

# RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION DISCIPLINARY HEARING

Constituent Body: NLD

Venue: Newark RFC

Date: 4/2/25

## **JUDGMENT**

### **Following citing by Meden Vale RFC.**

Player: Adam Loveday

Club: Sleaford RFC

Match: Meden Vale RFC v Sleaford RFC

Match Date: 14/09/24

Match Venue: Meden Vale RFC

Panel:- Tim Bembridge (Chair) Ian Roe (V/Chair) James Armstrong-Holmes

Secretary:- Andrew Statham

Assistant / IT Secretary:- Les Law

## **Attending**

Sleaford:- Adam Loveday (player), Andrew Crawford (Immediate past president), Jodie Melville (secretary) Megan Jones (Physio on the day of game)

Meden Vale:- Tom Wyman (player on the day), Jonathan Pettinger (Club chairman), Kim Hickinbotham (Club safeguarding lead), Joseph Hodgkinson ("victim" & player), Charlie Lilley (Player on the day).

## **Decision**

1. The Panel Found the citing "not proven". This was a complex case, despite the number of statements from both sides there was no significant or independent evidence to prove the case either way. We were left at the 50/50 position.
2. The Player pleaded not guilty to the offence of punching Contrary to Law 9-12
3. This document contains the Panel's reasoned decision, reached after consideration of the evidence, the written and oral submissions and documentation placed before us. It is a summary.  
The fact that specific reference is not made herein to any part or aspect thereof does not mean it was not considered and given the appropriate weight.

## **Preliminary Matters**

4. The panel introduced themselves and the chairman outlined the procedure. The chairman also asked if both clubs had any objections. Both clubs introduced themselves, the chair stressed that it was the responsibility too the Meden Vale club to prove the citing and the Player / Sleaford club to defend the charge.

## **Charge and Plea**

5. That the player Adam Loveday, punched the “victim” Joseph Hodgkinson and this act of foul play caused significant concussion. Adam Loveday denied the charge saying he may have pushed the opposition away but did not punch to the head.

The delay in hearing this citing is wholly because the incident was referred to Nottingham Police who following initial enquiries and after due consideration did not progress the case further. Because of the police involvement NLD Disciplinary secretary forwarded all papers to the RFU head of discipline who in turn returned it back to NLD after the police closed their case.

## **The Citing Complaint**

6. The following is copied from the original citing complaint form completed and submitted by the Meden Vale Club.

Meden Vale v Sleaford fixture Saturday 14th September 2024.

The incident occurred approximately 10 minutes into the second half. The location was on the half way line on the north side of the pitch, 5 metres directly in front of the Sleaford coaches and first-aider. Meden Vale were in possession of the ball attacking with forward phases. Joseph wearing a red scrum cap cleared out a ruck to secure a Meden Vale ball. The cleared out Sleaford player, was wearing a number 8 shirt and had white tape around his head and ears. The Sleaford player was easy to identify as he was the only player on the field of play with tape around his head. Joseph conducted a legal clear out which was witnessed by the match official. The Meden Vale 9 quickly passed the secured ball on to the next phase infield and away from the Sleaford sideline whilst the clear out on number 8 was taking place by Joseph. Following the clear out, Joseph and the number 8 were entangled and Joseph landed on the floor away from the ruck with number 8 seeming to land on his knees. At this point, Sleaford number 8 appeared enraged with the legal clear out, instantly jumping to his feet. He looked over to see where the match official was, as the match official had followed play infield his back was turned. Observing the match official had his back to him Sleaford 8 turned to Joseph who was still laying on the

floor and grabbed him by the collar/ scrum cap strap. Sleaford 8 fully recoiled his right arm as far as he could whilst clenching his fist, he then proceeded to punch down to Joseph's face with extreme force whilst pulling Joseph's head up with his left arm from the floor to cause utmost injury to him.

This was in full view of the Sleaford staff, as they were positioned 5 metres away directly in front of this assault on the Meden

Vale player from Sleaford 8. The play at the time had moved in field and was approximately 15 metres from the Sleaford sideline

and in the direct eyeline of the Sleaford coaches on the halfway line. To clarify, the Sleaford sideline were looking at play 15m

in-field, with the incident 8m from them in the same field of view. As the Sleaford sideline were witness to this, the Sleaford

first aider immediately attended to Joseph on the floor following the attack. She immediately attended to Joseph's head,

demonstrating she had clearly witnessed the assault.

After the game it was evident Joseph had severe concussion and significant swelling to his right cheek. He was unable to get

changed, showered or drive due to disorientation and sickness. At this point Joseph's family were contacted to collect him from

the club and advised he sort medical attention.

