

Refereeing and Equality – Frequently Asked Questions

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These FAQs have been provided by The FA's Refereeing department to provide clear guidance on various issues in relation to refereeing and equality.

Q: Can a player wear long tights or trousers to play football?

A: Law 4 (Players Equipment) of the Laws of the Game states that undershorts are permitted provided that if they are worn they must be the same main colour as the shorts. Undershorts can be of any length but must not be excessively baggy.

Q: Can a player wear a long sleeved undergarment?

A: If any undergarments (shirts) are to be worn the colour of the sleeve must be the same colour as the shirt's main colour. Long sleeved shirts are permissible under the Laws of the Game.

Q: Can players wear spectacles or goggles when playing football?

A: Flying footballs and close physical contact make football a moderate risk sport for eye injuries. Spectacles or goggles may provide protection from injury and can also be worn with those who need to wear prescription lenses.

Polycarbonate Lenses: This is the most important property of all protective spectacles or goggles. *Good polycarbonate is virtually unbreakable, and will sustain the impact of a ball or finger.*

Sports Band: an elasticised band and not temple pieces should secure the frame. Players must have something that will be secured tight to the head so that the spectacles or goggles won't fall off. A frame with temples will not hold tight enough and a jab from a finger could lift the frame off and potentially damage the eye.

Although sports eyewear is intended to offer the best protection available, there is always the possibility that the wearer may sustain an eye or facial injury due to severe impact or because of the nature of the athletic activity. Referees should ensure that if a request has been made to wear glasses/goggles, that they must not be a danger to himself or to any other player.

Q: “My son was born with the lower forearm and hand missing from his left arm but has a full range of movement in his shoulder and elbow joints. He was stopped by the referee from taking a throw-in as he could not 'use both hands', a bit difficult when he only has one.”

A: Referees should adopt a common sense approach and allow a person who has one arm or a shortened arm to take the throw in even though it is in breach of the Laws of the Game.

Q: Can a player wear jewellery on the field of play?

A: No jewellery – there is a requirement for the referee to inspect players' equipment before the match.

Q: Can hearing aids be worn?

A: The following advice must be taken whilst bearing in mind Law 4 – Players' Equipment – which states that “all items of clothing or equipment other than the basic equipment must be inspected by the referee and determined to be dangerous.”

Wearing hearing aids during matches: hearing aids are sensitive pieces of electronic equipment and risk being broken if they fall out of the ear during vigorous activity. For this reason some deaf people will choose to play without their hearing aids just in case. However, others prefer to wear their hearing aids, particularly if they play in mainstream teams, so that they can use them to hear instructions or calls from team mates. It is generally accepted that children can use their aids when playing sport provided they are comfortable and secure fitting. If in doubt advise parents to ask for further advice from their audiologist.

Wearing cochlear implants during matches: having a cochlear implant involves having a receiver package implanted under the skin behind the ear and an external package that is worn similarly to a hearing aid. The main risk with sport is suffering a blow to the head on or around the site of the internal package, which risks damaging the package or the skin around the area. Although the risk is very small this could mean that it became necessary to have repeat surgery to replace the package. Like hearing aids the external equipment is sensitive and risks being broken if it falls off during a match.

British Cochlear Implant Group safety guidelines state ‘vigorous sports (for example, football, netball, hockey and squash) - It may be advisable to remove the external parts of the system. If there is some risk of blows to the head the external parts should be removed and a form of head protection worn (for example, a scrum cap).’

It is generally accepted that children and adults will play football while wearing their cochlear implant although it is advisable that they check with their cochlear implant professional beforehand.

Children who have recently had cochlear implant surgery are advised against playing football until the operation site has fully healed (approximately 6 weeks).

Q: “A deaf player has regularly been booked for kicking away the ball even though he cannot hear the whistle. A typical scenario is that he is driving towards the goal but is flagged for offside and the referee blows for deliberately delaying the restart of play or time wasting.”

A: Whether the referee has been informed that the player is deaf or not, the referee will need to use common sense and make a value judgement as to whether the player deliberately kicked the ball away or just carried on and tried to score a goal.

Q: How do I deal with a player with Tourette's Syndrome?

A: The FA provides the following advice and guidance with regards to managing players with specific impairments e.g. Tourette Syndrome.

- If a referee is told that someone on the team has Tourette's they need to be told how that condition presents itself - i.e. what sort of 'tics' they have. Some people do not have verbal/swearing tics but may grunt or have a facial tic. Sometimes they can suppress them for a period of time but when they stop they will tic a lot - almost getting rid of the "store". Do not reprimand someone if the condition presents itself.
- Anxiety will make tics worse so anxiety before or during a match may make them more obvious to others.
- The referee could discuss with the player/official prior to the match to agree a means of coming off the pitch for a time if they sense or the referee senses that the tic-ing is getting worse and significantly interfering with others. A referee would have to make a value judgment as to the seriousness of the swearing and whether to take action to allow the person time to 'cool down'
- If the swearing was deliberately aimed at another player or official etc. then a referee should take action accordingly.

Q: What is the guidance on assessing referees with physical impairments?

A: The following guidance is taken from the Handbook for Referee Assessors.

All candidates for assessment should be assessed fairly and objectively against the core competencies for the on-field assessment:

1. Application of law
2. Match control
3. Positioning, fitness and work rate
4. Alertness and awareness including management of stoppages
5. Communication
6. Teamwork
7. Advantage

This guidance is concerned with '3. Positioning, fitness and work rate' on the assessment form.

- Regardless of any physical impairment, the Referee must be judged fairly on his/her positioning, fitness and work rate
- There is no requirement to make adjustments to the physical demands of the assessment to accommodate a person's physical impairment. This is because the Referee needs to keep up with the pace of the game in order to referee it competently. Referees will be self-limiting with regards to promotion depending on the speed of play, therefore the fitter the Referee is, the higher the level of game they will be able to Referee, as long as all the other competencies around positioning, fitness and work rate are also met
- Providing the Referee is in the right place at the right time to make credible decisions, the optimum distance is 10-15m from active play where possible

- In quick breaks the Referee may not be able to achieve this 10-15m distance therefore has the Referee adopted the best possible position and viewing angle to see point of contact but still may be 20-25 from play?
- By not reaching this recommended distance from active play – did the Referee miss any infringement?
- Did the Referee adopt the correct viewing angles, therefore substituted distance for angle?
- You should keep accurate notes to record your observations and these should substantiate any decision you make at an assessment. You are strongly advised to use the Planning Sheets and Referee Assessment and Development Form from the Assessors Handbook. You should keep copies of both the planning sheet and forms – this is because if someone challenges your decision on assessment these records will form part of your defence
- There is no upper limit to a claim of discrimination, claims are likely to be taken through an Employment Tribunal.