

DE-REGULATION FOR DORSET & WILTS RFU LEAGUES (COUNTIES 2 AND 3 DW SOUTH/CENTRAL/NORTH) FOR THE SEASON 2026-27

The RFU, through the South West Regional Organising Committee (SWROC), has delegated to constituent bodies the organisation of the Counties 2 leagues (formerly Level 8) and below. Dorset & Wilts RFU, subject to the approval of SWROC and the RFU, may de-regulate those leagues. The de-regulation that will be applied in Dorset & Wilts Leagues is summarised in this Appendix. Clubs should refer to their appointed League Secretary for guidance who will administer in accordance with RFU Regulation 6 and the administrative instructions issued by the SWROC and the de-regulation set out in this Appendix.

1. Principles of Promotion.

RFU Regulation governs the promotion of teams. The composition of leagues in the Dorset & Wilts Leagues will be recommended by Dorset & Wilts RFU and submitted for SW approval before each season. Dorset & Wilts RFU may nominate eligible teams for promotion taking into account the principles promulgated by the RFU.

- 1.1. With 2 leagues feeding one- the winners of the Counties 2 leagues will be promoted to Counties 1, unless the team has requested not to be promoted before 31st Dec 2026. If a 3rd team is needed for promotion, then the second placed team with the best playing record would be offered promotion. This would only arise if more than 2 promotion places became available.
- 1.2. At Counties 3 (formerly Level 9) with 3 leagues feeding 2, the league winners would be promoted along with the second placed side across all 3 leagues with the best playing record. As per the RFU performance criteria will be taken into account by Dorset & Wilts RFU.

2. Application to be exempt promotion.

RFU Regulation requires notice to be given by 1st January to express a preference not to be promoted. Dorset & Wilts RFU's recommendations to the SW have to consider the merits of the case against the imbalances that might result in the structure. If promotion is declined and agreed, then the following season promotion must be accepted if it is achieved as per para 1.

3. Relegation.

The number of teams in a league, whose number may change in accordance with the structure of the leagues for a future season, the locations of those teams, and relegations into Counties 1 and Counties 2 consequent on Regional changes will govern relegation within the Dorset & Wilts Leagues using league table outcomes and comparative performance at Counties 2

- 3.1. The recommendations on relegation to be made to the SWROC will take into account fixtures and travel in the next season. Teams may request relegation, by **1st January**, giving grounds for it but in general at least the bottom 2 teams in a Counties 2 league should expect to be relegated but may find they are not. All applications to Dorset & Wilts RFU in respect of promotion and relegation will be taken into account before a recommended structure is submitted to the SWROC. Due to possible impacts from the cascade of teams higher up the league structure it is possible that more than 2 teams may be relegated at each level. The playing record for the season will be taken into account in determining which team/teams are relegated.

4. Referees.

RFU Regulations cover the appointment of match officials. In the Dorset & Wilts Leagues the host club cannot rely upon the referee society to appoint a match official. Where one is not appointed, or becomes unavailable, the onus will be on the host club to arrange a referee, consulting the opposition team as to whether they can assist and keeping the league secretary informed of their progress in solving the problem. Where this is not done, and where the League Secretary deems the host club has not made the necessary effort to appoint a referee, then a league fixture will be deemed to be forfeited and will not be postponed to a later date if that is the only reason for postponement.

5. Eligibility & Registration - Players.

All players in the Leagues are to be registered At Counties 3 a minimum of Club Registered and at Counties 2 and above RFU registered.

6. Eligibility – Teams.

Eligibility is summarized in Reg 6 para 14-18 but in the Dorset & Wilts Leagues in order to enable players to play a game on a regular basis then any two or more clubs may nominate a joint (composite) team for entry in the Dorset & Wilts Leagues. This team may contain players registered to one or the other. The composite team will not be able to play in the same league as either parent club or at the same or higher level and one club must take

responsibility for administration and discipline. A composite team is usually to be declared and entered prior to the start of a season., but in the event that a team is expunged or withdraws during a season then, with the agreement of the League Secretary, the players may then join with another club's players and form a composite team to fulfil fixtures in the Dorset & Wilts Leagues.

