

NSW RUGBY LEAGUE

Community Competitions — Regional Sydney

MELEE ESCALATION POLICY

Frequently Asked Questions & Real-Life Scenarios

This FAQ is designed to help Clubs, Coaches, Team Officials, parents and Players understand how the Melee Escalation and Associated Crowd Invasion Policy works in practice. It uses real-life game-day scenarios to show what does — and does not — trigger a breach. This FAQ is a guide only and does not replace the Policy itself. In any conflict, the Policy and the NSWRL Community Rugby League Policies and Procedures Manual prevail.

Part 1 — The Basics

Q. What is a melee under this Policy?

A. A melee is any on-field altercation, brawl, fight or physical confrontation involving any level of violence or foul play — by one or more participants. It does not need to be a big brawl. Two players exchanging a single punch is enough.

Q. What is the “Initial Incident”?

A. The Initial Incident is the very first act of violence or foul play that starts the melee. The Players directly engaged at the moment the Referee blows the whistle to intervene are the only ones who are part of the Initial Incident. Everyone else — on the field or on the bench — **MUST** stay out.

Q. If my Player is just trying to break it up, is that allowed?

A. No. This is the most important rule to understand. The Policy says **engagement, not intention, is the test**. A Player who walks, jogs or runs toward a melee — even to separate teammates, restrain a player or act as a peacemaker — is in breach.

The reason is simple: the Match Officials cannot tell who is a peacemaker and who is joining in. The only safe behaviour is to step back and let the Referees manage the situation.

Q. What if a Player is just standing nearby?

A. If a Player has moved from their position toward the Incident, that counts as Engagement — even if they don’t throw a punch. Passive presence in the vicinity, once a player has moved, is enough to breach the Policy.

Q. Who is responsible for de-escalating?

A. Match Officials — and only Match Officials. Coaches, trainers and team staff must not enter the melee. Players who are not part of the Initial Incident must immediately retreat. Clubs are reminded that suspended players and unaccredited team staff must never enter the playing area under any circumstances.

Part 2 — Who Gets Sanctioned

Q. Does only the player get penalised, or the whole team?

A. Both. The individual Player who breaches the Policy is charged separately under the existing NRL Offences Index (for example, Charge 15.1.i — “Coming from a distance to become involved in a fight”, minimum 5 matches). The team also receives an Adjudicated Breach Notice with a minimum 1-match team stand-down. The two penalties are in addition to each other, not instead of each other.

Q. My Coach was on the sideline, then entered the field — does this still apply?

A. Yes. The Policy applies to Players AND Team Officials. A Coach, Team Manager or Trainer who runs onto the field to join or break up a melee is in breach in the same way a Player is. Coaches in particular are reminded that under this Policy they too must not enter a melee to separate Players.

Q. What does “team stand-down” actually mean?

A. It means your team forfeits its next scheduled fixture. The opposition is awarded 3 competition points and +29 points for. Your team receives 0 points and -29 against. It is recorded under By-Laws Section 2.1 as a Loss on Forfeit.

Q. Can the team appeal an Adjudicated Breach Notice?

A. If the Club accepts the breach, no — the matter is concluded. If the Club pleads not guilty, the matter goes to an NSWRL Tribunal Hearing. A Club Executive member AND the Coach of the Team involved are both required to attend the hearing. If either fails to attend, the Tribunal proceeds in their absence and the breach is deemed accepted. If the not-guilty plea is unsuccessful, the team may receive an additional one-match penalty on top of the base penalty. Once a Tribunal hearing has determined the outcome, there is NO further avenue of Appeal.

Part 3 — Real-Life Scenarios

Scenario 1 — The Peacemaker

What happened:

During an Under 15s game, two opposition players exchange punches after a tackle. A third player from your team — known by the Coach as a calm, steady kid — jogs in from 15 metres to stand between them. He doesn't throw a punch. He just stands there with his hands up.

Q. Is the team in breach?

A. Yes. The third player engaged the Initial Incident by moving toward it. His intention (to be a peacemaker) is not a defence — the Policy is clear that engagement is the test, not intention.

