

NSW RUGBY LEAGUE

Community Rugby League Competitions

MELEE ESCALATION & ASSOCIATED CROWD INVASION POLICY

Effective Immediately — 2026 Season

Issued by: NSW Rugby League (NSWRL)

Scope: All age groups in Community Rugby League competitions where NSWRL has control of Code of Conduct Tribunals

Applies to: All Players, Coaches, Team Officials, Clubs and District/League Administrators

Reads alongside: NSWRL Community Rugby League Policies & Procedures Manual 2026 (Section 5.4 Tough Love in League Policy), Relevant Local Competitions By-Laws 2026, NRL National Code of Conduct, NRL Laws of the Game

1. Purpose

After a continued pattern of on-field brawls and spectator invasions in Community Rugby League fixtures across the state, NSWRL is implementing a zero-tolerance policy on melee escalation and associated crowd encroachment. This Policy operates as a team-level breach mechanism, sitting alongside (and in addition to) individual Judiciary and Code of Conduct penalties already prescribed in the NSWRL Community Rugby League Policies & Procedures Manual.

This Policy is to be read as an extension of, and is consistent with, the NSWRL “Tough Love in League” Policy (P&P Manual Section 5.4). Where this Policy is silent on a matter, the Tough Love in League Policy, the P&P Manual and the relevant Local Competition By-Laws prevail. NSWRL retains absolute discretion in the application of this Policy.

2. Definitions

For the purposes of this Policy, the following definitions apply (consistent with the P&P Manual Section 5.4):

Term	Meaning
Incident	Any on-field altercation, melee, brawl, fight or physical confrontation involving any level of violence or foul play by one or more participants.
Initial Incident	The first act of violence, or foul play, or physical confrontation that triggers Match Official intervention. The Player(s) directly engaged at the point Match Officials begin to intervene constitute the participants in the Initial Incident.

Term	Meaning
Engagement	Any act of walking, running, jogging or otherwise moving toward an Incident with the apparent intent or effect of joining, supporting, separating, restraining or otherwise becoming part of that Incident. Engagement includes passive presence in the vicinity once a player has moved from their position.
Melee Escalation	Any Engagement by a Player or Team Official who was not part of the Initial Incident.
Associated Crowd Invasion	Entry by any spectator or non-participant onto the Playing Area or Field of Play during, or in response to, an Incident or Melee Escalation, contrary to NSWRL P&P Section 5.4 Rules 11–14.
Targeted Escalation	A Melee Escalation by Players or Team Officials of one Team (Team A) that NSWRL determines, at its sole discretion, was committed or orchestrated to provoke, draw in or otherwise cause the opposing Team (Team B) to engage in the melee.
Match Officials	Referees, Touch Judges, Ground Manager and any other person undertaking a Match Official role as defined in the NRL On-Field Policy and NSWRL Local By-Laws.
Team	The team(s) whose Players or Team Officials are engaged in an Incident, regardless of which Club or District they represent.
Adjudicated Breach Notice	A breach notice issued by NSWRL with a pre-determined penalty that may be accepted by the Team or contested at a NSWRL Tribunal Hearing.

3. Policy Statement

3.1 Zero Tolerance on Melee Escalation

NSWRL adopts a zero-tolerance stance on Players and Team Officials who become involved in melees, regardless of stated intention. The following principles apply:

1. Should an Incident take place whereby any level of violence or foul play is displayed, NO other Player or Team Official is permitted to become engaged in the Initial Incident.
2. Match Officials are solely responsible for managing and de-escalating the Incident, including dismissing Players and reporting the matter for review.
3. When an Incident occurs, all Players and Team Officials not part of the Initial Incident MUST immediately retreat from the area where the Incident is occurring, allowing Match Officials to de-escalate the situation.
4. Stated intention is not a defence. A Player who states they intended only to separate participants, restrain a teammate, or act as a peacemaker is still in breach of this Policy if they engage. Engagement, not intention, is the test.

3.2 Associated Crowd Invasion

Where a melee escalates and one or more spectators, parents, carers or other non-participants enter the Playing Area or Field of Play, this is an Associated Crowd Invasion. The Club whose supporters enter the Playing Area is jointly responsible for the escalation under the Tough Love in League Policy (P&P Manual Section 5.4, Rules 11–14) and under this Policy.

Associated Crowd Invasion is treated as an aggravating factor in any Adjudicated Breach Notice issued under this Policy and may trigger escalated penalties (see Section 5).

