



Central Murray Football League

Report of the CMFL Board of Management Working Party

Review of Umpiring

October 2007



Central Murray Football League
PO Box 376
Swan Hill 3585

President: Tori Ficarra
Administrator: Howard Rosewarne

www.cmfl.org
admin@cmfl.org

Overview

The Working Party to *Review Umpiring* in the CMFL was initiated by the Central Murray Football League (CMFL) at a meeting of the Board in July 2007. The Review was to address the concerns of the CMFL Board and the Central Murray Umpires Association (CMUA) that umpire numbers were declining and it was becoming increasingly difficult to field umpires. Currently the CMUA only field central umpires in the colts, and centrals, boundaries and goals in the senior games in the CMFL. Shortages sometimes make it impossible to field a full compliment of boundary umpires in the senior games. All umpires in the reserves are club umpires and organised by the individual clubs.

The Working Party:

John Brookshaw	CMFL Board Member, CMUA Member
Mick McLean	CMFL Board Member
Mike Harper	Secretary CMUA
Garry McCaig	President CMUA
Anthony Buying, Marcus McCaig, Ron Thompson	CMUA Members

The Working Party conducted the review during July, August and September of 2007. A literature search located many sources of information relating to the areas we were investigating. These were used as reference and acknowledged where appropriate. The Working Party sought submissions from a mix of stakeholders, conducted interviews, analysed data, as well as researched similar concerns addressed by other football leagues and other sports. Although the time line was short, only three months, there was a sense of urgency to work with all stakeholder groups prior to the end of the 2007 season. This would provide the end-of-season time for the Board to discuss the report, further develop potential solutions and present their conclusions to the clubs at the CMFL Annual General Meeting in November. There was also an urgency to have some recommendations implemented in readiness for the 2008 season.

The Working Party invited written submissions from all stakeholders, through a survey (Appendix 6) and also conducted interviews with a substantial number of others. In all, over 150 people were contacted and over 60 provided the Working Party with detailed feedback (Appendix 13). Also, many personal interviews were conducted to clarify particular points and to expand on some issues from these surveys. These stakeholders included; club officials, coach's, past and present players and umpires, football identities, media representatives and regular football spectators. The quality feedback provided by these grass roots stakeholders indicates the feeling and passion people have for our national game and their desire to see it improve. Their individual feedback has not been identified, however those that chose to identify their surveys are acknowledged at the end of the report and the Working Party is grateful for the time and thought given to all submissions.

John Brookshaw

October 2007

Executive Summary

Conclusions

The Review revealed that there is a genuine concern from all groups in local football that abuse of umpires at venues, by spectators, club officials and players was discouraging people from taking up umpiring, as well as detracting from a family environment. Officiating in a poor working environment is one of the main deterrents to recruiting umpires. To improve the sporting environment for umpires and families, the CMFL must provide the leadership to its clubs, their members and spectators, as a precondition for attracting and retaining potential umpires.

The perceived lack of communication between the CMFL and the CMUA was a concern to the umpires. The insular and inward looking culture of the umpires association was a concern for many stakeholders, including umpires. An improved management and governance model for the CMUA which includes closer ties to the CMFL could potentially eliminate these two concerns, as well as, build a capacity for long term strategic planning and improvement.

This review also makes a strong recommendation that the CMUA review its current quality management programme to include; regular formal and informal feedback to umpires, including feedback from clubs, a formal mentoring programme for all new umpires, additional promotion of the AFL accreditation programme within the umpiring fraternity, and an open, transparent and inclusive performance management system.

The Working Party submits the following recommendations based on our findings:

Recommendations

1. **The CMFL Board develop strategies which ensure clubs, their players, officials, members and spectators adhere to the Code of Conduct.**

The Codes of Conduct introduced in 2007 was an initial step promoting improved behaviour at venues, however there are limited consequences if a club or person fails to adhere to the Codes. Leadership from the CMFL Board is needed to assist clubs and the umpires to develop a zero tolerance regime. Two such strategies, which should be further investigated, is a Ground Manager role, responsible for behaviour of people at the ground. This person has the power to expel patrons from the ground, report poor behaviour of club officials to the CMFL who can then impose sanctions. The second is to introduce a set of penalties for failing to follow the Codes of Conduct. (Code of Conduct Penalties Appendix 9) Implementation across all clubs would substantially improve spectator behaviour and make football matches more family friendly. (See Appendix 9: Suggested Course of Action to Reduce the Abuse of Umpires) The Bendigo FL, Heathcote and District FL and the Loddon Valley FL have implemented these initiatives with some success.

