

# The Introduction of Red Cards into Cricket: From Whites to Reds

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In recent weeks, we have considered a number of forthcoming, or potential, rule changes in football, including the planned introduction of [Video Assistant Referees](#) from the third round onwards of the 2017-2018 FA Cup and the possible introduction of [sin bins](#).

Without wishing to be outdone by their footballing counterparts, similar changes are afoot in cricket. Earlier this month, the Marylebone Cricket Club (“**MCC**”), announced that a [new code of laws](#) would come into effect from 1 October 2017, the first time this has occurred since 2000.

Some readers may, quite understandably, ask who or what the MCC is. The MCC is a cricket club which owns, and is based at, Lord’s cricket ground in North West London, commonly regarded as the spiritual home of cricket in England and Wales.

But the MCC also holds another important role, that of the custodian and copyright holder of the [Laws of Cricket](#) (the “**Laws**”), which set out the worldwide laws of the game. The Laws, which apply from the village green to the Test arena, outline all aspects of how cricket is played, ranging from how a team wins to how a batsman is dismissed.

And why does the MCC hold this important role, despite the fact that the International Cricket Council (“**ICC**”) is the global governing body? This is largely a legacy of the MCC’s former dual role as both the governing body of the worldwide game and cricket in England and Wales. Whilst many of its former functions as global governing body were transferred to the ICC [in 1993](#), the MCC did not relinquish control of its coveted role as custodian of the Laws.

## ***Changes to the Laws***

In order to address concerns that a private members club in London was acting as the sole arbiter of how a global game is played, the MCC established the [World Cricket Committee](#) (“**WCC**”) in April 2006. The WCC is an independent body, made up of current and former international cricketers and umpires from across the globe, who meet twice a year in order to discuss pertinent issues in the game and, where necessary, make recommendations to the main MCC Committee that new laws should be promulgated or that existing Laws should be amended.

In early December 2016, the WCC met in Dubai to discuss [a number of changes](#) to the Laws. These included:

- Limitations to the size of bats – with their edges to be limited to 40mm and bat depths to 67mm, in order address concerns that the balance of the game had tilted too far in favour of big-hitting batsman. In particular, the WCC stated that it wanted to “*draw a line in the sand and target mis-hits that are clearing the boundary ropes for six*”.
- Ball-tampering – the current law (which is encapsulated in Law 42.3(a) and has previously been considered in detail by Sports Sports) was sufficiently clear and that attempting to produce a definitive list of “banned substances” was likely to prove counterproductive should a substance be missed.
- Catches and stumpings – catches and stumpings that follow a ball striking a fielder’s worn helmet (rather than one that may be lying on the pitch) would be permitted, with the MCC noting that a ball rebounding off a fielder’s helmet may help or hinder the fielding side in equal measure.

### ***The introduction of sending-off into cricket***

However, the most headline grabbing law change [discussed](#) by the WCC was the introduction of a new disciplinary measure into the Laws, whereby umpires would be given the power to eject a player from a game for breaching [Law 42.2](#) (Fair and Unfair Play) and/or [Law 42.18](#) (which relates to Players’ Conduct), two of the more egregious disciplinary offences that a player can be found guilty of.

As of 1 October 2017, the following “levels” of offences and punishments will come into effect:

Level 1	Offence	Punishment
	– excessive appealing	Following an official warning, a second offence will result in five penalty runs being conceded
	– showing dissent at an umpire’s decision	
Level 2	– throwing the ball at a player	Five penalty runs being conceded
	– making deliberate physical contact with an opponent	
Level 3	– intimidating an umpire	Five penalty runs being conceded and the removal of the offending player for a set number of overs

	– threatening to assault another player, team official or spectator	
<b>Level 4</b>	– threatening an umpire  – any other act of violence on the field of play	The removal of the offending player for the remainder of the match

During its discussions, the WCC was particularly [mindful](#) of the fact that cricket is one of the few sports where there is currently no “in-game” mechanism by which an official (in cricket’s case, the umpire) can punish misbehaviour by players that they believe merits immediate disciplinary action and which runs counter to the “*Spirit of the Game*”.

