

**Re: Report on Basketball Ireland's written evidence on the elimination of any and all abuse directed towards referees, officials, and players in sport.**

**Ref: JCM-I-611a**

Basketball Ireland is committed to combating any form of physical or verbal abuse no matter the form that abuse may take. This report, in response to the question that has been posed, will detail the written policies and procedures which are in place to combat abuse within the sport.

For ease, this report is divided into two sections. The first and second sections are to be differentiated on the basis of Basketball Ireland membership. The first section deals with the participants of the game. Participants of the game for the purposes of this document includes players, coaches, accompanying delegation members, referees, commissioners and table officials. The second section is dedicated to those that are not registered with basketball Ireland but are involved in the sport in the capacity of spectator.

**Part 1 - Elimination of Abuse between Participants of the game**

**Section 1 – Rules of the Game**

The game of basketball in Ireland is governed by the rules as provided by the International Basketball Federation (FIBA). In this way, Irish leagues apply the rules in the same way as other countries across the world. Within the rules of the game, a number of articles prohibit players from engaging in any form of physical or verbal abuse and players are at all times required to play the sport within the spirit and intent of the rules. Referees make all decisions in relation to the game, including judgment of physical contact and player behaviour.

Any form of abuse or violence is controlled within the game with the use of Technical, Unsportsmanlike and Disqualifying fouls<sup>1</sup>. Unsportsmanlike fouls are charged against players, broadly speaking, who engage in a physical action which is deemed by a referee to

---

<sup>1</sup> FIBA Official Basketball Rules 2020 at Articles 36-38, respectively.

be excessive or an act done which does not constitute a legitimate attempt to play the ball. A player can receive two unsportsmanlike fouls before being removed from the game.

A disqualifying foul is charged against a player for a flagrant unsportsmanlike action. Fighting or acts of physical violence are controlled through the use of disqualifying fouls. A player may only receive one disqualifying foul and is then required to leave the gym/return to their dressing room.

A technical foul is a player behavioural foul for behaviour which is not deemed to comply with the spirit and intent of the rules. Verbal abuse towards referees or officials, gestures, inciting or offending spectators, baiting/taunting an opponent and repeated non-compliance with the directions of officials by a player/coach are some of the acts penalised in this way. A player who receives two technical fouls is removed from the game. A coach may be disqualified having received two technical fouls as a result of their own poor behaviour, or having received three technical fouls for failing to control their team bench or by having received a combination of one technical foul as result of their own behaviour and two technical fouls related to the control of their bench.

Acts done by players which are already disqualified will be penalised by the imposition of technical fouls on the coach for that team. A player who receives a combination of one technical foul and one unsportsmanlike foul shall also be disqualified.

This section is intended to be a high level overview of the relevant rules of the game for the purposes of this report. Further detail regarding the operation of these rules is available on request from Basketball Ireland or within the FIBA Rulebook.

## **Section 2 – Match reporting mechanism in the National League**

A referee's match report form is required to be completed by either the two or three referees and a commissioner's report form is required by the game Commissioner (where present) in the event that a player receives any of the fouls detailed in Section 1. These match report forms are collected by the Basketball Ireland head office and may then be forwarded to the National Disciplinary Committee (NDC) for review. The operation of the NDC is detailed in Section 3.

Match report forms take all relevant detail in relation to any incident which occurs before, during or after a match. Officials are required to be as specific as possible when completing these reports so that the NDC can make the appropriate decision in imposing a sanction. As part of the report, a copy of which has been appended, officials are asked to rate the level of abuse on a scale of aggression (detailed within the document). The match reporting system directly links game events to the governing body and is the method of disciplining game participants.

### **Section 3 – National Disciplinary Committee and the Points System**

The National Leagues operate a points system for players and coaches who do not participate in the sport at the expected high standard. The National Disciplinary Committee (NDC), comprising of a minimum of three persons, will deal with all disciplinary matters relating to men's and women's national competitions. The membership of the NDC will be determined by the Board of BI and the Men's National Competitions Committee (MNCC) and may comprise of more than three persons. A decision of the NDC will be notified to the MNCC and the clubs and will be binding on all parties<sup>2</sup>.