References:

- *Research into Spectator Behaviour, Final Report to Sport & Recreation Victoria, March 2005, LaTrobe University (See Appendix 2, for Recommendations)*
- *Spectator Behaviour Project, Legal Jurisdiction Paper, Sports Federation of Australia March 2005.*
- *NRL Codes of Conduct Penalties (Appendix 4)*
- *AFL Kids First Code of Conduct Breaches (Appendix 5)*
- *CMUA Code of Conduct (Appendix 6)*

2. **The Working Party recommends that the CMUA establish an independent Board of Management to govern and manage the Central Murray Umpires Association.**
This would improve the governance and management of the CMUA and strengthen links between the CMUA and the CMFL. (Provided two CMFL Board members were appointed to the CMUA Board) Minimal changes would be needed to by-laws and constitutions. The CMUA Board would also provide the umpiring fraternity with an additional structure which would have the expertise and experience to develop and implement forward looking strategies without the burden of the daily management of the organization.

3. **The CMUA, with the support of the CMFL establish, for the 2008 season, a structure for providing all umpires with regular formal and informal feedback, as well as supporting their training as peer observers and developing the skills to “give and receive’ feedback.**
It is essential that all umpires, as part of their development and growth, receive both formal and informal feedback from a variety of sources. To accomplish this effectively a framework needs to be developed and implemented as well as the umpires trained in giving and receiving feedback. Initially a small group could be trained to do this and in time make the feedback process, part of every umpire’s role. (See 360° feedback, Appendix 10)

4. **The CMFL Board introduce a by-law which complements the Laws of Australian Football and encourages the umpire to award free kicks for the misbehaviour of club officials or spectators in proximity of the coach’s box.**
*Under Rule 15.5(a) – (e); “A free kick is to be awarded against a player or official who: (a) uses abusive, insulting, threatening or obscene language towards an umpire, (b) ...
This recommendation is asking that the rule 15.5 is expanded to include officials “and/or spectators in proximity of the coach’s box”. Umpires are encouraged to give a free kick first to enable the offenders to correct their behaviour, however if the abuse continues, then a free kick and a report against the club will follow. This rule only relates to spectators that are in the vicinity of the coach’s box and does not cover spectators around the ground. This does not indicate that spectator control should become the role of the umpire. The umpire’s role in dealing with the game and on-field behaviour is difficult enough without the additional responsibility of policing spectator behaviour as well. This should be read in conjunction with the recommendation relating to “Names on Team Sheets”. (See below)*

5. **The CMFL Board introduce a by-law which insists that any player or club official, who is on the ground and acting in some capacity for the team, is listed on the team sheet and situated well back from the edge of the playing surface.**
There were numerous examples of club officials (selectors, team managers etc) sitting in the coach’s box or standing on the edge of the boundary, issuing instructions to on-field players who were not mentioned on the team sheet. This proposal recommends the team sheet to include any player or club official intending to take part in the game (that is seated in or near the coach’s box) and inside the fence to be named on the team sheet, as well as, being sighted well back from the boundary line and preferably seated in the coach’s box.

6. **The CMFL establish a Tribunal Prosecutor position, who can manage the case against charged players before the Independent Tribunal.**
This proposed role change immediately disassociates the umpires from being the “prosecutors”. It helps prevent the “umpires versus the clubs” attitude in the Tribunal. This common perception voiced by clubs is a source of frustration with umpires. After the umpire, or any others, have appeared as witnesses, and been examined and cross-examined, they leave the Tribunal and go home. This avoids any issues at the end of the Tribunal and also distances the umpires from the final result. They appear only as a witness, as does the offended player. The “Tribunal Prosecutor” manages the case of the umpire and the offended player against the charged player/s or club. This would allow the umpire’s advocate to liaise with the Tribunal Secretary to organise suitable tribunal times, organise witnesses, prepare umpires and assist with written statements. (Appendix 8: Suggested Running Sheet for the Independent Tribunal. Appendix 11: Proposed Prosecutor Job Description)