Outcome:

Tier 1 Adjudicated Breach Notice issued to your team. Minimum 1-match team stand-down. The third player is also charged individually under NRL Offences Index 15.1.i (Coming from a distance) — minimum 5 matches as an individual.

Scenario 2 — The Bench Empties

What happened:

During an Under 17s match. After a heavy tackle, two players grapple. Four players from the bench of one team run onto the field. Two of these bench players grapple with opposition players, one drags a teammate away, and one acts only as a peacemaker.

Q. All four are in breach, including the peacemaker?

A. Yes. All four left the bench area to engage the Incident. The “peacemaker” defence is not accepted under this Policy. Each of the four is individually charged under 15.1.i and any other offences that apply.

Outcome:

Tier 2 Adjudicated Breach Notice issued to the team — 2 to 3 match team stand-down PLUS \$1,000 Club bond for the remainder of the season. All four players individually charged.

Scenario 3 — Parents on the Field

What happened:

During the Tier 2 melee from Scenario 2, two parents from the home Club’s supporters jump the rope and run onto the field. The Ground Manager identifies one parent. The Club refuses to identify the second parent.

Q. What happens to the Club?

A. This is a Tier 3 Associated Crowd Invasion on top of the Tier 2 melee. The Club is jointly responsible for the conduct of its supporters. The team forfeits the match (per P&P Section 5.4 Rule 14). The identified spectator is banned 12 months minimum. The team is suspended from competition until the second spectator is identified. The Club is fined \$1,000 and placed on a \$2,000 team bond, with further competition points deductions at NSWRL’s discretion.

Scenario 4 — Stay In Position

What happened:

Same Under 17s match as Scenario 2. After the tackle, two players grapple. Your entire team holds position — they don’t move from where they were, they don’t move toward the incident, they let the Match Officials handle it. The Referee sin-bins both players involved.

Q. Are we in breach?

A. No. Your team did exactly what the Policy requires. The two players involved in the Initial Incident are individually charged (they exchanged punches and were sent off), but the team-level breach does not apply because no other Player or Team Official engaged.

Outcome:

No Adjudicated Breach Notice issued to the team. The two individual players still face their judiciary charges, but the team is not penalised.

Scenario 5 — Targeted Escalation

What happened:

Final round of the regular season. Team A is no longer in finals contention. Team B sits 4th and needs the win to make finals. An Initial Incident occurs between one Team A player and one Team B player. The Team B players step back or stay in a neutral position. Four Team A players then move in on the Team B player,

creating a genuine wellbeing concern. Two Team B players move passively toward their teammate to protect him; one places hands on a Team A player but does not throw a punch.

Q. Both teams get sanctioned, right?

A. Not under this scenario. This is a **Targeted Escalation**. NSWRL determines that Team A orchestrated the melee to deliberately drag Team B in. Under those circumstances, NSWRL retains the right to sanction Team A only.

Outcome:

Team A receives an escalated Adjudicated Breach Notice (Tier 2 or higher). The two Team B players who engaged passively to protect their teammate are excused from the team-level breach. Team B does not receive an Adjudicated Breach Notice. Individual judiciary charges remain available against any player from either team who threw a punch or committed an on-field offence.

Q. Can my Club rely on “Targeted Escalation” as a defence if our players run in?

A. No. Targeted Escalation is determined by NSWRL at its sole discretion — it is not a defence the Club or its players can assert. If you tell your players “it’s okay to run in because the other team started it,” you are inviting an Adjudicated Breach Notice. The default rule still applies: stay out of melees.

Scenario 6 — The Whole Match Falls Apart

What happened:

A confrontation escalates into a full-team brawl. The Referee abandons the match. The Match Officials determine both teams are equally responsible.

Q. What happens to both teams?

A. This is a Tier 4 outcome. Neither team is awarded competition points (per P&P Section 5.4 Rule 8). The match is not replayed. Both teams attend a Code of Conduct Hearing. If the match was a Finals Series fixture, both teams may be disqualified from the competition under P&P Section 5.4 Rule 9 and Metro Conference Competitions By-Laws Section 29.6 — and ruled ineligible for premiership honours for the season.

