Tribunal Advocates Handbook – 2026

Frankston & District Junior Football League

Mornington Peninsula Junior Football League

South East Juniors

OVERVIEW

This handbook has been drafted for use by club players, officials and executives in preparation for an South East Region tribunal hearing. The purpose of this handbook is to provide clarity on the standard reporting process and how the tribunal operates, as well as the role and expectations of an advocate during a hearing - inclusive of how to address a player, official, or umpire when asking questions.

SOUTH EAST REGION REPORTS

Reporting Procedure

The standard administrative reporting process consists of the following:

1. A report form is completed and submitted by the officiating umpire.
2. A Notice of report is distributed to the relevant club/s.
3. Clubs may choose to accept an early guilty plea (EGP), or contest the report at tribunal: [1]
    a. If an EGP is accepted within 24 hours after receiving the Notice of Report, the player's profile is updated with the EGP sanction.
    b. If the club communicates their intention to contest the charge at tribunal, and an EGP has not previously been accepted within the 24-hour timeframe, a Notice of Tribunal is then sent to all parties.
4. All tribunal outcomes are formally communicated to all relevant clubs the following day after receiving a decision.[2]

Club Responsibilities

For any relevant report that a club is involved in, it is the responsibility of that club to communicate to the South East Region Administrative Body their intentions to either accept an EGP or contest the charge at Tribunal. Unless otherwise specified, this must be communicated to the South East Region Administrative Body within 24 hours of receiving the Notice of Report. Furthermore, should a tribunal case be set, each club must notify any of the relevant player(s), official(s), witness', and/or advocate of the need to attend a hearing during the set date and time. If a zoom link is required for any attendee, this must also be communicated to the South East Region Administrative Body, in order to provide adequate time to set this up.

THE SOUTH EAST REGION TRIBUNAL

Attendance

The following relevant persons must attend a the South East Region Tribunal hearing at the set date, time and place:

- The charged Person and their advocate.
- The offended person and their advocate (if applicable).
- The reporting umpire/s and their advocate

[1] See National Community Football Policy Handbook ('the Handbook') at paragraphs 22.4, 23.5, 25.4(a)(vi), Appendix 1 (Tables 2, 6, 8) and Section 7 for further information. [2] Handbook, [25.4].

- Any other Football Official, Player, parent, or guardian of a player if requested to do so by the South East Region Administrative Body, a Disciplinary Officer, or the Tribunal Panel.
- Any person nominated or permitted to give evidence.[2]
- A Disciplinary Officer nominated by the South East Region Administrative Body.[3]

Players or officials charged with an offence MUST attend the Independent Tribunal hearing. Where a player or official cannot attend, and where approved by the South East Region Administrative Body and the Tribunal panel, a player, official, witness or umpire may deliver evidence via telephone or video conferencing.

Those who cannot attend by any means MUST inform the South East Region Administrative Body at the earliest opportunity with a valid reason for not attending.[4]

A sitting Tribunal is permitted to issue a monetary fine for any non-appearance at the tribunal for club advocates and players (per offence).[5]

Process

A tribunal hearing is an inquisitorial process. This means the tribunal members will act as questioners to determine the truth. The panel will usually hear evidence from each party and their witnesses in the following order:

- The reporting umpire and their advocate, or the investigation officer (if applicable)
- The offended player/official and their advocate, if applicable
- The charged player/official and their advocate

Note: Each party will have an opportunity to cross-examine one another. Please wait for the tribunal panel's directions to do so, the tribunal will direct each party when they may commence questioning.

Once all evidence is presented and no party has any further questions to ask, the tribunal panel will direct everyone to leave the room whilst they deliberate (come to a decision, by way of a guilty or not guilty verdict).

Onus of proof

At a tribunal hearing, no person, or party, shall bear an onus on establishing that an alleged *Reportable Offence* or *Policy Breach* has been committed.[6] This means that no one person or party is required to

[2] Handbook, [25.3(e)].

[3] Handbook, [24(a)].

[4] Providing the South East Region Administrative Body with notification of non-attendance does not make a person/club exempt from a tribunal panel's determination, or any relevant fine they may hand down for non-attendance. The case may also be adjourned, or the tribunal panel may hear the case as they see fit in that person's absence.

[5] South East Region, Junior Competition By-Laws (Version 2026 1.01), Appendix A – Fines Schedule.

