



## **SOCIAL MASTERS CHAMPIONS LEAGUE (SMCL) POLICY & RULES**

**Version 3.0**

### **1. OBJECTIVES & COMPLIANCE**

The purpose of this policy is to standardize the governance, operation, and regulation of the Social Cohesion Masters League (SMCL). It seeks to ensure fair competition, integrity, and adherence to international football standards. All clubs, officials, players, and stakeholders are required to comply with the following regulatory frameworks; not limited to:

1. FIFA Laws of the Game (as issued by IFAB)
2. FIFA Disciplinary Code (2023 Edition)
3. FIFA Code of Ethics (2023 Edition)
4. Procedural Rules Governing the Football Tribunal (2023 Edition)
5. Confederation of African Football (CAF) Regulations
6. South African Football Association (SAFA) Constitution & Regulations

This policy supersedes all previous versions and any club found to contravene any provision herein will be subject to disciplinary proceedings.

### **2. COMPETITION FORMAT**

#### **2.1 Overview**

1. The Social Masters Competitions consist of two (2) major knockout tournaments conducted under the authority of the Masters League Organizing Committee:
  - a. The Champions League — contested by the Top 64 teams from eight (8) affiliated regional Masters Leagues.
  - b. The Confederation Cup — contested by the Top 16 teams from eight (8) affiliated regional Masters League and additional non-league teams.
2. Both competitions shall follow the knockout format, meaning once a team loses a match, it is eliminated from that competition.
3. All matches shall be governed by the Laws of the Game, as amended for Masters-level play, and by these Rules

## **2.2 The Champions League (Top 64 Knockout)**

1. The tournament shall proceed in the following stages:
  - Round of 64
  - Round of 32
  - Round of 16
  - Quarterfinals
  - Semifinals
  - Final
2. Each Champions League match shall:
  - a) Consist of two halves of 40 minutes each, with a 5-minute halftime break.
  - b) Be decided by penalty kicks if level at full time (no extra time).
  - c) Permit five (5) substitutions per team.
  - d) Require a minimum of seven (7) players to start or continue.

## **2.3 The Confederation Cup (Top 16 Knockout)**

1. The tournament shall proceed in the following stages:
  - Round of 16
  - Quarterfinals
  - Semifinals
  - Final
2. All Confederation Cup matches shall follow the same technical and disciplinary rules as the Champions League.

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## **3. PLAYER ELIGIBILITY & REGISTRATION**

### **3.1 Age Restrictions**

1. Each team is required to field players aged 35 years and above on the day of the scheduled match.
2. Any player who turns 35 years after the scheduled match shall be deemed underage and ineligible for the match.

### **3.2 Registration Requirements**

1. Each team must register a maximum of 25 players before the start of the competition.
2. Each team must submit a fully completed Player Registration Form with signed Indemnity Forms, as provided by the Committee prior to the stated deadline.
3. Failure to submit the form on time will result in the affected players being deemed ineligible for match participation.

### **3.3 Player Identity Verification**

1. Players must present their original identification to the Match Officials before kick-off for verification against the official team list.
  - a. South African Nationals:
    - i. Smart ID Card
    - ii. Valid Driver's License.
  - b. Non South African Nationals:
    - i. Valid Passport
2. Failure to produce valid identification before the match shall result in the player's disqualification from that fixture.
3. Any attempt to use another person's identification or falsify documents shall result in immediate suspension and referral to the Disciplinary Committee.

### **3.4 Dual Registration**

1. No player shall be permitted to represent more than one team in the same tournament season.
2. Once a player has participated in an official fixture for one team, s/he is ineligible to play for any other team within the same competition.
3. Any team found fielding a player registered with another team shall be disqualified.

### **3.4 Transfers of Players**

1. Transfer of players' mid-tournament is not permissible.
2. Players may only transfer between teams before the start of the tournament, and only if both teams submit written consent together with the registration form to the Organizing Committee.

### **3.5 Responsibility of Teams**

1. Each team is responsible for ensuring that all its players meet eligibility and registration criteria.
2. Ignorance of these rules shall not be accepted as a defence in cases of misconduct or ineligibility.
3. Team managers must ensure that match day team sheets correspond exactly with the registered players on file

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## **4. FIXTURES, VENUES & ARRIVAL PROTOCOLS**

### **4.1 Match Scheduling**

1. All fixtures shall be determined and approved by the Organizing Committee.
2. The Committee reserves the right to:
  - a) Schedule, postpone, or schedule any match when deemed necessary due to weather, safety, or logistical reasons; and
  - b) Decide on neutral or alternative venues should a field be deemed unfit or unavailable.
3. Fixture notifications or changes shall be communicated to all teams at 24 hours prior to kick-off via the official communication platform (e.g. WhatsApp group, email, or league notice)
4. Teams must confirm receipt of fixture information – failure to do so shall not excuse non-attendance or late arrival.

