

Social Media Guidelines for Club and School Rugby in Scotland

A large number of us now use social media as a matter of course in our everyday lives; communicating with friends and family, organising events, building awareness of socio-cultural issues, promoting business, consuming news, creating fun and interesting content, and much more.

In sport, the advent of social media has allowed interaction between players, coaches, referees, parents, supporters, clubs, schools and governing bodies like never before.

With the growth of interaction via social media set to continue there is merit in providing some useful advice and guidance to ensure we all get the best value from its potential and avoid the associated pitfalls.

Why Use Social Media?

Success in the use of social media involves providing engaging content, building relationships with people and communities, conversing with people and sharing insights, offering value, and providing news and updates of interest to your communities.

The question ‘why use social media?’ is important; if the answer is to help promote the sport you love, raise its profile and engage with various rugby enthusiasts, then listed below are just some ideas of how social media could help:

- Promote activities and events e.g. training times, matches, coaching/refereeing courses, special events.
- Provide news and updates through the posting of traditional news reports, photos and video content.
- Enhance lines of communication within your organisation, leagues or other groups.
- Build a following for your organisation or an event, from your members, supporters, sponsors and the media.
- Provide insight into the lives of those involved in the game of rugby in Scotland.

The Challenges of Social Media

Conversely, there are as many challenges and potential pitfalls of using social media as there are opportunities.

The possibility of interacting with people that you’ve had little or no direct connection with is one of the key benefits of social media. Protecting privacy is the key challenge of social media and all users must have their eyes open to the risks. Children, youths and other vulnerable user groups are particularly at risk. Also, personal information is a valuable commodity these days and imposters may aim to access your social network to harvest data for their own personal gain.

Social media can also be misused through the posting of content or comments that are considered inappropriate, inflammatory, abusive, indecent or offensive. The speed at which

content can be shared via social media channels is a big opportunity, however it can also be very damaging if the content is viewed negatively. Even those that take time to understand and review privacy settings are at risk; any content posted to 'friends', 'followers' or 'connections' can still end up in other public domains.

There have been a number of high profile examples of this in a sporting context with content or comments being posted that bring the 'game into disrepute', often leading to disciplinary action due to a breach in the sport's rules and regulation.

Examples of Social Media 'Gone Wrong'

- Ashley Cole launches verbal tirade against the FA on Twitter, which is re-tweeted in the tens of thousands before being removed. Cole is fined and sanctioned by FA.
- Then Liverpool midfielder Ryan Babel is charged and fined by FA for posting a photo of referee Howard Webb in a Manchester Utd shirt following a match between the two clubs.
- Stephanie Rice, Australia's triple Olympic gold medal-winning swimmer, lost a sponsorship deal with luxury car maker Jaguar after making a homophobic remark on Twitter in relation to a rugby match.
- Hampshire cricket captain Dimitri Mascarenhas was fined £1,000 by his county after aiming his anger at England selector Geoff Miller on Twitter.
- The USA Cricket Association suspended executive secretary Kenwyn Williams and investigated his role in a protracted and angry exchange with journalists and stakeholders on the official USACA Facebook page.

Guidance for Your Social Media Communications

In light of the opportunities, and the potential pitfalls, of social media, it is worth considering a list of 'do's and don'ts'. Our advice to you as players and volunteers in the Scottish rugby community would be to follow the guidelines below. Each of us has a responsibility to promote the game in a positive way and to not engage in any social media activity that affects the game, a team or an individual negatively, whatever the circumstances or provocation. Ultimately, the most practical advice we've heard is 'if in doubt don't post'.

Dos

Do... Use common sense and show consideration and respect within everything you post.

Do... Know what image you want to present to the world - be authentic, natural, personable and insightful.

Do... Show your personality and express your point of view – relevant and interesting content will engage and draw attention for the right reasons.

Do... Stop and think about the potential impact of what you are saying before you post. Err on the side of caution – if in doubt, don't post it.

Do... Protect yourself and your privacy – remember what you publish might be available to be read by the masses for a long time.

Do... Understand that once you have posted content you lose control – your comments may be circulated to others without your permission.

Do... Report anything that concerns you to the relevant authority – we want to know when misuse of social media is bringing the game of rugby into disrepute.

Do... Remember it's not all about you – your actions may affect your club or school and the image of Scottish Rugby as a whole.

Do... Consider the timing of your post to ensure you gain maximum attention when promoting a specific event or activity.

Do... Post regular meaningful content – the more you interact the stronger your online presence and following will become.

Don'ts

Don't... Post content that discriminates against individuals or groups on the basis of age, disability, gender reassignment, marriage & civil partnership, pregnancy & maternity, race, religion or belief, sex, sexual orientation.

Don't... Post it if you wouldn't say it in a media interview, at a public event, to your grandmother or to a five-year-old child.

Don't... Post critical or abusive content about any rugby organisation, player, coach, match official or any other individual.

Don't... Engage in online disputes and don't allow family or friends to engage in conflict on your behalf.

Don't... Post privileged or confidential information that could harm your organisation or provide others with a competitive advantage.

Don't... Give out personal information or encourage a user to do so – sharing broad information is okay but don't talk specifics.

Don't... Assume anything you delete will completely disappear – you never know where your comment has been reposted.

Don't... Be impulsive when using social media – refrain from posting content when under stress or your judgement may be impaired in any way.

Don't... Post content if you are unsure of the accuracy/legitimacy of what you are saying.

Don't... Link to unsuitable content – being seen to promote anything that contravenes these guidelines is just as bad as creating the content yourself.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Scottish Hockey for their assistance and contribution to the development of these guidelines.

The social media guidelines circulated by the British Olympic Association in advance of London 2012 were also used to aid the development of the 'Dos and Don'ts' outlined above.