[6] 5(3)(i)].

prove guilt or innocence regarding the charge. All evidence will be considered by the tribunal panel, and a decision will be made based on that evidence.

Standard of proof

A tribunal panel is required to make its decision, on whether a reportable offence has been committed on the balance of probabilities.[7] This means that the Tribunal will consider whether one case is more plausible than the other and that the case is backed up by the evidence that has been brought before the panel. In its simplest form, where the panel deems that one version of events is 51% more likely than the other version, then the requisite standard of proof of balance of probabilities is met.
With respect of a policy breach, the standard is whether the breach has been committed to its comfortable satisfaction.[8]

<u>During deliberation:</u>

- If the charged person pleaded "not guilty" to start, the panel will first need to decide if they believe the person is guilty or not guilty based only on the evidence presented before the tribunal panel.
- If the charged person pleaded "guilty" to start, the tribunal panel will decide on an appropriate sanction.
    - Note: Where the charged person is guilty, the Tribunal will ask that person's advocate to deliver a character reference. This might include details on playing history, club behaviour, volunteer work, suspension history, or life outside football (if known). The panel will take this into account before deciding on an appropriate sanction Where deemed appropriate, the player may also provide their own character reference.

The South East Region Tribunal is an informal hearing designed to give all parties a fair opportunity to present their case. The hearing will be conducted with as little formality and technicality and as much expediation as proper consideration of the matter and facts permit.[9]

However, this does not mean that clubs should not prepare accordingly. An advocate should always intend to defend their player or official confidently, with proper evidence and procedure. You will need to know your case, inside and out. Preparation is critical to conduct your case effectively, with simplicity and persuasion.

[7] Handbook, [25(3)(h)(i)].
[8] Handbook, [25(3)(h)(ii)].
[9] Handbook, [25(3)(d)(i)(B)].

Evidence

Given the South East Region tribunal is informal in nature, the rules of evidence found in a legal court of law do not apply at this level.[10] This means the tribunal panel is able to inform itself as to any matter in any such matter it determines during the hearing.

Importantly though, advanced notice is required by the South East Region Administrative Body if either party wishes to adduce any video or physical evidence during the hearing. A party seeking to use such evidence MUST email the South East Region Administrative Body with the attached video or physical evidence by 10:00am the day after the Notice of breach is received.

Any Video Evidence of an incident may be shown at Tribunal, as long as the panel believes the video is unedited and it clearly helps to determine the guilt or innocence of a party or group.

Written statements can also be submitted as evidence. However, it's important to note that written statements cannot be directly questioned, therefore, they provide little to no tangible evidence compared to a witness attending in person. If a statement were to be provided, it is the Tribunals expectation that the author should attend to be questioned on their statement.

THE ROLE OF AN ADVOCATE AT TRIBUNAL

The Right to be Appropriately Represented

Any person appearing before the Independent Tribunal has the right to be represented by an advocate. This includes both the charged and offended person/s, as well as the officiating umpire.

- A charged/offended player or official who is under the age of 18 years, MUST be represented by an advocate, as well as have a parent or guardian present to observe the hearing.
- A charged/offended player or official who is over the age of 18 can either be represented by an advocate, or may choose to represent themselves.[11]

What is an Advocate

An Advocate is a person who volunteers to support, ask questions and speak on behalf of a player or official during a tribunal hearing. An advocate's main role is to present their player/official's case to the tribunal panel and argue the points that support their claim. In doing so, the advocate will usually also question the opposition party about the facts of the case, test the other parties credibility and clarify anything that may be confusing or conflicting in the opposition's side of the story.

What can an Advocate do?

During the tribunal, an advocate may perform a number of tasks, including but not limited to:

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[10] 5(3)(d)(ii)].

[11] 5(3)(b)(ii)].

- Asking their player/official questions regarding their own recount of the incident.
- Listening to the opposition's evidence and taking notes to rebut or challenge this.
- Cross-examining the opposition player, official, umpire, or any relevant witness/es on their perception of the incident.
    - Note: You should generally only ask "Yes or No" questions when cross-examining the opposition. This allows you to control which topics of the witnesses evidence are tested.
- Presenting relevant documents (e.g., medical certificates or statements) and other physical evidence to the tribunal panel.
- Calling upon their own witnesses to deliver verbal recounts of the incident.