#### 4.2 Kick-off Times & Penalties for Late Arrival

1. Kick-Off times shall be determined by the Organizing Committee and must be strictly adhered to.
2. Teams are required to arrive at the match venue at least 30 minutes before the scheduled kick-off to complete pre-match protocol and player identification.
3. Late arrival shall be handled as follows:
  - a. Up to 15 minutes late: The match will start with the late team trailing by one (1) goal and play the remaining as schedule.
  - b. 30 minutes or more late: The late team shall forfeit the match, and the opposing team shall be awarded a 3-0 walkover
4. The Match Official or Referee shall record the official arrival time of each team
5. Repeated lateness or failure to comply with scheduling protocols may result in disciplinary action.

#### 4.3 Arrival and Pre-Match Requirements

1. All teams must report to the designated match venue no less than 30 minutes before kick-off.
2. On arrival, teams shall:
  - a. Submit the official team sheet with player names and jersey numbers
  - b. Present original identification for each player, and
  - c. Cooperate with player inspection and verification by match officials and the opposing team representative.
3. Player ID verification process:
  - a. Player identification shall be conducted by the Referee and both Team Officials jointly.
  - b. The purpose of verification is to confirm that all players are eligible and properly registered.
  - c. Failure or refusal to undergo ID inspection shall result in an automatic misconduct charge referred to the Disciplinary Committee
  - d. Any team that intends or fields an unverified or unregistered player shall be disqualified from the match, and the opposing team shall be awarded a 3-0 victory.

#### 4.4 Match Duration and Format

1. Each match shall be played over two (2) halves of 40 minutes each, with a 5-minute halftime break.
2. Match shall proceed to penalty kicks in an event of the draw after regulation time and no extra time.
3. Each team shall be permitted to make five (5) substitutions during the match
4. A match shall not commence or continue with fewer than seven (7) players per team.
2. Any caution or send-off issued during a match shall be considered valid only for that specific fixture.

## **5. TEAM MANAGEMENT & EQUIPMENT**

### **5.1 Team Sheets**

To ensure accurate match records and proper player eligibility, the following team sheets protocol must be followed:

1. Pre-Populated Team Sheets
  - a. The Organizing Committee will provide each team with pre-populated team sheet listing all registered players.
  - b. Teams must use this sheet to select available players for each fixture
2. Match Day Squad Composition:
  - a. Each submitted team sheet must include:
    - i. 11 Starting Players
    - ii. Up to 9 substitutes, of which a maximum of 5 may be used during the match.

### **5.2 Kits & Colours**

1. Each team must bring their official home and alternative kit colours.
2. Goalkeepers must wear kits that are clearly distinguishable from both teams
3. Away team is required to change kits in case of colour conflict.
4. Failure by the away team to provide an appropriate alternative kit in the case of a colour conflict shall result in the match being forfeited and recorded as a walkover.

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## **6. MATCH OFFICIALS & REPORTING**

### **6.1 Match Officials**

1. Match officials shall be independent and neutral, appointed by the Organizing Committee.
2. Referee payment shall be coordinated by the Organizing Committee.
3. Each team shall contribute R150 referee fee via official channels before kick-off.
4. No direct payment shall be made to referees by teams.

### **6.2 Match Reporting**

1. The Referee's report must be submitted to the Organizing Committee within 24 hours of match completion.
2. Any team wishing to lodge a protest must do so in writing within 4 hours after the match, accompanied by a non-refundable protest fee set by the Committee.
3. All disputes and protests shall be adjudicated by the Disciplinary Committee, whose decision shall be final and binding.

## **7. PROTEST AND APPEAL PROCEDURE**

### **7.1 Right to Lodge a Protest or Complaint**

1. Any club, affiliate, official, player, staff member, or other relevant party may lodge a formal protest or complaint to the Organizing Committee regarding any alleged misconduct, rule violation or disciplinary offence.
2. This right excludes protests against referee or assistant referee decisions made on the field of play, as such decisions are final and binding under the Laws of the Game.