Meden Vale RFC are extremely saddened that this kind of thuggery was witnessed and condoned by the Sleaford sideline

allowing number 8 to continue on the field of play for the game. The number 8 clearly had the intention to inflict serious, life

changing injuries to Joseph. This was premeditated as he made sure it was unseen by the match official before assaulting

Joseph.

We strongly believe that the intentions of Sleaford 8 was to inflict serious injury to J Hodgkinson. This was a premeditated and

unprovoked attack that has resulted in serious harm of an individual and could potentially have been life threatening. The

seriousness of the attack has resulted in long term and sustained injuries, impacting on the life and ability to work and drive of

a young man. This is not in the core values of Rugby and must be dealt with in the most serious of manners.

### **Rationale of the decision**

7. We undertook an assessment of the Player's conduct under Regulation 19.11.8 as follows:-

- a) There is no doubt Joe Hodgkinson suffered a blow to his head
- b) There is no doubt Joe Hodgkinson attended hospital on the Monday morning (16/9/24) following the match.
- c) There is no doubt Joe Hodgkinson came into contact with the player Adam Loveday.
- d) The points above (a, b, & c) are agreed by both parties and are substantiated by a NHS hospital document.

- e) There is no agreement following that. 1 party says it was a maul as a result of a line out the other states it was a ruck.
- f) Joe described how he cleared Adam Loveday in a ruck describing how he cleared past the ruck (agreed this was legal as the match official did not penalise it).
- g) Adam Loveday states it was a line out that resulted in a maul which he got through (again legally for the same reason)
- h) Both players ended up together on the floor.
- i) Nothing was seen to plead retaliation
- j) Not self-defence;
- k) Joe Hodgkinson has no memory of the incident following the clear out due to concussion. it follows that his statement from this point reflects what he has been told.
- l) The Incident happened directly in-front of the Sleaford bench and supporters.
- m) Andrew Crawford stated the action was directly in-front of him no more than 10 meters onto the pitch.
- n) Andrew Crawford stated he saw nothing that would cause Joe Hodgkinson the injury. No foul play nor accidental collision (say to the head or body of Adam Loveday or ground)
- o) Adam Loveday suggested Joe Hodgkinson may have hit his head on his hip or ribs He states in his written statement, that Joe Hodgkinsons RIGHT arm rode up over his shoulder like a seat belt, if so, that would most likely mean that Joe Hodgkinson's right cheek, the injured one could have hit Adam Loveday's rib/hip area.
- p) Tom Wyman, who's evidence was persuasive in most aspects but he could not remember what the previous play was (line out or such like)
- q) The Meden Vale opening statement attempted to discredit the statement submitted by Megan Jones (Sleaford Physio).
- r) Megan Jones when asked was equally adamant her version of her attendance to Joe Hodgkinson was fact. As per her statement, she did not see any foul play incident, she did not kneel on the ground to attend to Joe Hodgekinson, in fact as she approached him, he stood up immediately.
- s) The statements from the Meden vale club members were very similar but whilst suggesting they were 30/40 meters away they agreed it was significantly more - from the other side of the field and on a diagonal line of sight.
- t) The Meden Vale statements / evidence suggested Adam Loveday used his left hand to "grab the collar / head guard" of Joe Hodgkinson and threw a single punch with his right hand.
- u) By requesting him to write his name the chairman demonstrated Adam Loveday is left handed, *suggesting* he would on the balance of probability favour his left hand to punch (no inference he WOULD punch).
- v) However the photo of the swollen face of Joe Hodgkinson demonstrated any alleged punch may possibly be from a left handed punch.
- w) There was further conflicting statements from both parties as to attendance to Joe Hodgkinson by both sides physio's
- x) There was conflicting statements as to Joe Hodgkinson continuing involvement in the game.

- y) Joe Hodgkinson was named on a match card two weeks later however that game was cancelled
- z) Joe Hodgkinson did not play in a game for ten weeks.

### **Considered Factors**

8. The Panel considered all documents provided to it and heard and considered submissions from both Clubs. Whilst not all matters are set out above, this should not be taken to indicate that the Panel disregarded any matters set out in writing or submitted orally.

### **Decision**

9. In effect the panel were unanimously agreed they were at a 50/50 point of decision. As explained the burden of proof is "on the balance of probability" i.e. 51 / 49. despite this lower level of proof the panel could not reach that final 1 % to judge either way.

### **Costs**

10. Because of the "not proven" decision the chairman and panel agreed the Citing fee to be returned to Meden Vale RFC. They are a small community club and this was a significant cost to the club.

### **Right of Appeal**

11. There is a right of appeal against this decision. Any such appeal must be lodged with the RFU Head of Discipline within 14 days from the date of the Secretary's email when sending this judgements to both clubs.