



Social Media Policy



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1. Purpose

The purpose of this document is to provide information to Pascoe Vale Football Club (PVFC):

1. Clubs.
 2. Players.
 3. Coaches.
 4. Team Managers.
 5. Officials and Referees.
 6. Volunteers including parents, friends, and guardians; and
 7. Other football related groups (such as PVFC staff, Board Members and Members)
- (together, **Stakeholders**)

On the standards and expectations of the use of social media in relation to football in Victoria and what may occur if those standards and expectations are not met.

Pascoe Vale Football Club recognises that social media is an important part of the way Stakeholders communicate. PVFC actively encourages the use of social media to share their experiences in football.

PVFC recognises the importance of the internet to improve and increase the flow of information and to shape public thinking about our organisation, Stakeholders, and sponsors. However, PVFC's public reputation is valuable, and so are the reputations of Stakeholders. For that reason, any communication on social media that is defamatory, obscene, threatening, discriminatory, racist, or which is otherwise misrepresentative of PVFC, or Stakeholders is prohibited.

The aim of this Policy is to encourage all Stakeholders to be able to express their views on social media in a constructive way and free from harassment.

This Policy applies whenever any use of social media, including personal use, can be linked to PVFC or a Stakeholder's involvement in PVFC football activities.

Case Study

Vince is a passionate football fan, and he volunteers as an assistant manager for his local team.

Vince believes that every week the referees have it in for his club; they ignore clear infringements against his team but hand out penalties when one of his players does just the slightest infringement. Vince has had enough. He takes to Facebook, his Club's website, and a local football blog to complain. He posts that all Referees are corrupt, and he even names those he thinks are most responsible.

What next?

Online complaints to social media don't usually result in change. More often, they inflame situations causing further harm.

If Vince has genuine concerns, there are proper channels to lodge his complaint and get a response.

Vince's actions may result in him being charged for misconduct under the GDT and a ban being imposed on him. It may even result in legal action against him for defamation.

2. What is social media?

“Social Media” refers to websites and other applications that enable users to create and share content or participate in social networking.

Examples include professional networking sites, blog sites, forums, discussion boards, discussion groups, and personal websites. Well-known examples include Facebook, LinkedIn, Snapchat, YouTube, Instagram, and so on.

Social media provides football Stakeholders with opportunities to express their ideas. However, all Stakeholders need to use judgement about what type of material appears online and in what context. PVFC has a zero-tolerance approach to bullying and harassment. This applies to conduct on-field, off-field, and on social media.

Stakeholders are expected to maintain in the online environment the same standard of conduct and behaviour as required offline under the *Codes of Conduct*, various Rules, Regulations and By-Laws and any other obligations.

3. Online misconduct

3.1. The following actions or behaviours are prohibited online when linked to PVFC or a Stakeholder’s involvement in PVFC football activities:

- a) Bullying, harassing, or threatening social media posts.
- b) Discriminatory, racist, homophobic, or sexist language in social media posts.
- c) Impersonating or falsely representing any other person, including PVFC or another Stakeholder.
- d) The disclosure or use of information that is confidential to PVFC or its Stakeholders.
- e) Slanderous, defamatory, or libel comments about a Stakeholder, PVFC, a Club, or the PVFC Board or staff.
- f) Spreading false or malicious information about a Stakeholder, Club or PVFC.
- g) Improperly using PVFC’s trademarks or branding without authorisation; or
- h) Posting information that brings, or in PVFC’s reasonable opinion may be likely to bring, PVFC, football, a Club or the PVFC board, executive, or staff into disrepute, or otherwise adversely affect or in PVFC’s reasonable opinion may be likely to adversely affect the image or reputation of PVFC, football, a Club, or the PVFC board, executive, or staff.

(together, **Misconduct**)

3.2. Online correspondence directed toward a particular person or club that in isolation may not amount to Misconduct, may be considered harassment where it is consistent, constant, or continues after the person or club requests the correspondence cease.

3.3. Where PVFC becomes aware of Misconduct, PVFC may investigate and may:

- a) Request offending posts or materials are removed.

- b) Direct the maker of the comments to apologise or make a necessary public comment such as a correction, clarification, or contradiction.
- c) Report any breach of any law to any local authority or wronged party.
- d) Process Misconduct as per the provisions of the PVFC Grievance, Disciplinary and Tribunal By-Law (GDT); and/or
- e) Exercise any of its available rights at law.

Misconduct vs another point of view:

3.4. It is important to remember that:

- a) Social media misconduct is just that: *misconduct*. Sometimes, a person may post an unwelcome comment, but a comment does not automatically amount to social media misconduct just because you may not agree with it.
- b) Posting a different point of view, or airing displeasure at a decision, etc., may be unhelpful and unwanted to a club or another person, but PVFC will not get involved unless it amounts to *Misconduct* (as set out under clause 3.1 above).
- c) In football, as in society generally, it is important that people get a chance to have their say. PVFC in no way seeks to stop people from engaging in social media debates to share their opinions.
- d) PVFC will only step in where in its view, the engagement in social media amounts to *Misconduct*.

Case Study

Effie is a seniors team player for her local state-league club and coaches the club's Miniroos teams. She also runs her club's Facebook page.