Players, coaches, clubs and club officials may be fined and/or suspended for any disciplinary incident occurring before, during or after a game. Disciplinary action may also be taken against a club for any unacceptable behaviour by its followers and/or supporters<sup>3</sup>.

A cumulative points system is in place in the National League which may lead to sanctions for players and coaches who do not perform at the expected high standard. A one-match suspension is automatic when a person reaches 20 points, 30 points is a two-match suspension and so on for each subsequent 10 points<sup>4</sup>. A person who is disqualified from a game shall automatically receive 14 points but the NDC also has a discretion to award a higher number of points<sup>5</sup>. An exception to this is when a player is disqualified for having received two unsportsmanlike or two technical fouls (or a combination of both), in which

---

<sup>2</sup> Men's National Competitions Regulations at section 6.2.2.

<sup>3</sup> *Ibid.*, at section 6.6.3

<sup>4</sup> *Ibid.*, at section 6.6.10

<sup>5</sup> *Ibid.*, at section 6.6.6

case the sanction shall be 10 points and the NDC will only review the case at the request of the MNCC or the League Commissioner<sup>6</sup>.

For the avoidance of doubt, the NDC has remit to impose a sanction on a participant (holding Basketball Ireland registration) who is involved in a game as a spectator but does so in a way that does not comply with the rules of the sport, the social media policy, the spirit and intent of the rules and the high standards expected of participants. In addition to match reports, the NDC may also review match commissioner's reports; written complaints and recommendations from the National Referee Committee/National League Officials' Commission in determining a sanction. An appeal mechanism lays from the NDC and is detailed in the attached regulations.

References to the Men's National Competitions Committee and the Men's National Competitions Regulations, for the purposes of this section, are applied in a similar way by the National Disciplinary Committee using the Women's National Competitions Regulations (appended).

#### **Section 4 – Match Report Data<sup>7</sup>**

For the purposes of this report, data collected from the previous two full seasons has been detailed below<sup>8</sup>.

In the 2018/2019 season, there were a total of 24 match report forms received which resulted in the imposition of points to a player/coach's record. Of those 24 instances, 13 cases involved an in-game behavioural sanction by way of technical foul. In 2 of those instances, the behaviour in question was abuse directed solely towards match officials. In 7 out of the 24 cases, the NDC imposed a sanction greater than the automatic sanctions detailed above. The number of points that the NDC awarded, in addition to the automatic

---

<sup>6</sup> *Ibid.*, at section 6.6.7

<sup>7</sup> Records held by the National Disciplinary Committee

<sup>8</sup> Data from the 2019-2020 has not been included in this report as there was no regular season between the end of the 2018/2019 season and the current 2020/2021 season. This was due to government restrictions imposed in response to the Covid-19 pandemic. As a result, they have not been included in this report.

points awarded against a player/coach, ranged from between 12 to 26. Of the 24 cases mentioned, 5 involved a disqualifying foul for a flagrant physical act or otherwise.

There were slightly fewer cases in the 2017/2018 season which was recorded as follows:

There were a total of 23 match report forms received which resulted in the imposition of points to a player/coach's record. Of those 23 instances, 11 cases involved an in-game behavioural sanction by way of technical foul. In 2 of those instances, the behaviour in question was abuse directed solely towards match officials. In 5 out of the 23 cases, the NDC imposed a sanction greater than the automatic sanctions detailed above. The number of points that the NDC awarded, in addition to the automatic points awarded against a player/coach, ranged from between 14 to 24. Of the 23 cases mentioned, 2 involved a disqualifying foul for a flagrant physical act or otherwise.

For relevance, the National Appointments Officer appoints to approx. 720 games per season all of which use the aforementioned reporting mechanism.

## **Section 5 – Social Media Policy**

Basketball Ireland may also regulate certain types of behaviour that takes place on social media. A copy of the Basketball Ireland Social Media Policy has been appended to this report. The policy applies to all registered Basketball Ireland members, BI staff as well as contractors and administrators. The policy's aim is to provide guidelines for all members of Basketball Ireland in the effective and productive use of social media channels, including social media to promote and grow the sport of basketball.