3.3 Targeted Escalation

NSWRL recognises that, in some Incidents, members of one Team (Team A) engage in a Melee Escalation in a manner that is committed or orchestrated to deliberately provoke, draw in or otherwise cause the opposing Team (Team B) to engage in the melee. Common indicators of Targeted Escalation include (without limitation):

- Multiple Team A Players engage during an Initial Incident, whilst Players from Team B are in a neutral position, or in retreat, or attempting to disengage.
- The scale or co-ordination of Team A's engagement creating a genuine wellbeing or safety concern for Team B Players, such that Team B Players engage passively to protect a teammate.
- Timing or competitive context suggesting motive — for example, an Incident occurring in the final rounds of a competition involving a Team that is no longer in finals contention against a finals-contender.
- Pre-match conduct, social media activity, or sideline behaviour suggesting an intent to provoke an altercation.

Where NSWRL determines, at its sole discretion, that a Melee Escalation constitutes a Targeted Escalation:

1. NSWRL retains the right to sanction Team A only, even where Players from Team B subsequently engage in the Incident.
2. Team B Players who engage passively, including for the purpose of protecting a teammate from a credible wellbeing or safety threat, may be excused from the team-level breach under Section 3.1 of this Policy.
3. This carve-out applies to the team-level breach only. Individual judiciary charges against any Player or Team Official (including Team B Players who throw a punch, strike or otherwise commit a chargeable on-field offence) continue to apply under the NRL Offences Index, P&P Section 5.4 and the NSWRL Judiciary Code of Procedure.
4. Targeted Escalation is an aggravating factor against Team A. NSWRL may apply an escalated penalty against Team A under Section 5.2 of this Policy, including (without limitation) elevation to a higher Tier, additional match stand-downs, monetary fines, Club bonds, competition points deductions, or suspension or disqualification of Team A from the competition.

The determination of Targeted Escalation is reserved to NSWRL. Neither Team A nor Team B may assert Targeted Escalation as a defence or expectation; the carve-out under this section operates only where NSWRL has expressly determined that Targeted Escalation has occurred.

4. Process — How a Breach is Adjudicated

4.1 Issuing of the Breach Notice

Where NSWRL identifies a breach of this Policy — whether on the basis of a Match Official report, Ground Manager report, video footage, photographs or any other evidence NSWRL considers reliable — NSWRL will:

1. Review the available evidence including (without limitation) match footage, Match Official Reports, Ground Manager Reports and any associated Notices of Charge for individual Players or Officials.
2. Issue an Adjudicated Breach Notice to the Team (or Teams) whose Players or Team Officials engaged in the Incident beyond the Initial Incident.
3. Identify in the Adjudicated Breach Notice the breach, the proposed penalty under Section 5 of this Policy, and the response options available to the Team.

NSWRL has absolute discretion to determine whether a breach has occurred, the grading of the breach, the evidence relied upon, and the penalty imposed.

4.2 Response Options

Following receipt of an Adjudicated Breach Notice, the Team (via its Club) may respond in one of two ways:

1. Accept the adjudicated breach and the penalty issued. This concludes the matter and the penalty takes effect immediately.
2. Plead not guilty to the adjudicated breach. Where a not-guilty plea is entered:
 - a) a Club Executive member AND the Coach of the Team involved are both required to attend the NSWRL Tribunal Hearing in person (or by approved electronic means);
 - b) failure of either the Club Executive member or the Coach to attend will result in the Tribunal proceeding in their absence and the Adjudicated Breach being deemed accepted; and
 - c) if the not-guilty plea is unsuccessful, the Team may be liable to an increase equivalent to one match in addition to the base penalty.

4.3 Hearing Logistics

Hearings will be conducted in accordance with the relevant League's Code of Procedure. NSWRL reserves the right to conduct hearings via Microsoft Teams, Zoom or any other technology.

5. Penalty Schedule

5.1 Base Penalty (Team Level)

The Adjudicated Breach penalty for the Team(s) concerned begins with a minimum one (1) match stand-down — that is, the next scheduled fixture for that Team will be forfeited (recorded under relevant local forfeit rules)

This team-level penalty is in addition to (not in substitution for) any individual Judiciary charge issued under the NRL Offences Index (e.g. Charge 15.1.i — “Coming from a distance to become involved in a fight”, P&P Appendix 1) or any Code of Conduct charge under P&P Section 5.4. Matches that are deemed as a Forfeit do not count towards individual player suspensions

When a team is serving a mandatory stand down (having to forfeit a match / matches), any participant who took to the field (signed on) in the Match where the original penalty arose from will be unable to participate for another team until the penalty is served, regardless of which team they may be primarily registered to

5.2 Escalation Tiers

Where the Incident shows further escalation, the Adjudicated Breach penalty may be more severe. The following tiered framework is indicative; NSWRL retains absolute discretion to apply a more severe (or, in exceptional cases, a less severe) penalty:

