



Amateur Football Combination

Respect 

Spirit of Football

Respect 

www.amateurfootballcombination.com

President: Jim Buttress **Chairman:** David Goldring **Treasurer:** Alan Robinson
Secretary: Danny McConnell, PO Box 605, Bromley, Kent, BR2 0YQ. Tel: 020 8325 2448.
Email: secretary@amateurfootballcombination.com

Spirit of Football - 2009/2010

Season 09/10 will be the fourth since the introduction of the 'Spirit of Football' initiative which, as you know, was introduced in an effort to improve the behaviour of players in our football. It will also see the full introduction of the FA Respect programme running alongside. As its principles are very similar to, perhaps based on, Spirit of Football, changes to existing practices will be minimal. It should be noted, however, that the principles from now on will formally extend to non playing club members, supporters and spectators.

Although Spirit of Football has been adopted by most, if not all of Clubs, to a greater or lesser degree, it would be folly for any to become complacent as there is always room for changes/improvements to be made if we, as a League, are to achieve an acceptable standard throughout. As we all know, a lowering of standards can happen easily without it being noticeable straightaway – to recover the situation and raise standards is difficult, time consuming and hard work. At the outset of the new season, each Club should target an improvement year on year with the satisfactions that success will bring.

Comparing 2007-08 and 2008-2009

A number of clubs saw significant drops in their Spirit of Football ratings last season, and it was particularly concerning to see a number of new and/or returning clubs into the bottom dozen or so:- Old Tenisonians, Centymca, Old Bromleians, Wandsworth Borough Officers, Birkbeck College, Enfield Old Grammarians, Old Danes, Old Josephians and Teddington. Of even more concern are those clubs in such a lowly position for the second year running:- Old Camdenians, William Fitt, Temple Bar and Old Wokingians – a positive change in club culture needs to be considered if these clubs are to overcome their long standing problems.

On the other side of the coin, special mention should be made of those clubs whose efforts led to their moving away from the bottom positions with pleasing improvements in their marks:- Old Tollingtonians, Fulham Compton, Old Manorians, Old Parmiterians and Royal Sun Alliance.

To those clubs whose average mark, year on year, suggests that there might have been a deterioration in behaviour, it is important that the situation is addressed when planning for the new season by establishing the reason(s) for their record (if they don't know already) and develop a strategy to turn it around.

It's worth reminding ourselves of some of the points from previous seasons that remain very appropriate:-

Not Interested? – There Are Other Leagues!

We've set out the stall, we think how our football is played is important, and we've noted that we have four new clubs accepted into membership for this season, with many other applicants unsuccessful. Clearly, we're doing something right – people want to join the League and play football the way it should be played.

If we do have clubs, who simply aren't interested, then they can always try and find their football somewhere else. **We want all clubs to think carefully about their membership, and who they allow to represent them. Your club's reputation is at stake – be careful about who you invite to represent you.**

It's Not My Fault

All too often we hear excuses for bad behaviour. "We want to win", "it was the referees fault", "we were provoked". Let's be clear about this – everyone in the AFC is responsible for their own actions. Winning and Good Sportsmanship are not exclusive. Referees do make mistakes, and do make decisions you don't agree with (the two things are not the same!) and that's part and parcel of football. Spirit of Football – Respect is about how you behave, and how you expect others to behave towards you.

Playing in the Spirit of Football, Promoting Fair Play and Respect for All

Taking Responsibility

Following on from this, Clubs and Club Officers need to understand that responsibility for the behaviour ultimately falls to them. Clubs need to acknowledge where problems lie and take steps to identify and deal with troublemakers. **Don't shy away from making tough decisions simply to prevent a loss of members and/or seeing a reduction in playing strength of teams.**

If you have "problem players", Clubs have to be brave enough to kick them out, and contact us to ensure such players are listed on the website as players banned by Clubs so that the bad apples don't resurface elsewhere.

If Clubs and League Officers are firm but fair, the referees/officials are competent and in control and captains set a good example, taking responsibility for their players actions, behaviour will improve and the level of sportsmanship will continue to move towards the high but realistic level that this League has set itself.

Clubs – The Essentials

For the dual campaign to bear fruit, it is essential that it is embraced by everyone. The following points are mandatory for a "Respect League":-

- Codes of conduct to be read, agreed and signed by all club members, playing and non-playing, including supporters and spectators. Clubs should retain these copies and provide them if required.
- New players recruited into the club during the season should also read and sign the codes.
- Captains and vice-captains take responsibility for their players' actions and behaviour – please make sure they have a "Respect Guide".
- Captains must wear a Respect (or Spirit of Football) armband. Respect armbands will be provided.

Clubs – Optional Extras

In addition, we would encourage clubs towards the following:-

- Stand-alone "Spirit of Football" Display Cards (A2 and A3 sizes) as featured at the Annual Dinner are available for League and Club functions, events and so forth. Please ask for more information.
- When possible, please include the Spirit of Football – Respect branding on club communications and publicity. This is another indication of support for and adoption of the dual campaigns.
- Remind your captains/players as to the likelihood of appointed referees' pre-match briefings to mention Spirit of Football – Respect. Please encourage your club referees to do likewise.
- Please mark your opposition carefully each week, considering all elements of 'Spirit of Football – Respect' – be objective, assessing solely the game in hand. If you consider a poor mark appropriate please give it and explain why – as most, if not all, of you should now realise, we do act on reports, both bad and good, but we are dependant on your realistic feedback!
- Club marks, together with those given by appointed referees (and club referees please) are important elements when considering the annual 'Spirit of Football – Respect' awards to at least two winning clubs. When possible, issue regular reminders of the dual programme to all players and supporters. It is essential to maintain momentum if they are to succeed.
- Publicise the Laws of the Game to all of your players, spectators and club officials. If you have a club website, please make sure there's a link to them (you can copy the link from the AFC website). If you'd like a hard copy of the Laws of the Game, please let us know.
- When purchasing new sets of shirts, we ask that consideration be given to displaying in some way the AFC and Spirit of Football – Respect branding.
- Respect barriers are available for clubs who have significant numbers of spectators – ask for details.

Please pass on this newsletter to your club referees, officers, and anyone else involved with your club.

Spirit of Football Committee

If you have any queries, comments, thoughts or constructive suggestions about the dual Spirit of Football – Respect programme, please contact Rob Gibbs, Chairman (Grasmere Nook, 56 The Chase, Eastcote, Pinner, Middlesex HA5 1SN. Tel. 020 8866 2033 or 07958 061 555) or any member of the committee (details in the handbook/on the website) who will be more than happy to discuss any aspect with you.