

RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION
DISCIPLINARY HEARING

Constituent Body: NLD

Venue: Lincoln RFC

Date: 24/11/23

JUDGMENT

Player: N/A

Club: Lincoln RFC

Matches LRFC U16 V Leicester Forrest RFC (AWAY 17/09/23) LRFC Colts V Grimsby (HOME 1/10/23)

Panel: Tim Bembridge (Chair), Nic Corrigan, Leslie Law

Secretary: Andrew Statham

Attending: Jodie Hill (LRFC Chair) Claire Hanson-Church (LRFC Discipline chair)

Andrew Osmond (LRFC Referee co-ordinator)

Observing:.. Craig Lord (NLD Ref's and NLD discipline)

Decision

1. The Panel found that in the balance of probability the behaviour of LRFC spectators in both games where not acceptable, constituted referee abuse and caused the match referee to submit an RFU match official abuse form (MoA Form)
2. The club pleaded guilty to the charge of conduct prejudicial to the interests of the game, contrary to [RFU Rule 5.12](#).
3. For the benefit of clarity the club pleaded guilty to both charges following both MoA forms. Both charges are to be dealt with by this one judgement.
4. The club were sanctioned as follows:
 - a) 10 league points to be deducted from their first team RFU league (Counties 1, Midlands East (N)) This to be suspended to the end of season 23/24 (June 1 2024). Should there be a repetition of this behaviour at any game/ level gender or age group this sanction will be invoked in addition to any sanction the subsequent panel judges.
 - b) The club must evidence what they have told NLD Discipline has already been put in place to prevent reoccurrence of this behaviour.
 - c) The club must distribute RFU angry man cards to be supplied to Mr Osmond.
 - d) The club must write a letter of apology to both match officials involved in this charge.
 - e) The club must arrange with the RFU education dept to have active bystander training at their club (at their expense should there be any)

- f) The club website and social media must show evidence of this judgement and these sanctions along with further efforts to prevent reoccurrence.
- g) The club must produce, at their own expense, business cards (or similar) showing their own version of the RFU “angry man cards.

Preliminary Matters

5. The panel introduced themselves and the chairman outlined the procedure. The chairman also asked if the club had any objections. The club introduced themselves and stated they had no objections to the formation of the panel nor the procedure that follows.

Charge and Plea

6. That their members on the days in question acted in such a way that the referee took the decision to complete a match official abuse form. This is acting in such a way as to be conduct prejudicial to the interests of the game, contrary to [RFU Rule 5.12](#),

7. The clubs pleaded guilty to the charge.

Evidence

8. The abuse forms were discussed at length and the panel were grateful of the clubs candour and efforts they have gone to already to deal with this behaviour and actions to prevent reoccurrence.

Sanction

9. We undertook an assessment of the club members conduct under Regulation 19.11.8 as follows:-

- a) We believed that the offences, mentioned in both MoA forms, that occurred during the matches where wholly unacceptable and convinced the match referee to feel concerned enough to complete a MoA form.
- b) The offending was reckless, that is the members knew (or should have known) they were committing an act of match official abuse;
- c) The offences would have passed the red card guidelines had the words been spoken by a player
- d) There were numerous members committing these acts and, at the time, no other members took any steps to prevent the perpetrators from repeating these acts despite the knowledge that these were acts of abuse. (passive bystanders)

Mitigating Factors

10.

- (a) We considered there were no mitigating factors on the days in question
- (b) There was a large amount of evidence already submitted by the club that they had taken this charge extremely seriously.
- (c) The club had spent a lot of time organising and evidencing the actions they had taken to prevent reoccurrence
- (d) The actions and evidence mentioned above (10, a & 10, b) greatly affected the panels consideration in this case. But for the clubs efforts prior to this hearing the sanctions would have been far grater.

Aggravating Features

11. We considered the aggravating factors under regulation 19.11.13 NLD RFU have taken steps at the beginning of the current season, (23/24) to enable this discipline committee to aggravate cases of match abuse at their discretion. As this is not a charge against an individual we considered it difficult to aggravate by the agreed rate (aggravation of up to 4 weeks ban)

Decision

11. The club pleaded guilty and this was proven by the panel.

Costs

12. £50-00 fee to the club.

Right of Appeal

13. There is a right of appeal against this decision. Any such appeal must be lodged with the RFU Head of Discipline by

Appendix:

Record of steps taken by LRFC following the charge but before the hearing are listed below. These steps convinced the panel that LRFC have taken the charge seriously and have taken appropriate steps to prevent reoccurrence. This list is not exhaustive but just intended to prove the clubs efforts. Had these steps not been taken this panel would have taken more serious action which would have included some or all of this list.

- Chair and Director of Age Grade rugby informed immediately
- Colts coach who is suspected to be involved in Colts MOA, prevented from any pitch side involvement or coaching in game versus Kesteven on Friday 5th October evening and going forward pending investigation
- Disciplinary with red-carded Colt's player arranged for Wednesday 11th October with parents
- DOR rugby issued immediate social media posts on LRF Facebook site making it very clear to parents, coaches and players that MOA is not acceptable and referred to RFU Codes of Conduct
- All age grade coaches then sent same message to all parents in team WhatsApp messages to ensure that everybody is aware that this sort of behaviour will not be tolerated
- At Colts match on Friday evening all parents were addressed before the match with regards to unacceptability of Official Abuse

- Junior Safeguarding lead was nominated Club official to supervise the parents at Colts match on Friday 5th October
- Lollypops were provided by DOR and parents given one if comments were not in spirit of game as a reminder
- DOR has arranged a meeting with all age-grade rugby coaches on Wednesday 11th October to reinforce message that this will not be tolerated and can have very serious consequences for individuals and clubs, again codes of conduct will be reinforced
- DOR will be enforcing that coaches remain in technical areas and are not to approach match officials unless invited to do so
- Disciplinary panel members recruited (Andrew Edmondson and Jodie Hill)
- All parents and supporters in U16's were addressed by DOR and Coaches prior to their match on Sunday 8th October and again referred to RFU code of conduct
- All parents and supporters were behind respect barriers
- Meeting arranged with Head Coaches of U16's and Colts on Monday 9th October to gather evidence ahead of panels