

**GUIDANCE -
TACKLING
PITCH
INCURSIONS**

Overview

In recent times, there have been some serious assaults on players and other individuals where spectators have entered the field of play illegally. Substantial fines have been handed out to Clubs where the independent FA regulatory panel has found the Club breached FA rules governing the conduct of spectators.

A number of fans have also been sentenced to significant terms of imprisonment. The Government, the PFA and the LMA have held meetings with the EFL, asking for details of plans to prevent further pitch incursions. It is pretty clear that players and match officials, alongside their professional bodies are deeply concerned that it is only a matter of time before one of them is seriously hurt as a consequence of the actions of a spectator unlawfully entering the pitch area.

Guidance for Clubs

It is strongly advised that Clubs designate suitably qualified match day security personnel as their 'pitch protection team'. Where in house stewards are deployed by the Club, they will not need to be licensed by the SIA. If the designated stewards/security staff are made up of contract staff they will need to be SIA licensed. It is further recommended, that if stewards/security staff are expected to detain spectators or have physical contact then they should have had the appropriate SIA physical intervention training and be DBS checked.

The SIA physical intervention module is not part of the level II spectator safety certificate (it is an additional optional unit) and whilst it is not mandatory for stewards to have this training, it is important that anybody undertaking physical intervention is appropriately trained. This is especially so, given the techniques used in restraint of an individual should be approved and lawful. This is also recommended by the SGSA and will be subject of scrutiny by the SIA in the very near future.

If during the match, it has become obvious that a match official or player has been subjected to aggressive attention or chanting from spectators, then this should be seen as good intelligence to indicate where the priority focus should be, to protect the match officials and players from harm. It is good practice recognised by the SGSA and the SIA, that if stewards/security staff are tasked to protect specific individuals (player or match official) from harm, the recommendation is they should have Close Protection training.

Although exempt from licensing, an in-house steward should also be trained. The Door Supervisors licence is not deemed to be a substitute for the Close Protection training. It is advised that Clubs scrutinise the training record of contracted staff. Escorting match officials from the pitch under normal circumstances does not require this type of enhanced training.

It is vitally important that Clubs deploy proportionate and necessary steps to deal with pitch incursions. It is advisable that stewards/security staff are equipped with studded shoes, to ensure a rapid response to any potential serious incident on the field of play. The objective of the team should be to prevent an assault on a match official or player and to detain and remove the person or persons concerned.

Consideration should also be given to protecting broadcasters, ball kids and others from harm. It is good practice, that Clubs have a security team which is trained and designated, to enter the field of play when a pitch incursion takes place, to protect the match officials and both teams players from threats and serious harm. It is recommended that 'pitch protection teams' are also equipped with body worn cameras to act as a deterrent and to capture evidence. It is important these resources are strategically placed within the stadium bowl to be most effective.

Mass Incursions

In the event that a mass incursion takes place despite prevention efforts, security teams should be deployed in a manner where they would be most effective to keep the two separate groups of fans apart and protect the tunnel area.

There are a number of tactical responses available to disrupt or control an incursion and which are already in use at many Clubs. It is often the case that crowd movements within the stands can help to predict a pitch incursion, which gives Safety Officers forewarning and time to implement their considered response, which they have planned for.

It is recommended that Clubs engage with their police commander, at a local level, to ensure they are fully briefed on the match day operational plans, in good time, prior to the fixture. It is also recommended that Clubs conduct joint training exercises with their police colleagues, so they are able to respond together to these incidents, in anticipation of when it becomes a necessary tactic on a match day.

It is recommended that Clubs have, sitting alongside their match day plans and risk assessments, a pitch incursion plan and these are reviewed by the Police and SAG. There is also benefit in seeking a peer review by other experienced safety officers. It is also recommended that Safety Officers review the police plans to respond to these circumstances.

Where pitch incursions are predicted and informed by risk assessments, Clubs should ensure they engage fully with their fans and fan groups, to proactively influence fan behaviours, to help deter any infringement of the playing surface.

We need to move away from almost an acquiescence, that pitch incursions at the conclusion of the season are celebratory in nature and to be expected.

Communications Support for Clubs

To help Clubs spread the primary message that ***"the pitch is for players and the stands for spectators"***, the EFL Communications team will supply Club media teams with proactive communications materials, digital/in stadia assets and messaging to use.

As discussed at the recent Club media managers meeting, this request will be under the game-wide Love Football, Protect the Game campaign, which was launched at the start of the season in conjunction with the FA, Premier League and FSA.

The full update and toolkit will be provided to communications leads in due course, but in the interim, below are key lines for spokespeople to use as appropriate to help with any public facing documents, meetings or media appearances.

