

CONSULTATION BETWEEN UMPIRES

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In recent years we have observed a paradigm shift in the way field, boundary and goal umpires interact during a game to achieve the right outcomes.

When the consultation process is managed effectively, the game of AFL is the winner because in the end, it does not matter which umpire calls the decision correctly, just so long as the correct decision is reached.

10 years ago if the field umpire told the boundary umpire to throw the ball in without the boundary umpire blowing the ball out of bounds, there was every chance the boundary umpire might have told the field umpire to "shove it and throw the ball in himself".

Section 8.2 of the laws states very clearly the duties and responsibilities of each umpire and these still apply. The goal umpire is still responsible for adjudicating the score and the boundary umpire is responsible for calling the ball out of play.

Such was the culture and separation of the umpiring disciplines that field, boundary and goal were each responsible and accountable for their domain and ensuring their patch was well maintained. The notion of 'team of umpires' never really existed until recent years.

The advent of professionalism and increased scrutiny in football has seen these behaviors abolished. Today the team aspect is very much a part of umpiring. In every pre-game discussion the umpires congregate and reinforce the team rules in relation to the consultation process and team work in general.

The aim of the consultation process is to get the decision right. It makes sense to gather as much accurate information as possible before reaching a decision.

When should a consultation occur?

A consultation should occur when a field, boundary or goal umpire is unsure or doubt exists surrounding a scoring situation or the ball being out of play. Consultations can also exist between field umpires.

Which umpire can initiate a consultation?

Any umpire can initiate a consultation.

Which umpire should manage the consultation?

The field umpire should control the consultation. This will be discussed later.

Steps in the consultation process

When it is obvious a goal, boundary or field umpire is going to initiate a consultation the following should occur:

1. The field umpire must blow time off.

In the event of a scoring situation the time keeper will only stop or add time once the goal umpire has signaled. Since there is doubt over the score the field umpire will not have given the 'all clear' for a score. Therefore, the clock will continue to run. By blowing time on, time can not be wasted while executing the consultation.

2. The field umpire should clear away any players from the area.

The players could interfere with the process and heighten the anxiety of the umpires involved. This could compromise or influence the outcome of the consultation. The players do not need to be engaged or involved in any way.

3. The field umpire should manage the process and lead the questions.

For example, ask questions that will provide a direct response, such as: What did you see? Was the ball touched? Did the ball completely cross the scoring line?

By asking these types of direct questions, the responding umpire is forced to explain exactly what occurred.

The field umpire should not ask leading questions which will call into doubt the views of the responding umpire, such as: I think it was touched what do you think? The ball might have crossed the line, but was the entire ball over the line?

These types of questions have the potential to cloud the responses and influence the respondent. It is best to start with straightforward and direct questions which will provide the field umpire with the required information.

4. The field umpire calls in the other umpires to provide any assistance.

Umpires are instructed that unless there is 100% certainty in what they have seen, they are not to engage in the consultation. This does not preclude the field umpire from calling in other umpires to provide assistance. In this case the umpire would respond, I am not sure, or I did not see the incident, or I can not add anything.

5. Once the questioning process is completed, the field umpire should ask the respondent(s).

Are you 100% sure? If the respondent is 100% sure the decision should stand. If there is uncertainty then the lesser decision should apply.

Specific Examples in the case where doubt exists whether or not

a goal was scored, then a behind should result.

a behind was scored or the ball was out of bounds, then a throw in should result.

the ball was out of bounds on the full, then a throw in should occur as this is the lesser option.

Tips to manage the consultation:

Document specific examples where you will commence a consultation.

Think of the consultation as a process and implement each step (as documented above)

Practise the language to be used in the consultation process.

Reinforce the process with the umpires before the start of the match.

Request feedback from other umpires on how the consultation was conducted.

Look at ways to improve the consultation process.