Communicating to your player/official

As an advocate representing a player/official, it's important to check in with your player/official and communicate anything they may wish for you to say on their behalf. For example, you may:

- Speak to your player/official to make sure they are understanding the tribunal process.
- Ask if the player/official has any questions around the evidence that has been presented.
- Ask the player/official specific questions to clarify their own recount of the incident, especially if this is unclear the first time around.
- Provide advice to the player/official on displaying proper behaviour during the hearing.
- Calm the player/official or ask for a quick break if they look agitated or unhappy during the hearing.

Who can be an advocate?

Advocates must not be a current Solicitor or Barrister, or involved in any other relevant legal profession. They must also not be a parent or legal guardian of the player/official.

Usually, an advocate will be someone who has known the player/official well throughout their football career and can defend their actions. This could be a member of the Club's executive committee (e.g., President, Secretary, Registrar, etc.), or a long-time Coach.

Ideally, an advocate will thoroughly understand the tribunal procedure and will guide their player/official and relevant witnesses through the process. They must be prepared to deliver the player/official's case and raise any issues and evidence relevant to the incident.

It's important to note that a person cannot be an advocate and a witness at the same time. If you saw the incident on the day and wish to deliver a recount as a witness, you cannot be an advocate for the same case.

- For instance, a Coach who was performing their role on the day may have seen the on-field incident from the coach's box. They may know the player involved very well and may believe that they can defend this player appropriately. The coach can choose to:
    - ○ Act as an advocate and defend the player by presenting the case in full, or ○ Act as a witness to the incident and only deliver a statement of what they saw.

Advice for Advocates

- Come to the hearing with a desired outcome, and evidence that may help achieve this outcome. This includes knowing whether to plead "guilty" or "not guilty":
    - Not Guilty – The charged person is pleading that nothing happened, the witnesses/umpire are mistaken in what they say occurred and that the charge is false.
    - Guilty – The charged person is pleading that they did in fact commit an offence, but:
        - The charge is incorrect (i.e., it should be rough conduct, not striking), OR,
        - The grading is wrong and should be downgraded (i.e., low impact, not high impact).
        - Classifications are seen at Appendix 1.[12]
- Deliver your case in a coherent, consistent, and credible way. Where possible, refer directly to league rules and have copies of these to hand to the tribunal panel.
- Take notes throughout the hearing – you might use these notes later to formulate questions.

- **Some Tips for Cross-Examination include:**
    - Remember to ask short, yes or no questions (ask about a point you are trying to clarify with the witness, and finish with 'is that correct?').
    - Try not to repeat the same line of questioning just to make a point.

- **Some Tips for Summing-Up include:**

    ○ Clearly explain the key points of your case (e.g., why your player is not guilty, or why your player is requesting a downgrade.
    - Use evidence to support your view, (e.g., reiterate something from the video footage, or refer to an inconsistency in the oppositions story).
    - Try to avoid talking about your players good record, football career, or playing history. The panel will ask for this at the very end.

Advice for Charged and Offended Players/Officials

As a player or official, you should:

1. Tell the truth. Recount the incident as it happened.

[12] Handbook, pg. 109 – 130.

2. If you genuinely can't remember what happened, then say so.
3. Speak in a loud and confident manner when giving your recount.
4. Stay relaxed, calm and collected. The panel will only ask questions for clarification.
5. If you need a quick break, this is okay, just ask.

BEFORE THE HEARING

Clarifying details about the case

Before attending the tribunal, you should make an effort to contact your player/official and discuss possible defences to your case.

- For example, you should try to run through the events that happened, who was involved, and where and why the incident occurred. Try to uncover any conflicting or confusing details. You might form questions for the opposition surrounding these details.

Some details to clarify might be:

- Where was your player on the ground? How far away were they from the ball?
- What did they see, if anything?

- If they made contact with someone, where exactly did they hit? Was the contact intentional or accidental?
- Regarding verbal offences, what exactly was said by your player, and/or what did they hear others say?
- Was play stopped?
- Was your player provoked?
- Was there an umpire involved? Did you see where they were during the incident? - How did your teammates react to the incident?

Asking these questions can help to cement answers before the hearing, so no surprises or instances of confusion occur.

As a side note, it's also important to establish a plea of "guilty or "not guilty" before coming into the hearing, as this will form the basis of your case.

AFTER THE HEARING

Appeal of Tribunal Decision (WorkSafe AFL Victoria Country Rules - Section 8.2)

If a club wishes to lodge an appeal following a tribunal decision, this can be done via the below instructions (as per the WorkSafe AFL Victoria Country Rules).