Tier	Trigger	Indicative Team Penalty
1	One (1) additional Player or Team Official engages in the Initial Incident (passive presence).	Minimum 1 match stand-down (forfeit of next fixture).
2	Two or more additional Players engage, OR engagement is active (throwing punches, grappling, dragging).	2–3 match stand-down + Club placed on a \$1,000 bond for the remainder of the season (consistent with P&P Section 5.4 Rule 15.4).
3	Tier 2 conditions PLUS Associated Crowd Invasion (one or more spectators enter the Playing Area).	3+ match stand-down + competition points deduction equivalent to a win for each spectator (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 14) + Club \$1,000 fine + \$2,000 team bond + identification obligation under P&P Section 5.4 Rule 13.
4	Match abandoned due to foul play (whole-of-team or whole-of-bench involvement, or serious injury arising from the melee).	Match deemed forfeit by the instigating Team under P&P Section 5.4 Rule 8; both Teams required to attend a Code of Conduct Hearing; finals disqualification possible under P&P Section 5.4 Rule 9.

Tiers are indicative. NSWRL may impose any greater penalty it considers appropriate, including additional match stand-downs, competition points deductions, monetary fines, Club bonds, suspension or disqualification of the Team from the competition.

5.3 Individual Player and Team Official Penalties Preserved

Nothing in this Policy displaces the individual penalties that already apply under existing NSWRL policy. In particular:

- On-Field Striking / Punching: minimum 1-week suspension; aggressor minimum Medium/Grade 2 (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 1).
- Leaving the Playing Area to become involved in an altercation outside the Playing Area: minimum 6-week suspension and competition points deduction for the team (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 7).
- Coming from a distance to become involved in a fight (NRL Offences Index 15.1.i): Grade 1 — 5 matches up to Serious — referred directly to Judiciary Panel for 6–14 matches.
- Spectator field intrusion: minimum 12-month spectator ban (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 11); team forfeit and competition points deduction (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 14).
- Suspended persons taking the field: automatic 12-month additional suspension plus 12-month suspension of coach/team manager (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 10).

5.4 Finals Series — Aggravated Consequences

Where a breach under this Policy occurs in a Finals Series match, the offending Team(s) may be disqualified from the competition and ruled ineligible for any premiership honours for that season (consistent with P&P Section 5.4 Rule 9)

6. Club Obligations

Clubs are reminded that under NSWRL Rules and Regulations Rule 8 (Misconduct), Schedule Four (Code of Conduct), and P&P Section 6.2 (Code of Conduct Procedure), Clubs are responsible for the conduct of their Players, parents, carers, coaches, officials and spectators. Under this Policy, Clubs must:

1. Brief every Player, Coach, Team Manager, Trainer and parent on this Policy prior to their next fixture.
2. Ensure on-field Coaches and Team Officials are instructed that they too must not enter a melee to separate Players — Match Officials manage the de-escalation.
3. Identify, on request from the Ground Manager, Match Officials or NSWRL, any person(s) involved in or contributing to an Incident (failure to identify is itself a breach under P&P Section 5.4 Rule 13).
4. Where a not-guilty plea is entered, ensure a Club Executive member and the Coach of the Team involved are available to attend the NSWRL Tribunal Hearing.
5. Comply with all directions of the Ground Manager and Match Officials before, during and after any Incident.

7. Interaction with Existing NSWRL Frameworks

This Policy operates within and complements the following existing frameworks. In the event of any inconsistency, the more stringent provision prevails:

Existing Framework	How This Policy Operates Alongside It
Tough Love in League Policy (P&P Section 5.4)	This Policy adopts and extends the TLIL framework to all age groups. TLIL Rule 7 individual penalties (6-week minimum) continue to apply to individuals. This Policy adds a team-level Adjudicated Breach.
NRL Offences Index — Charge 15.1.i (P&P Appendix 1)	Individual judiciary penalties for “Coming from a distance to become involved in a fight” continue to apply. This Policy does not duplicate or replace those penalties; it adds a team-level consequence.
Code of Conduct Procedure (P&P Section 6.2)	Where applicable, the Adjudicated Breach Notice mechanism in Section 6.2 (Rule 7.7) operates as the procedural mechanism. For grades that sit outside the Match Review / Incident Review Coordinator framework, NSWRL exercises the discretion conferred under Section 10 of this Policy.
Local Competition By-Laws	By-Laws may already authorise team-level penalties (suspension, termination, forfeiture, fines, suspension of Club). This Policy gives structure to how those penalties are applied for melee escalation specifically.
Metro Conference Competitions By-Laws 2026 Section 6 (Appeals & Protests)	An accepted Adjudicated Breach is not subject to appeal. A not-guilty plea is heard at Tribunal as set out in Section 4 of this Policy. Appeals from a Tribunal outcome continue to operate under By-Laws Section 6.5 (\$500 fee, refunded if upheld).
NSWRL Rules and Regulations — Rule 9 (Penalty Provisions)	Penalties available under Rule 9 (fines up to \$20,000, competition points deductions, exclusion from competition) remain available to the NSWRL Board in addition to penalties under this Policy.
Suspended and Disqualified Persons (P&P Section 1.12 and Section 5.4 Rule 10)	Any individual suspended under this Policy is bound by P&P Section 1.12. Clubs are reminded a suspended person on the field of play during the period of suspension attracts a further automatic 12-month suspension for the individual AND the coach / team manager.