Amongst several other practical guidelines in the policy, members are encouraged not to engage with social media in a way that could be construed as negative or derogatory to other members, or damage either their own reputation or that of the sponsors, stakeholders and staff of Basketball Ireland. Information in relation to posting media, consent and intellectual property rights is also contained in the document.

A breach of the Social Media Policy will be a breach of the applicable registered membership and Basketball Ireland reserves the right to take any appropriate measures with respect to

infringements of this Policy, including issuing a 'Take Down' notice, imposing other sanctions, and/or taking legal action for damages.

## **Section 6 – Coach's Code of Ethics and Anti-Bullying Policy**

Basketball Ireland also has a code of ethics for coaches and an Anti-Bullying Policy. The code of ethics encourages coaches who are coaching underage participants to foster an environment which promotes fair play, respect for other participants and fun. Within the policy, coaches are instructed not to tolerate cheating, verbal abuse or violence and to support match official's in the achievement of this goal/imposition of sanctions for inappropriate behaviour.

Basketball Ireland's Anti-Bullying Policy encourages all participants to be aware of their responsibilities in combating any form of bullying. Coaches, officials, clubs and volunteers are requested, in particular, to eliminate bullying by seeking to ensure that bullying is neither accepted nor condoned. Each participant has the right to enjoy the game of basketball in an environment where safety, security, praise, recognition and opportunities are available.

Both the Basketball Ireland Coach's Code of Ethics and the Anti-Bullying Policy are available on the Basketball Ireland website: [Ireland.Basketball](http://Ireland.Basketball)

## **Part 2 – Elimination of Abuse directed from Spectator's towards Participants**

### **Section 1 – National Competitions**

Many people, although not members of Basketball Ireland, enjoy spectating what can be a fast-paced and spectacular sport. In addition to the documented procedures detailed above, both the Men's and Women's National Competitions Regulations contain provisions for dealing with abusive or threatening spectators.

Many spectators verbally convey their opinions and emotions while spectating at sporting events and in some cases this can add to the atmosphere and tension within the game. In

some cases, where those opinions or emotions are affecting the game in a negative way, officials may be required to take action. As participants are required not to incite or offend spectators, those spectating are also expected to maintain a minimum level of acceptable behaviour. Basketball in Ireland is mostly played indoors and in venues that often do not have much seating. With spectators sometimes in close proximity to participants, there are instances where comments made can negatively affect the smooth running of the game. The home team is responsible for taking reasonable precautions to control the behaviour of spectators. However, disciplinary action may be taken against either team for the behaviour of its followers<sup>9</sup>.

Referees who encounter such behaviour may stop the game and approach the game commissioner, if present. If a referee deems it necessary to remove a spectator for verbal or physical abuse of a participant, they may request that the venue officer remove the spectator before the game resumes. Venue officers are required to be on location at least one hour prior to tip off to meet the referees and commissioner and is required to stay for the duration of the game. The venue officer is also responsible for duties such as ensuring that the court is clean and dry and liaising with spectators under the instruction of the game commissioner or referee (if there is no game commissioner).

In instances that spectators do not behave reasonably at basketball events, this may also be recorded on a match report form and sanctions may be imposed on either team for the behaviour of their supporters.

## **Section 2 – Local or Regional Level**

There are local and regional arrangements in place to cater for the removal of abusive spectators from basketball events. As local games do not have a game commissioner, the onus is on the event organisers in clubs to make arrangements in this regard. Referees may, through an organiser or coach of the home team, request that a spectator be removed from the gym for engaging in abusive behaviour. Local reporting arrangements and disciplinary processes apply.

---

<sup>9</sup> Men's National Competitions Regulations at section 5.1.6

For example, in the Cork area, a venue officer must be available to assist the referees in the same way that they are in the national league. An abusive spectator is removed from the gym at the request of the referees. In cases where there is no venue officer appointed, the game should not go ahead.

Although it is one of Basketball Ireland's goals to have a venue officer appointed and available for every game in the sport, we acknowledge that it is not always the case. Basketball Ireland aims to convene a working group soon to review and improve our procedures for combating abuse. This will include liaising with the public to gain more insight about whether procedures are being implemented consistently in practice, particularly at a local level.