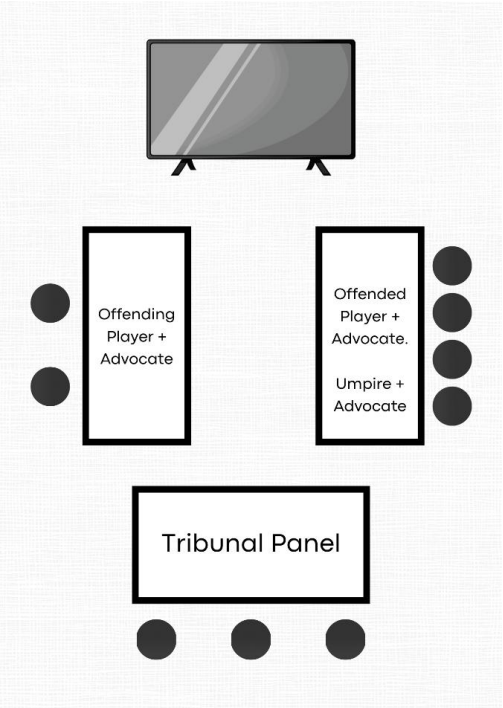
8.2.2 - An appeal under Regulation 8.2 shall be brought by lodging with AFL Victoria Community Football Operations Manager a duly completed "AFL Victoria Country Notice of Appeal" in or substantially in the form prescribed, accompanied by:

a) *any documents initially provided to the relevant body whose decision is the subject of the appeal; and*
b) *payment or evidence of payment to AFL Victoria Country of the sum of $**5500 for Senior clubs**/ organisations and for **Junior clubs/organisations a sum of $2750** for costs of the appeal, which sum shall be dealt with in accordance with section 26.4(d)&(e) of the National Community Football Policy Handbook.*

*8.2.3 - An AFL Victoria Country Notice of Appeal shall be lodged with the AFL Victoria Community Football Operations Manager, which must be received **by no later than 5.00pm on the day following the decision of the relevant body was made**. Only the charged person or organisation, subject to the decision of a League Independent Tribunal, may appeal to AFL Victoria Country Appeal Panel in respect of a decision made by a League Independent Tribunal on one or more of the following grounds:*

i. the decision involved an error of law that had a material impact on the Tribunal's decision;
ii. the decision was so unreasonable that no Tribunal acting reasonably could have come to that decision having regard to the evidence before it;
iii. the classification of the Reportable Offence or Policy Breach or other conduct (as applicable) was manifestly excessive or inadequate; or
iv. that the sanction imposed was manifestly excessive or inadequate

Layout of the Tribunal Room



Grading Matrix

Table 2 – Classification Table

Conduct	Impact	Contact	Base Sanction	Early Guilty Plea
Intentional	Severe	High/Groin/Chest	5 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	N/A
		Body	4 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	N/A
	High	High/Groin/Chest	4 Matches	3 Matches
		Body	3 Matches	2 Matches
	Medium	High/Groin/Chest	3 Matches	2 Matches
		Body	2 Matches	1 Match
	Low	High/Groin/Chest	2 Matches	1 Match
		Body	1 Match	Fine and/or Reprimand
Careless	Severe	High/Groin/Chest	4 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	N/A
		Body	3 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	N/A
	High	High/Groin/Chest	3 Matches	2 Matches
		Body	2 Matches	1 Match
	Medium	High/Groin/Chest	2 Matches	1 Match
		Body	1 Match	Fine and/or Reprimand
	Low	High/Groin/Chest	1 Match	Fine and/or Reprimand
		Body	1 Match	Fine and/or Reprimand

*Refer to Clause 2(h)(vi) of Appendix 1

Table 8 – Auditory Classification Table

Receiver	Conduct	Volume	Base Sanction	Early Guilty Plea
Umpire	Threatening	Any	6 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	5
	High-level	Loud	5	4
		Medium or Low	4	3
	Medium / Low-level	Loud	3	2
		Medium or Low	2	1
Other Person	Threatening	Loud	4 or more Matches (Tribunal)*	3
		Medium or Low	3	2
	High-level	Loud	3	2
		Medium or Low	2	1
	Medium / Low-level	Loud	2	1
		Medium or Low	1	Reprimand