7. Team Composition/ Higher Level Team Not Fielded. .

7.1. In the event that a significant number of players who play at a higher-level play for a lower XV then the League Secretary may request an explanation and award a sanction if they are not satisfied with the answer.

7.2. In the event that a higher level team is not fielded, but a lower level one is and wins its match when a higher XV of that club does not have a fixture, or that fixture does not take place, then there will be grounds for appeal to the League Secretary to review the result if it is suspected that a significant number of players from a higher level team have been fielded.

- In particular if a team defaults in the league and the club has a lower team in a league that plays and wins on the same day then that lower team may be deemed by the League Secretary to have played and lost, a Nil Nil score being returned.

7.3. The circumstances of each such concession will be examined by the League Secretary.

8. Replacements. RFU Regulation restricts sides to three replacements at Level 5 and below and for a team to have at least one Front Row nominated reserve in the squad.

8.1. In the Dorset & Wilts Leagues up to 5 replacements will be permitted at Counties 2.

However, if you have more than 3 replacements then your match day squad will need to include at least 5 players capable of playing front row. Otherwise you are limited to up to 3 replacements with 4 in the squad capable of playing front row.

8.2. At Counties 3 level an unlimited number of replacements will be allowed. No fourth Front Row players are required at this level. Rolling replacements are permitted as per Reg 6 para 61.

9. Additional De-Regulation for Counties 3 (Level 9).

The following additional de-regulation is authorised for teams in Counties 3 of the Dorset & Wilts Leagues. They include some but not all aspects of Game On. However as laid

down in RFU Regulation 6 para 53 & 54 if both teams agree to adopt additional Game On principles, then the outcome of the match can be submitted as a valid result. It is to be noted that the RFU guidance states that both teams must agree which of the Game On principles will apply to the match and notify the referee at least 30 minutes prior to kick off by completing a Game On Match card. If both teams cannot agree which principles to apply the match will proceed without the application of the Game On principles. This will mean in accordance with this de-regulation.

9.1. Player Numbers - Concessions and Point Deductions.

(Please refer to SW Admin Instructions point 6) As per the SW Admin Instructions, points are not deducted if a team plays a friendly, Please ensure you keep the league secretary in the loop when there are issues around playing numbers/ playing a game- they should be the first point of contact BEFORE any decision to call off the game is made. Points deductions that are incurred after the transfer deadline will be carried over to the following season. However, at Counties 2 & 3 in the D&W leagues the league secretary will have the discretion to apply the sanction in the season incurred but the club will need to fully explain the circumstances to the league secretary who must then be happy with the explanation.

9.2. Front Row and Uncontested Scrums.

At Counties 3 for a match to be valid a team must start with a front row capable of playing the fixture but if no suitably trained and experienced player is available to substitute in the event of injury, temporary suspension or dismissal (and the opposition are unable to assist with a suitable replacement) then the match will continue with uncontested scrums for the period necessary and the result will stand. Any additional 'Man Off Rule' will not apply if uncontested scrums are in place. In the event that a team has caused matches to be played with uncontested scrums continuing up to the final whistle and has gained more than two wins in such circumstances then the League Secretary can decide not to award any further points for that team as a consequence of winning subsequent matches played with uncontested scrums.

9.3. Maximum score. In Counties 3 leagues. when the scoring differential reaches 60 points the result will be recorded as at that time in the game. If mutually agreed, the match may continue to full time, but further scores will not be recorded or reported.

9.4. Duration of Game.

At Counties 3 the length of a game may be abbreviated to 60 minutes by mutual agreement of both sides and the referee. This can be agreed prior to or during the game. The score at the time the game ends shall be deemed the result unless the maximum scoring differential has already been reached

Note:

Any issue that arises over whether a league match can or cannot be played – such as ground condition or lack of players or lack of a referee – must be discussed prior to the scheduled kick off with the League Secretary before any decision is made. Only the League Secretary can cancel a game, and teams must seek authorisation of a postponement. Clubs should make every effort to play a game whenever possible.