Part 4 — What Clubs Must Do

Q. What does my Club need to do right now?

A. Five things:

- Brief every Player, Coach, Team Manager, Trainer and parent on this Policy before your next fixture.
- Make sure your on-field Coaches and Team Officials understand they too must not enter a melee — Match Officials manage the de-escalation.
- Make sure your Club Executive members are aware they may be required to attend an NSWRL Tribunal Hearing if a Breach is noted.
- Be ready to identify, on request from a Match Official, Ground Manager or NSWRL, any person involved in or contributing to an Incident. Failure to identify is itself a breach.

- Comply with all directions of the Ground Manager and Match Officials before, during and after any Incident.

Q. What should I tell my Players?

A. In simple language: “If a fight starts on the field, you take three steps back, you put your hands in the air, and you wait for the Referee to act. Do not run in. Do not separate your teammates. Do not act as a peacemaker. Yell if you like ‘don’t escalate, don’t escalate’. If you move toward the fight, your team does not play its next match and you may get suspended.”

Q. What should I tell my parents and supporters?

A. “Do not enter the field of play under any circumstances. If you go over the rope, you get a 12-month ban, your child’s team forfeits the match, and the Club may be suspended until you are identified. The 12-month ban applies even if you were trying to help.”

Q. What if my Coach disagrees with a decision — can they argue with the Referee?

A. No. Under the NSWRL Local By-Laws, only the Ground Manager can approach the Match Officials. Coaches and Trainers must not approach the Referee, must not make argumentative or disparaging comments to any Match Official, and must comply with the Ground Manager’s directions at all times. Breaches of this carry their own Code of Conduct penalties.

Part 5 — Common Misconceptions

Q. “It was just a push, not a fight — the Policy doesn’t apply, right?”

A. Wrong. The Policy applies to any Incident involving any level of violence or foul play. A push, a shove, a grapple, a wrestle, a single punch — all of these are Incidents. If your players move toward any of these things, the Policy applies.

Q. “My player only ran in because the other team started it.”

A. Doesn’t matter. The Policy does not distinguish between who started it and who joined in. Both are engagements. The only exception is a Targeted Escalation determination, which is made by NSWRL alone after reviewing all the evidence — it is not something a player or club can rely on in defence of an escalation.

Q. “We didn’t do anything wrong — it was the other team.”

A. If your players engaged the Initial Incident, your team is in breach — regardless of who started the Initial Incident itself. The only way to avoid the team-level breach is for your players and team officials to stay out of it entirely.

Q. “The Coach was just trying to protect his player.”

A. A Coach must not enter the playing area to intervene in a melee. That is the Match Officials’ job. A Coach who runs onto the field puts his Club at risk of Code of Conduct charges in addition to the team-level breach.

Q. “This Policy only applies to the older grades.”

A. Wrong. The Policy applies to ALL age groups in Community Rugby League competitions where NSWRL has control of Code of Conduct Tribunals — from the youngest grades through Open Age.

Q. “If we accept the breach, do we lose points for the season?”

A. Not under the base Tier 1 penalty alone — that is just a forfeit of the next scheduled fixture. But escalated breaches (Tiers 2, 3 and 4) can include competition points deductions, Club fines, team bonds, suspension or disqualification from the competition. The penalty grows with the severity of the breach.

Part 6 — Getting Help

Q. What if my Club has more questions?

A. Direct all questions through your local League Administrator or the NSWRL Club & Competition Coordinator. Do not post questions or commentary on social media — NSWRL Rules and Regulations Rule 10 prohibits public adverse comment on NSWRL processes, and breaches can attract their own fines.

Q. Where can I find the full Policy?

A. The full Policy is set out in Section 5.5 of the NSWRL Community Rugby League Policies and Procedures Manual 2026. The standalone Melee Escalation & Associated Crowd Invasion Policy document contains the full set of definitions, tiers, processes and worked examples.

Q. Where can I find the rules this Policy refers to?

A. The Cross-References Reference Pack contains one page per rule cited in Section 5.5 — including the Tough Love in League Policy (P&P Section 5.4), Code of Conduct Procedure (P&P Section 6.2), NRL Offences Index Charge 15.1.i, Metro Conference Competitions By-Laws Section 29.6, and NSWRL Rules and Regulations Rule 8.

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