The Spirit of the Game is set out in the [Preamble](#) to the Laws. Instead of being a black letter law that needs to be followed, it seeks to delineate the way in which players should conduct themselves on the cricket pitch. The Preamble provides guidance as to how players should act, with this “Spirit” exemplified by respecting opponents and umpires alike, refraining from using abusive language, and refraining from acts of violence, which is said to have “*no place...on the field of play*”. The Preamble notes that adherence to this Spirit gives cricket its “*unique appeal*”, stating that “*Any action which is seen to abuse this spirit causes injury to the game itself*”.

The captains of the competing teams currently bear responsibility for ensuring their players act in accordance with the Spirit of the Game. For example, if an umpire feels that a player is not complying with their instructions or is behaving in a manner which might bring the game into disrepute, the umpire would inform the captain of the offending player and ask them to take appropriate action. A captain may then choose to ask the misbehaving player to leave the field. However, given that there is no obligation for them to do so, the captain could choose to simply ignore the umpire, even if they face being castigated for a lack of “etiquette”. The misbehaving player would only then face retrospective disciplinary action for any in-game misdemeanours.

The WCC provided the extreme example of a batsman deliberating hitting a fielding member of the opposition. Should the captain fail to take action, in spite of any overtures from the umpire, the very same batsman could go on to score a century and win the match for their side, despite their violent conduct.

Consequently, the WCC felt it appropriate that the umpire be given the power to take immediate, unilateral action, just as a referee in football can immediately punish an act of violence perpetrated by a player against opponents or [teammates](#) alike.

### ***What led to the introduction of this new power?***

The debate regarding whether or not umpires should have the power to eject players has been [rumbling on](#) for a number of years.

Those against giving umpires the power to do so claim that it may [undermine the authority of umpires](#)

, that the introduction of yellow and red cards would go against the “traditions of the game” and believe that the umpires are strong enough to use their common sense to police the game, without stoking tensions between teams.

However, it is clear that the WCC did not agree and that umpires at lower, recreational levels of the game are in favour of the new law. The MCC’s decision appears to have been heavily influenced by the results of its [extensive global consultation](#), which highlighted the concerns in grass-roots cricket about the increasing levels of [player misconduct](#) and the adverse effect this was having on the availability and willingness of people willing to stand as umpires. Indeed, Australian legend Ricky Ponting (a [current member](#) of the WCC) made it clear that the new powers were being introduced to stamp out poor on-field behaviour at the lower levels of the game, [stating](#) that the “*reason we are talking about making significant changes to lower level cricket is because it has got completely out of hand down there... We have got to the stage that something had to be done to prevent these things happening*”.

Consequently, whilst the levels of offences make it clear that the WCC and MCC intend for yellow and red cards to only be used as a last resort, with captains still shouldering much of the responsibility to keep their charges under control, it seems that the custodians of the Laws do not wish to see cricket experience the kind of problems that have led to referees at the grassroots level in English football [threatening to strike](#) because of the verbal and physical attacks they regularly endure. After all, cricket is not only played out in the full glare of TV cameras in the Test and international arenas.

However, how would some past examples of poor behaviour be dealt with from 1 October 2017?

Should there be a repeat of the incident from the November 2013 Ashes Series, during which [Michael Clarke told James Anderson](#) to “*Face up. Get ready for a broken f\*cken arm*”, the player may be deemed to have threatened to assault his opponent. Should they deem it necessary, the umpire would then have the power to punish the offending player’s team by awarding five penalty runs to the opposition and/or removing the player for a set number of overs.

And, whilst examples are few and far between [at the professional level](#), should a player be deemed to have committed an act of violence, the umpire will be able to remove them from play for the remainder of the match. Given the nature of the longer form of the game, which consists of each side playing two innings, should a player be sent off during the first innings, this could leave their team at a significant disadvantage, having to play a significant portion of the match with one less fielder and batsman.

Once the new code of laws comes into effect on 1 October 2017, the cricketing fraternity will await news of the first “sending off” with bated breath. Whilst the player involved will no doubt gain infamy and pub quiz fame in equal measure.

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National Law Review, Volume VII, Number 80

Source URL: <https://natlawreview.com/article/introduction-red-cards-cricket-whites-to-reds>