7. **The Working Party recommends that the CMFL Board enter negotiations with the CMUA to develop a pay scale and performance package which better reflects the responsibility of the role and provides a lucrative attraction for potential senior umpires.**
Improved pay for senior panel members is at the core of attracting umpires. An increase in pay without the appropriate performance accountability through feedback, assessment and increased productivity is gratuitous. The CMFL would need to be assured there is sufficient potential senior panel numbers to allow competition for the places and therefore ongoing continuous improvement in performance. The starting point should be the model developed by the Working Party and the preconditions that are needed for its implementation. (See Senior Panel Pay Scale Model Appendix 12)
8. **The CMFL Board implement strategies which include and recognize the umpires in the celebrations of the CMFL.**
The CMUA feel they are traditionally overlooked when CMFL celebrations take place. They would like to be included and special mention made of their participation when appropriate. In this way their contribution to football and the CMFL is recognised and acknowledged. For example; being included in the B & F vote count by recognising the umpires who will be officiating at the Grand Final, similarly for the interleague players' night, the CMFL could make a uniform presentation to the umpires who have been chosen to represent the CMFL.
9. **The CMFL Board schedule a meeting of coach's, interested club officials and umpire representatives prior to the commencement of the season.**
The Board currently encourages clubs to invite umpires to address their players about new rules and interpretation of rules. This is largely unsuccessful at the beginning of the season. Perhaps a more proactive solution would be for the CMFL to organize two meetings between coach's, clubs and umpires. (One in Kerang and one in Nyah) Attendance by the clubs, at one meeting would be compulsory. The umpires would introduce the new rules and the consequent interpretation, go through any other business and sell the message that umpires would be happy to address clubs and players during the season.
10. **The CMFL establish, as soon as possible, a process for mediating disputes between clubs and/or players and umpires. The mediation to be chaired by a Board member and where possible the appropriate training provided to the Chair.**
This would provide clubs and their players with a conciliatory forum to discuss issues with umpires without the need to escalate their concerns to a formal complaint. If the CMUA establish a Board of Management, this process could be potentially managed by the CMUA Board.
11. **The CMFL establishes a promotional fund which would be used by umpires to travel to clubs to conduct training sessions with players, prior to and during the season.**
This proposed fund would be used to compensate umpires for their travel to the football clubs. The coaching sessions would be used to initially communicate rule changes prior to the season, as well as, during the season to better help players understand interpretations of rules, train club umpires and forge better relationships between umpires and players. Some funds are available for the VCFL/AFL and these will need to be sourced.
12. **The CMFL make a commitment to support the CMUA in developing a medium term strategy to improve their rooms and training facilities.**
The headquarters of the CMUA is a shared facility and is not meeting the training needs of the umpires. It is badly in need of refurbishment and is not a positive advertisement for potential umpire recruits. If the CMFL are really committed to marketing umpiring as a hobby and sport then we need to collectively improve the environment in which they train and socialize. There are football & netball facilities grants available, if the submission is supported by the CMFL and the Rural City Council. This recommendation is asking the CMFL to make an in-principle commitment to support the redevelopment of the Umpires Rooms, acting as a broker between all of the interested stakeholders (CMUA, RSL Cricket Club, Swan Hill Rural City Council and Swan Hill College) and where appropriate support the development of a submission to upgrade the Umpires Rooms.

13. **The CMFL make it mandatory for each club to provide the name of one club member, each year, willing to be trained and coached to achieve their Level 1 Umpiring Accreditation. This process to continue for three years until each club has three accredited umpires and these numbers be maintained into the future.**

Clubs are keen to retain their recently retired senior players and this strategy would increase umpiring numbers, as well as, maintain these volunteers in their clubs. The club umpires could be used in tandem with CMUA umpires for Colts and U15s. As they became experienced and willing they could progress to the senior panel. The quality of reserves umpires would also improve and lead to all reserves games being officiated by qualified umpires. The training would be where possible conducted by the CMUA at their clubs or nearby. The club umpires would also be expected to officiate in at least 6 neutral games per year. These would be scheduled where possible in close proximity to their home club. In the long term each club would have a cohort of trained and experienced umpires who were capable of further training of potential umpires or training of players on the rules and interpretations in their own clubs.

14. **The CMUA with the support of the CMFL develop a comprehensive marketing plan, aimed at marketing umpiring as a positive part of football.**

To increase and retain umpires requires a well thought through long term plan. No "silver bullet" solution which has been tried in the past will provide a long term fix. The Marketing Plan would be a working document which could be started from the data collected in this report. The plan would provide the CMUA with a set of goals, costed strategies and a "road map" to follow.

15. **The CMFL implement initiatives which allow the Central Murray Umpires Association to participate in mentoring umpires in the junior competition.**

Current scheduling and lack of sufficient umpiring numbers prevent experienced umpires from mentoring novice umpires in junior games. These junior games are more suited for training younger student umpires. Having two separate football competitions, a junior and a senior, is a hurdle to implementing further umpire training initiatives. The ideal situation is where umpires receive their training in junior matches and when assessed as ready can more easily make the transition to senior games.

16. **The CMFL encourage clubs through the Club Excellence Awards or by other means to improve the club environment for umpires. (E.g., tidy, clean and warm umpires change rooms, with the basic essentials received by players, including access to drinks during and after games.)**

Some clubs do an excellent job in looking after the umpires; providing heated rooms with carpets, afternoon tea, water and assorted electrolytic drinks after the game. The CMFL should include these amenities in their Club Excellence Awards or find another alternative which encourages clubs to take care of the umpires officiating at their game, with services at least equal to their own players.