### **7.2 Conditions of a Valid Protest or Complaint**

1. Must be submitted in writing using the official Champions League Protest/Complaints Form provided by the Organizing Committee.
2. Clearly states:
  - a. Name and contact details of the complainant
  - b. Facts of the incident
  - c. Specific rule(s) or regulation(s) allegedly violated
  - d. Any supporting evidence or witness statements
3. Not duplicate or reopen a matter already ruled upon by the Disciplinary Committee
4. Lodge within four (4) hours of the alleged incident or match conclusion, to ensure feedback is given before the next competition draw.
5. Non-refundable protest fee of R150 payable upon submission to the Organizing Committee

### **7.3 Responsibility of the Complainant**

1. The complainant bears full responsibility to ensure that all procedural requirements are met.
2. Protests submitted after the four-hour deadline, missing documentation, or without proof of payment shall be automatically dismissed.
3. The Champions League shall not be held liable for delays caused by the complainant's failure to meet these requirements.

### **7.4 Disciplinary Committee Process**

1. The League Committee shall convene the Disciplinary Committee (DC) to review the matter within 24 hours of submission.
2. The DC may:
  - a. Dismiss the protest if deemed frivolous, malicious, or lacking a prima facie case; or
  - b. Accept the protest and institute formal disciplinary proceedings against the accused party
  - c. The respondent shall receive written notice of the charges and right to respond.
3. All proceedings must follow principle of procedural fairness, ensuring that both parties are given a fair chance to submit evidence in support of their case.

### **7.5 Burden of Proof**

1. The burden of proof lies with the complainant, who must substantiate the alleged violation with credible evidence or testimony.
2. The standard of proof shall be on a balance of probabilities.

## **7.6 Decisions and Appeals**

1. The Disciplinary Committee shall issue a written ruling with 24 hours after the hearing.
2. Any party dissatisfied with the ruling may submit a formal appeal within 4 hours of receiving the decision.
3. Appeals must:
  - a. Be in writing
  - b. Clearly specify the grounds for appeal, and
  - c. Be accompanied by the non-refundable appeal fee prescribed by the Organizing Committee.
4. The decision of the Appeals Committee shall be final and binding

## **7.7 Confidentiality**

All protest, complaint, and appeal proceedings shall be treated as strictly confidential. No party may publicly disclose details of an ongoing or concluded case without prior written consent from the Organizing Committee.

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## **8. PLAYER DATA PROTECTION**

All personal and identification data collected during registration shall be used solely for tournament administration and will be stored securely in compliance with the POPI Act

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## **9. DISCLAIMER AND INDEMNITY**

### **9.1 Voluntary Participation**

1. All teams, officials, and players participating in the Social Masters Champions League and Confederation Cup do so voluntarily and at their own risk.
2. By registering and taking part in the competition, each participant acknowledges that football is a contact sport that carries inherent risks of injury, illness, or property damage, and accepts full responsibility for their own participation.

### **9.2 Liability Waiver**

1. The Organizing Committee, sponsors, officials, referees, and venue owners shall not be held liable for any injury, death, loss, or damage sustained by players, officials, or spectators before, during, or after any match.
2. The waiver includes, but not limited to, incidents arising from:
  - a. Collisions, falls, or physical contact during play,
  - b. Environmental factors
  - c. Misconduct or negligence of other participants, or
  - d. Transportation to and from match venues.

### **9.3 Personal Responsibility**

1. Teams and players are encouraged to ensure they are medically fit to participate and to obtain personal or team medical insurance prior to taking part in the competition.
2. The Organizing Committee shall not be responsible for any medical costs, treatment, or aftercare.

## 9.4 Acceptance of Terms

1. By signing the official team registration form, every player, coach, and team official acknowledges and agrees to the terms of this disclaimer and indemnity.
2. This acceptance forms a binding condition of participation in the Champions League and Confederation Cup.

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## 10. FINAL PROVISIONS

### 10.1 Gaps in Rules

1. Where SMCL rules are silent and do not explicitly address a situation or issue, the following reference hierarchy shall apply to guide interpretation and decision-making:
  - a. South African Football Association (SAFA) Constitution
  - b. Confederation of African Football (CAF) Statutes
  - c. Federation Internationale de Football Association (FIFA) Statutes
2. This reference framework ensures consistency with broader football governance standards.
3. The Organizing Committee reserves the right to interpret and apply these external statutes where necessary.

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**Adopted by the Social Cohesion Masters League Committee on [Date]**

**Chairperson:** \_\_\_\_\_

**Secretary:** \_\_\_\_\_