



NOTTINGHAMSHIRE, LINCOLNSHIRE & DERBYSHIRE  
RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

DISCIPLINARY DECISION

*Professionalism • Transparency • Fairness • Integrity • Consistency*

**JUDGMENT OF THE PANEL**

**Venue:** Newark RUFC

**Date:** Tuesday 24<sup>th</sup> June, 2019

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**Club:** East Retford RUFC ('the Club')

**Match:** East Retford RUFC 2<sup>nd</sup> XV v Mansfield RUFC 3<sup>rd</sup> XV

**Match Date:** Saturday 16<sup>th</sup> February, 2019

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**Panel:** Matthew O'Grady, Chairman  
Andrew Stout  
David Chamberlin

**Secretary:** Andrew Statham, NLD Disciplinary Secretary

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**Attending:** Richard South (Club Secretary)  
Paul Barratt (Senior Player)

**Observing:** Mike Waplinton (RFU Council Member for NLD RFU)  
Chris Johnson (NLD Youth Disciplinary Secretary)

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### **Preliminary Issues**

1. There were no objections to the composition of the Panel. This charge was heard alongside the charge for the same offence settled against Mansfield RUFC.

### **Charge and Plea**

2. The Club was charged with an offence under Rule 5.12 for conduct which was prejudicial to the interests of the Union or the Game.
3. In relation to the match between East Retford RFU 2nd XV and Mansfield 3rd XV on Saturday 16th February 2019, it was alleged that, "...members of the East Retford team acted in such a way that the referee was forced to abandon the game."
4. The Club admitted the charge.

### **The Evidence**

5. The Panel considered the report of the Referee. The report states as follows:

"Weather was dry and sunny. The pitch was dry, and an even coverage of grass. The game was played in a competitive manner. The players of both teams were vocal, and questioned decisions and verbally abused members of the opposite team. This was addressed by warnings to both captains to inform their players this was unacceptable. 3 yellow cards were issued to Mansfield players in the first half.

33 minutes in 2nd half - Play on Retford 5m line. Mansfield awarded a penalty for off-side in front of the Retford posts. Whilst I spoke to the Retford Captain - this was a repeated offence in the 'red zone' - a quick Mansfield penalty was returned to the mark. Whilst I was explaining the consequences of further offences to the Retford (sic) Captain, Mansfield again took a quick penalty - and again I blew the whistle to stop play. At this point with players of both teams 'playing' after the whistle went, tempers quickly rose and scuffles between players from both teams began. In one of this scuffles, I observed the Retford No 8 use a clenched fist and hit a Mansfield player to the back of the head.

Following the incident, I first spoke to the Retford No 8 and captain, explaining what I observed and issued a red card for foul play. Then I informed the two captains that the game was now being played in a 'bad tempered' manner and given the fact that the previous warnings were being ignored, I informed them I was abandoning the game in the interests of player safety."

6. The Referee gave evidence by telephone and the Club had the opportunity to ask questions of the Referee. The Referee could not recall why he gave three yellow cards. He confirmed the game ceased to be played in good spirits, with extensive goading by both sets of players of the other. There was a notable physical confrontation in which most players from both sides were pulling at other players' shirts and some were holding

other players around their necks. This confrontation included the incident in which East Retford 8 punched an opponent to the head. The Referee told the Panel that after this confrontation he approached both captains and asked whether they were able to control their players. The East Retford captain said he could not provide a guarantee. The Mansfield captain, whose team were losing at the time, said he could and that his team wanted to continue playing. The Referee said that he felt the game had become too unsafe, with a further serious physical confrontation likely, that he ended the match some 7 minutes early.

### **Representations by the Club**

7. On behalf of the Club, Mr. South argued that the Club has a good disciplinary record (this being the fourth time this season it has appeared before the Panel) and that issues of discipline are taken seriously. He pointed out that this was the Club's first abandoned match. The Panel was told that discipline is high on the agenda for next season, although could not identify any specific steps that had been taken following this event. Mr. South told the Panel that the right level of sanction would be a reprimand.

### **Findings**

8. The Club admitted the offence. The Panel found that:
  - a) The Club's players behaved in the way alleged within the Referee's report and his oral evidence. The features of that behaviour were that there was:
    - i. Questioning of the Referee's decisions;
    - ii. Verbal abuse / goading of opponents beyond the typical banter that would be expected between these two sides, which contributed to the escalating situation;
    - iii. A physical confrontation with opposition players after the Referee had blown his whistle to stop the game;
    - iv. A failure to control behaviour after being warned by the Referee;
    - v. A red card for a punch to the head.
  - b) That behaviour contributed to it being unsafe for the match to continue;
  - c) The behaviour of the Club's players was inconsistent with at least three of the Game's core values: Sportsmanship, Discipline and Respect.
  - d) This Club's conduct was relatively more serious than Mansfield's given an East Retford player was sent off.

### Sanction

9. Abandoned matches through the collective loss of team discipline are very serious. There must be a strong deterrent against this and other clubs from behaving in ways that cause games to be abandoned and to reinforce the importance of discipline as a key Game value. Having regard to all the circumstances, the Panel concluded that this abandonment was at the lower end of seriousness given:
  - a) There was, fortunately, no abuse or offence directed at the Referee;
  - b) This was a friendly fixture between two clubs which have (and continue to have we were told) a good relationship with each other;
  - c) Besides the punch by the East Retford 8 the physical confrontation between the two teams was not the most serious; and
  - d) The match was abandoned very late into the second half.
10. This was the Club's first offence of this kind and it admitted the charge.
11. The sanctions imposed on the Club are as follows:
  - a) The Club is reprimanded for the conduct of its players.
  - b) A fine of £200.
  - c) This fine shall be suspended until the end of the 2019-2020 season and shall be activated only if there is an offence of the same kind during that season (namely, an abandoned match in any fixture at any level for which it bears some culpability).
  - d) The Club must remind all its players at all levels of the importance of the Game's core values, but especially discipline, before the commencement of the 2019-2020 season. It should consider TREDs guidance. The Club should report back to the Panel, through the Disciplinary Secretary before the commencement of the season as to what steps it has taken.
12. It should be obvious that the Club has now lost its good record and, if there is a further disciplinary issue of this kind, it will have been as a result of this set of sanctions being an insufficient deterrent. The Club would be right to expect any future Panel dealing with a future abandoned game to provide a more stringent sanction. If the offence occurs next season, then that sanction will be in addition to the activation of this fine.

### Costs

13. The Club shall pay costs to NLD RFU of £30.

## Appeal

14. There is a right to appeal against this decision. Any such appeal must be made within 14 days of this judgment being sent.

Matthew O'Grady  
Chairman, for and on behalf of the Panel

Wednesday 26<sup>th</sup> June, 2019