Exiting without Match Official permission	139	161	+15.8%

# GENERAL MISCONDUCT (CONTINUED)

## Standard misconduct

DISMISSAL CODE	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2022/2023)	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2023/2024)	PERCENTAGE CHANGE
S1 – Serious Foul Play	4,700	4,996	+6.2%
S2 – Violent Conduct	10,649	12,232	+14.8%
S3 – Spitting	137	160	+16.7%
S4 – DOGSO <sup>1</sup> by handball offence save for goalkeeper	1,358	1,406	+3.5%
S5 – DOGSO to an opponent whose overall movement is towards the offender's goal by an offence punishable by a free kick	2,725	3,021	+10.8%
S6 – Offensive Language	8,317	9,538	+14.6%
S7 – Second Cautionable Offence	8,819	10,686	+21.1%

<sup>1</sup> Denying an Obvious Goal-Scoring Opportunity.



# GENERAL MISCONDUCT (CONTINUED)

## Misconduct charges

OFFENCE TYPE	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2022/2023)	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2023/2024)	PERCENTAGE CHANGE
E3 Improper Conduct Against a Match Official – Including Abusive Language	3,078	3,845	+24.9%
E3 Improper Conduct Against a Match Official – Not Including Abusive Language	579	601	+3.7%
E20 Failure to control club officials/ E21 Failure to control spectators	5,671	5,645	-0.4%

# GENERAL MISCONDUCT (CONTINUED)

## SOW offences

DISMISSAL CODE	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2022/2023)	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2023/2024)	PERCENTAGE CHANGE
SOW01 – Clearly/persistently not respecting the confines of the technical area	280	373	+33.2%
SOW02 – Delaying the restart of play	143	188	+31.4%
SOW03 – Deliberately entering the technical area of the opposing team	20	29	+45%
SOW04 – Dissent by word or action	4,158	6,330	+52.2%
SOW05 – Entering the referee review area	1	5	+400%
SOW06 – Excessively showing the TV signal for a 'VAR' review	0	0	0
SOW07 – Excessively/persistently gesturing for a red/yellow card	17	57	+235.2%

# GENERAL MISCONDUCT (CONTINUED)

## SOW offences (continued)

DISMISSAL CODE	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2022/2023)	COUNT OF INCIDENTS (2023/2024)	PERCENTAGE CHANGE
SOW08 – Gestures which show clear lack of respect for Match Officials (e.g. sarcastic clapping)	185	258	+39.4%
SOW09 – Gesturing or acting in a provocative manner or inflammatory manner	334	420	+25.7%
SOW10 – Persistent or unacceptable behaviour (including repeated warnings)	447	527	+17.8%
SOW11 – Showing a lack of respect for the game	201	253	+25.8%
SOW12 – Throwing/kicking drinks bottles or other objects	39	35	-10.2%
SOW13 – Other	243	281	+15.6%

# FA INTERVENTIONS TO DRIVE CHANGE

## Points deductions

The FA introduced point deductions from the start of the 2023/24 season, where players or coaches commit repeated offences of serious misconduct.

This landmark development followed consistent feedback from across grassroots football that player and coach behaviour is a significant issue and specifically targets offending teams where its participants commit repeated serious misconduct, making clear to clubs that this kind of behaviour will not be tolerated.

Deductions range from 3 to 12 points depending on the number of breaches within 12 months of the team's first offence and severity.

We know this approach is working, as the regulations were not applied once in the 2023-24 season, clearly indicating this deterrent is having the desired effect.

## Ground closures

The FA has introduced the power for teams at step 5 and step 6 of the National League System to have a full or partial stadium closure, where there are repeated incidents of serious misconduct. Further details can be found [here](#).

## Body Cam trial

The FA started to pilot the wearing of body cams by Match Officials in February 2023, across four adult grassroots leagues. Since the trial began, there has only been one allegation of misconduct against a Match Official wearing a bodycam.

The pilot has therefore been further expanded to an additional four grassroots leagues, from the start of the 2024-25 season. The FA continues to monitor the impact of this trial closely.

## Penalty point accumulations/Behaviour Improvement Programme

From the start of the 2024-25 season, The FA has revamped its penalty point system and introduced new charges where teams breach certain limits.

Penalty points are now only issued for behavioural offences, such as dissent or threatening behaviour. When certain accumulation thresholds of these points are reached, teams will be asked to evidence steps that are being taken to tackle poor behaviour and bespoke support will be provided by County FA's.

This bespoke support will also be provided to teams identified as struggling the most with their behaviour, identified by a combination of factors including penalty points and poor matchday scores.

Ultimately, ongoing accumulation of these penalty points can lead to removal of England Football Accreditation or even the removal of a team from a competition.



# FA INTERVENTIONS TO DRIVE CHANGE (CONTINUED)

## Sanction Ranges

The FA has in place guidance for commissions set up to consider all charges, in terms of appropriate sanction ranges for offences. This publicly available document can be found [here](#) and is reviewed annually.

## Grassroots Code

The Grassroots Code is designed to unite everyone across grassroots football by driving positive standards of behaviour we can all get behind.

Created with contributions gathered from grassroots clubs, The Grassroots Code aims to improve and maintain the standards everyone expects to see.

To do so, The Grassroots Code includes Standards of Behaviour which ensure a positive football environment for all. They are clear, so everyone can understand and remember them:

- **Enjoy The Game** - we're here to enjoy ourselves... win, lose or draw.
- **Give Respect** - we always treat others as we'd like to be treated.
- **Be Inclusive** - we embrace our differences... football is a game for everyone.
- **Work Together** - we're a team, on and off the pitch.
- **Play Safe** - we all have a role in safeguarding young people and vulnerable adults.

Together, these Standards of Behaviour aim to promote a positive, inclusive and respectful football experience for everyone. One which clubs can take pride in. One which makes even the strongest football clubs stronger. One which better represents our communities.

Having launched the Grassroots Code at the start of the 2024-25 season, The FA will continue to develop this area of the game, ensuring participants Respect the Standard. For more details click [here](#).





## SUMMARY:

The FA has identified 'A Game Free from Discrimination' and 'Tackling Poor Behaviour' as key strategic priorities in its 2024-28 FA Group and Grassroots Football strategies.

During the next 4 years, The FA will continue to tackle discrimination, apply tougher sanctions, promote positive behaviour and drive collective responsibility across the game to raise standards.

The FA is proud of the work it does in this area and has introduced pioneering approaches to attempt to address serious misconduct. We acknowledge that we must always continue to do more however, working with the whole game to ensure that, whenever serious misconduct occurs, it is dealt with appropriately.

We are fully aware of the challenges in this area and cannot tackle these alone. Working together with the County FA network and with the support of the grassroots game, collectively we will ensure football continues to be a safe and welcoming environment, For All.



**FOR ALL**

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