

# **SOCIAL MEDIA GUIDELINES FOR CLUBS**

**COMMENTARY** The massive increase in the use of social media over the last few years has been phenomenal, and nowhere has this been more far reaching than in the sporting world. The explosion of cricket clubs on social media is such that thousands across the UK now use platforms like Twitter and Facebook to promote themselves, do score updates and tweet fundraisers and events. But despite all the positives about such freedom and instant communication there is also a downside and, perhaps unsurprisingly, there have been numerous instances where people have posted obscenities or potentially libellous comments about others. It's a sad state of affairs - there are a multitude of insults hurled about online, either in the heat of the moment or due to ongoing feuds - it is a problem sporting or governing bodies can only very loosely police. However, it is a problem we believe clubs can go a long way to solving at source, and these guidelines aim to better inform club committees of how they can help in this regard.

## **WHAT SHOULD CLUBS DO TO PROTECT THEMSELVES AND THEIR MEMBERS**

Broadly speaking there are four key areas where clubs need to ensure they have adequate systems in place:

- a. Their own disciplinary regulations and process.
- b. Club websites (primarily club forums, but also such things as match reports, news items etc).
- c. Club publications.
- d. Club members inter-action on external social media in respect of Bradford Premier League and club related matters.

### **1. CLUB DISCIPLINARY CODES**

The overriding issue for all clubs is that every player they register to play in the Bradford Premier League signs a registration form in which they agree to adhere to the League's code of conduct. That code of conduct includes the following:

'Players and club officials shall not make any public or media comment which is detrimental to the league, its officials, clubs, umpires or the game in general. In this instance media shall include press, radio, television, external websites, club websites, social networking sites and club match programmes.' The above should be reinforced by including it within the club's own code of conduct and disciplinary regulations if it is not already there.

### **2. CLUB WEBSITES**

The legal framework surrounding social media use indicates that the club and its administrators/moderators could be held liable for defamatory or libellous comments posted on their website - whether that be on the site forum (irrespective of whether it is members only), within match reports, in news items or in any other area of the site. It is crucial, therefore, that each club should only give administration rights on their websites to responsible individuals, and those individuals should rigorously monitor (ideally on a daily basis) all items posted on the site. If, after all this, censorship has to be undertaken the fallout from any indiscretions can potentially be soothed somewhat providing that:

- The person making the communication takes swift action to remove the communication and expresses genuine remorse directly to those affected in a format and manner agreed as acceptable by those affected.
- The Service Provider (note this has a wide meaning and includes moderators and administrators) takes swift and effective action to remove the communication or otherwise block it.

### **3. CLUB PUBLICATIONS**

Clubs need to be vigilant about any written matter which goes out bearing their name - only last year a club in another part of the country got into serious trouble when allowing defamatory comments to be published in its match programme. All published material in a club's name should be 'edited' prior to publication to ensure mistakes do not occur.

### **4. THE WIDER WORLD**

In contributing to unofficial forums club members do not escape responsibility for what they write. Anything posted on any site about Bradford Premier League cricket that could be judged to be defamatory, grossly offensive, harmful to the game of cricket, to the league, to clubs, to officials and to administrators is fully actionable. Clubs may feel they have little control over this, but in some cases this is an 'out of sight out of mind' approach.

Some within clubs say they are unaware of external comments made by their own members, or don't understand social media, but it will be a truism that there will be some members of all club committees who know the people within their own club who may be prone to social media indiscretions. It is they who can make the real difference to reducing abuse.

Club committees should ensure that social media abuse is a regular topic on the agenda of their internal meetings, and if they become aware of any of their own members acting in a way which may prejudice the good name of their club, or the league, or other individuals within the league whatever their role, they should take timely action which may include one or more of the following - verbal warnings, written warnings, formal apologies, requests for deletion of offending matter, full disciplinary action.

### **SUMMARY AND ACTION PLAN**

The four key action points clubs should consider putting in train immediately are those headlined - they do not require any major work on anyone's part, indeed, some of you will already have several in place. It should be stressed these are guidelines, not rules, and are solely intended to help you deal with something that we recognise is alien to many - whether you implement them or not is your choice, but hopefully you will see the very real benefit for your club, the league, and the game in general in doing so