One night on her personal Facebook page, Effie posts that a rival team gets more favourable treatment from a referee because the referee is bias, and the referee and other team are "all the same colour" and from "the same country back home".

PVFC writes to Effie and asks her to remove the posts. Effie refuses to do so saying that it is her opinion, and she can say whatever she likes. She says that PVFC has no business telling her what she can and can't say on her own Facebook page, as opposed to the club's page which she didn't use.

What next?

Where Effie's comments amount to misconduct, then that misconduct can be treated just like any other misconduct by PVFC.

It makes no difference if the misconduct is online or said in person. It also makes no difference if it is Effie's personal page or that of a club. It also will not necessarily matter if it is Effie's personal page, and such page is set to private.

Effie's comments likely amount to misconduct because they are slanderous, discriminatory, and racist in nature. PVFC may ask Effie to remove the comments and may also process the matter in accordance with the provisions of the GDT.

4. What to do if you suspect online misconduct

- 4.1. Any person who suspects online Misconduct has occurred should advise PVFC via telephone or email to:
 - a) Your Club Coordinator; or
 - b) The PVFC Legal and Regulatory Department.
- 4.2. Don't get involved in an online debate with the other person for all the world to see. That often just inflames the situation. Rather, report the matter to PVFC.
- 4.3. Take a photo or screenshot of the misconduct and provide it to PVFC to help with the investigation. This is important because people have the ability to delete postings, and without such images, sometimes it can be difficult for PVFC to proceed.
- 4.4. All suspected or actual breaches will be dealt with in accordance with the provisions of the GDT and any other Rules, Regulations, By-Laws, or contracts of employment as appropriate.
- 4.5. Additionally, PVFC may remove or request Clubs and/or individuals to remove any material where there is found to be a breach of this Policy.
- 4.6. If a matter is reported to PVFC, and it turns out that PVFC does not consider the matter amounts to Misconduct, PVFC can still request the material to be removed if it is offensive or embarrassing.
- 4.7. Provided that a report to PVFC is made in good faith and not out of malice, there is no penalty from PVFC for reporting suspected social media misconduct to PVFC, even if the matter doesn't end up being considered Misconduct.

5. Steps to consider

- 5.1. To avoid committing any actions or behaviours on social media that constitute misconduct, remember the following points when posting any information online:
 - a) Protect the privacy of others by not posting their private or personal information (for example, photographs, private addresses, and phone numbers) in any social media channel without permission.
 - b) Represent your own views only, and do not impersonate or falsely represent any other person.
 - c) Do not be abusive and do not harass or threaten others.
 - d) Do not make defamatory or libellous comments or use obscene or offensive language.
 - e) Do not post material that infringes the intellectual property rights of others. Make sure you are entitled to use images, photos, or trademarks before you use them.
 - f) If posting images of minors, obtain permission to do so. See the PVFC Video and Photography Guidelines for more information; and

- g) Do not make excessive postings on a particular issue, as posts which in isolation may not amount to Misconduct, may be considered harassment where they are consistent, constant, or continue after the person requests they cease.

5.2. In addition, PVFC staff, Board Members and Members must at all times remember to:

- a) Not promote commercial interests unrelated to, or in conflict with, the PVFC and its sponsors or partners in your posts to PVFC's social media channels.
- b) Not convey information that would allow a reasonable person to assume you are a spokesperson for PVFC or have access to confidential information as a result of employment with PVFC when you are not authorised to disclose the information.
- c) Not disparage, criticise, or show disrespect for any Stakeholder, and do not discriminate, harass, bully, or victimise any stakeholder or any other person.

5.3. PVFC staff must exercise considerable care in using social networking sites and be aware that making comments or conducting conversations that relate to PVFC or stakeholders can affect our reputation or business.

Case Study

Jimmi has just heard that his team has been drawn to play their fierce rivals in the FFA Cup draw. Jimmi is a FFV Zone Rep.

Jimmi jumps online to discuss the draw and his team's chances. Soon, the online conversation turns from friendly banter about the game and starts referencing the ethnic history of the teams and comments regarding the race of players.

Jimmi is upset that friendly banter has turned into racist comments. He doesn't support the comments, but he is reluctant to say anything to his friends as he doesn't want to be seen to be against them.

What next?

Jimmi should notify PVFC of the comments (ideally providing a screenshot of them if possible) and take down the posts if asked to do so. PVFC will assess the comments and determine whether any further action is needed. By cooperating with PVFC, Jimmi may avoid being personally held responsible for any racist remarks on his Facebook page.

As a Zone Rep, Jimmi has even greater responsibility for upholding the values of the game and ensuring online debate remains at an acceptable standard.

Racism and racist comments have no place in football.

6. Legislation

All Stakeholders should be aware that aside from PVFC policies and the Code of Conduct, communication online is subject to legislation as for other forms of communication. Australian citizens have been prosecuted for offensive, threatening, and inappropriate online activities.

More information can be found on the Australian Communications and Media Authority website at <http://www.cybersmart.gov.au>

More information

This Policy should be read and considered in accordance with the following:

- Code of Conduct Policy
- Staff Email and Internet Policy
- GDT
- PVFC Privacy Policy

For further information, please contact your Club Coordinator or the PVFC General Manager, Legal and Regulatory.