Key Messages

- As we approach the season finale, people must respect that the **pitch is for players and stands for spectators**
- It is against the law to enter the pitch at any time and anyone who does so will face a ban and police action
- Recent pitch invasions have brought football bans, police prosecution and criminal records - this can impact employment, education and international travel
- Everybody should feel safe at football but pitch invasions endanger everyone because it's impossible to tell the difference between celebration and an attack
- Entering the pitch could also result in penalties for the Club, so do not spoil it for the team or other fans.
- From fans, to stewards to players, we all have a role to play in keeping each other safe on matchdays
- We need to protect each other, the Club and the game.

Club communications leads are also reminded to consider the following points as we head into the end-of-season period:

- Talk to your local media proactively to help deliver key messages
- Talk to key fan groups to help spread the message on relevant fan channels
- Engage other relevant stakeholders that can help disseminate key information
 - Eg. Local police forces
- Be mindful of content and output on your Club channels
 - Please do not post content that incites fans or glorifies behaviours we are looking to prevent – eg. Pitch invasions & pyro use

Should you have any questions, the EFL Media & PR team will be able to provide support via media@efl.com

Guidance for Match Officials and Players

Safety officers should advise match officials, during the pre-match briefing, what their plans and risk assessments are to respond to illegal pitch incursions. Where a mass pitch incursion is predicted, it is recommended that all players and match officials are advised that they should leave the playing surface to the sanctuary of the changing rooms.

Special consideration, especially during a mass pitch incursion, should also be given to the match official who is furthest from the tunnel. It is good practice to share plans with match officials as part of the pre-match briefing pack. It is also good practice to advise both sets of players, prior to the match, to leave the playing surface in the event of a pitch incursion. It is also important that Medics are briefed on pitch incursion plans and they develop their own operational plans in the event of a mass pitch incursion.

Risk Assessments and FA Investigations

Clubs should be aware that any mass incursion will lead to an investigation by the FA, which would always look for any flaw

in the Clubs plans, risk assessments and operational responses, especially where assaults have been committed by spectators entering the field of play. Club responses to an FA inquiry, should always demonstrate how they responded to the risks and threats, how they prepared and planned to deal with the different challenges of pitch incursions at that fixture and demonstrate that their security staff (stewards) are appropriately trained and competent to respond effectively to the risks. The quality of briefings to stewards, security personnel, match officials and players will come under significant scrutiny so it is vital that these are conducted comprehensively.

There have been a number of Clubs (Premier League and EFL) appearing before independent FA regulatory panels recently following mass pitch incursions towards the end of the 2021/22 season. Information from a number of these rulings are being shared here to demonstrate the thinking of FA independent regulatory panels in these circumstances and to ensure Clubs implement the necessary safeguards, which are made clear in the decisions.

These pitch incursions were at high-risk fixtures and amounted to some abusive and in many cases, violent confrontations between rival supporters and players.

The Clubs involved were fined significant amounts after the FA independent regulatory panels found that they had ***'failed to ensure their supporters conducted themselves in an orderly fashion and had used threatening and violent behaviour whilst encroaching onto the pitch'***. Some fans were sentenced to terms of imprisonment by the Courts.

The FA independent regulatory panels found that in most cases there was a lack of ***'match specific risk assessments and that pitch encroachment plans and steward deployments fell short of what is required from a pre-match risk assessment'***.

There was also criticism of ***'pre match liaison with police, match specific briefing***

of stewards and that steward numbers, although within the guidelines, were short of what was considered necessary for such high-risk fixtures'. Resources to risks - It is recommended that the risks are the guiding factors for numbers of stewards and security resources and not the figures agreed with Safety Advisory Groups detailed on the safety certificate.

The FA panels felt that the planning was generally ***'insufficient and the execution of such plans that had been made, was inadequate'***.

The need for ***'match specific'*** risk assessments, including pitch incursion plans for protection of match officials and players as well as prevention of confrontations between rival supporters cannot be overstated. It is recommended that 'match specific' plans and risk assessments are dated and signed to ensure it is validated for the match in question.

We can see the thinking of FA independent regulatory panels in these circumstances which act as a helpful guide to Clubs' development of match specific risk assessments, pitch incursion plans, operational planning and delivery of the plans. Clubs need to ensure they have the necessary safeguards in place, which will help provide some mitigation of the risks and support Clubs in preventing similar incidents towards the conclusion of the 2022/23 season.

If Clubs require further support, they can contact Mark Rowan, Communications Director, EFL, Bob Eastwood, Head of Security and Safety Operations EFL.