8. Worked Examples

Example 1 — Tier 1

Two Players exchange punches during a tackle. A third Player from Team A jogs across from 15 metres and stands between them but does not throw a punch. Match Officials send off the original two Players (under Rule 15.1.a — On-Field Striking).

Under this Policy: Team A receives an Adjudicated Breach Notice (Tier 1) for the third Player’s engagement. Minimum 1 match stand-down (forfeit of next fixture). The third Player is separately charged under NRL Offences Index 15.1.i (Coming from a distance) — minimum 5 matches as an individual.

Example 2 — Tier 2

After the initial Striking incident, four Players from Team B run in. Two grapple, one drags a teammate away, one acts only as a peacemaker.

Under this Policy: Team B receives an Adjudicated Breach Notice (Tier 2). 2–3 match stand-down + \$1,000 Club bond for the remainder of the season. Each of the four Players is individually charged under 15.1.i and/or 15.1.h. The “peacemaker” defence is not accepted — engagement is the test, not intention.

Example 3 — Tier 3

During the Tier 2 incident, two parents from Team B’s supporters jump the rope and enter the Playing Area. Ground Manager identifies one; Club refuses to identify the second.

Under this Policy: Tier 3 penalties apply. Team B forfeits the match (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 14). Identified spectator is banned 12 months minimum (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 11). Team B is suspended until the second spectator is identified (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 13). Club fined \$1,000 and a \$2,000 bond is placed on the team, with further competition points deductions at the discretion of NSWRL.

Example 4 — Tier 4

The melee escalates and the Referee abandons the match. Both teams are determined to be equally responsible.

Under this Policy: Neither team awarded competition points (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 8). Match not replayed. Both teams attend Code of Conduct Hearing. If in finals, both teams disqualified (P&P Section 5.4 Rule 9 and By-Laws Section 29.6).

Example 5 — Targeted Escalation

It is the final round of the regular season. Team A is no longer in finals contention; Team B sits 4th on the ladder and a loss-on-forfeit in the following week would cost them their finals position. An Initial Incident occurs between one Team A Player and one Team B Player. Members of Team B are seen to retreat or stay in a neutral position. Multiple Team A Players — four in total — then engage the Team B Player, creating a genuine wellbeing concern. Two Team B Players move passively toward their teammate to protect him; one of them places hands on a Team A Player but does not throw a punch.

Under this Policy: NSWRL reviews the available evidence and determines, at its sole discretion, that this is a Targeted Escalation. Team A is issued an Adjudicated Breach Notice with an escalated penalty (Tier 2 or higher). The two Team B Players who engaged passively are excused from the team-level breach under Section 3.1; Team B does not receive an Adjudicated Breach Notice. Individual judiciary charges (15.1.i — Coming from a distance, and any striking offences) remain available against any individual Player from either Team who committed an on-field offence.

9. Commencement and Review

This Policy takes effect immediately upon issue by NSWRL and applies to all matches played from that date forward in Community Competitions where NSWRL has control of the Code of Conduct Tribunal.

This Policy may be amended by NSWRL at any time in accordance with NSWRL Rules and Regulations Rule 2.2 (Amendments). Notice of amendment will be published by NSWRL through District/League Administrators and on the NSWRL website.

10. NSWRL Discretion

NSWRL retains absolute discretion in the application of this Policy, including the determination of what constitutes an Incident, Engagement or escalation, the evidence relied upon, the grading of any breach, and the penalty imposed. Where any situation arises that is not expressly covered by this Policy, the determination of NSWRL shall be final.

11. Acknowledgement

Each Club competing in NSWRL Community Competitions is required to circulate this Policy to its Coaches, Team Managers, Players and parent body and to acknowledge receipt to its local League Administrator.

NSWRL Community Competitions Coordinator
New South Wales Rugby League Limited

Date