

**IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION
APPEALS COMMITTEE**

**In the matter of an appeal by CREWE UNITED against a decision taken by MID
ULSTER FOOTBALL LEAGUE**

Emma McIlveen BL (Chair)

Rachel Best BL

Stephen Shaw

DECISION

This is a decision of the IFA Appeals Committee ('the Committee') which was reached following a hearing which took place at IFA Headquarters on 18 January 2023. It concerns an appeal brought by CREWE UNITED ('the Appellant') against a decision reached by the MID ULSTER FOOTBALL LEAGUE ('the Respondent').

Having regard to the reasons set out below, the unanimous decision of the Committee is that:

- 1. The appeal is successful.**
- 2. The decision of Mid Ulster Football League dated 8th December 2023 is quashed.**
- 3. The fixture of the game played between Crewe United vs Valley Rangers on 11th November 2023 therefore stands.**
- 4. By virtue of Article 14(6)(f) of the IFA Articles of Association a fine of £100 is imposed upon Crewe United for their failure to notify their opponents of a last-minute change to their starting lineup. This fine should be paid to Mid Ulster Football League**

ATTENDEES

1. The Appellant was represented at the hearing by Ms. Sarah Agnew BL instructed by O'Hare solicitors. Thomas McKenna (Club Chairman) and Scott Bingham (manager at game in question) were also in attendance on behalf of the Appellant. The Respondent was represented at the hearing by Mr. Maurice Johnston (Vice Chair) and Stephen Magill (Honorary Secretary) of the League.

2. The Committee wishes to express its gratitude to the parties for their attendance at the hearing and for their helpful written and oral submissions.

BACKGROUND

3. The dispute arises out of a match which took place between Crewe United and Valley Rangers on the 11th November 2023.
4. Following the match, Valley Rangers protested the outcome of the match to the Mid Ulster Football League.
5. On the 26th November 2023, Crewe United sent correspondence to Mid Ulster Football League making several points in relation to the protest.
6. Mid Ulster Football Leagues Management Committee considered the protest at a hearing on 4th December 2023.
7. The Management Committee issued a decision on 8th December 2023. They concluded that the Valley Rangers FC protest be upheld and using the precedence of a similar case, ordered the match to be replayed on a date to be confirmed by the Fixtures Secretary.

POINTS RAISED ON APPEAL

8. Crewe United made the following points on appeal:
 - a) Rule 15a should be read in isolation from the rest of the subsections of Rule 15
 - b) Subsections 15b-f only apply where the Games Management System is unavailable rendering the completion of match cards necessary.
 - c) The League did not have the power to order a replay. They are restricted to a fine only by virtue of Rule 15g.
 - d) The importance of clarity around the rules which applied.
 - e) If there is a need for amendment of rules, there is facility to do this, and it is open to the League to amend the rules going forward if they wish to do so.

- f) In the circumstances of this case, the Panel should set aside the decision of the League and quash the penalty imposed.
- g) The reason why the lineup was changed was because two players were involved in a car accident.
- h) The referee was notified of the change.

9. In response, Mid Ulster Football League the made the following points:

- a) Rule 15 should be read as a whole.
- b) The Management Committee followed the precedent of a similar case.
- c) The sanction was equitable.
- d) The rules are clear.
- e) 15b provides that both teams must be afforded the opportunity to view their opponents team sheet. Must is a mandatory requirement.
- f) 15a provides that it “shall be considered good etiquette to inform opponents of any change to line ups subsequent to confirmation.”
- g) Once confirmed, the lineup should not change in the interests of sporting integrity.
- h) It is the responsibility of the members of the League to be aware of the rules.

FINDINGS

10. The Committee has made the following findings following a detailed consideration and analysis of the information available.

11. During the hearing, both parties to the appeal agreed that the key issue in this appeal surrounded the process which must be followed when there is a last-minute change to the starting lineup.

12. The Committee examined the relevant rules carefully and spent time considering how Rule 15 applies to this set of circumstances.

13. Ultimately, the Committee held as follows:

- a) Rule 15 should be read as a whole. It is not possible to separate 15a from 15a-g.
- b) 15a provides that teams must submit their match day line ups on the Comet Games management system at least 30 minutes prior to the scheduled kick off time. This was done by both teams.
- c) 15b further provides that “*prior to the commencement of the match, both teams must be afforded the opportunity to view their opponents’ team sheet*”. Both teams had this opportunity because 15a was compiled with. Therefore, both sides could view the team sheet on COMET.
- d) The issue in this case was the fact that 2 players who were listed in the starting lineup did not start in the lineup. Both these players were on the team sheet. There was essentially a change in position of the players. Crewe United notified the referee of this last-minute change. The referee allowed the game to proceed. Valley Rangers were not notified of the change.
- e) The League clearly concluded that there had been a breach of Rule 15b. The Committee do not accept this. Both teams did have the opportunity to view their opponents team sheet prior to the commencement of the match.
- f) The Committee consider that the League Rules are silent on what the process is where a last-minute change is required to the lineup.
- g) Given the fact that there has been no breach of Rule 15b, the decision of 8th December 2023 must be quashed.
- h) Given the views of the Committee with regards to the interpretation of 15b, it is therefore not strictly necessary for the Committee to examine the question of sanction. However, for the avoidance of doubt, the Committee agrees that the League did not have the power to order a replay. Under Rule 15, Rule 15g gives the League the power to issue a fine only.

14. Even though the Committee decided to uphold this appeal, the Committee wishes to record their disappointment at how Crewe United handled this situation. In particular, we note that the League’s decision records that when approached about why the last-minute changes were made, Crewe United informed their opponents that “*their opponent had no call to be told*”. Crewe United then advanced the case at hearing that the reason for the last-minute change was because two of their players had been involved in a car accident, resulting in them being delayed. There was no mention of this car accident in advance of the appeal hearing and no evidence was placed before the Committee to support this assertion. The Committee is skeptical about this

assertion and if it indeed was the case that an accident did occur, the Committee is of the view that Crewe should have explained this situation to their opponents in advance of the commencement of the game.

15. Indeed, 15a of the League Rules note that “*It shall be considered good etiquette to inform opponents of any change to line ups subsequent to confirmation*”. The Committee agrees with this and considers that Crewe did not demonstrate good sportsmanship in this scenario. The Committee recognises the importance of confirming line ups in advance of matches.
16. Given the way in which the rules are currently drafted, the Committee felt bound to overturn the decision of the League.
17. However, given the conduct of Crewe, the Committee carefully considered the options open to them in this situation.
18. Applying the discretion afforded to us pursuant to Article 14(6)(f) of the IFA Articles of Association which empowers the Committee to take any step which it considers appropriate to deal justly with a case, the Committee have decided to impose a fine of £100 on Crewe. The reason for this fine is because Crewe failed to exercise good sportsmanship and to notify their opponents, Valley Rangers, of the change to their starting lineup. The Committee considered this fair and reasonable in all the circumstances.

RECOMMENDATIONS FOR IMPROVEMENT TO LEAGUE RULES

19. The Committee noted that the League acknowledged that there was a typographical error contained within the 2023-24 season League Rules. The Committee encourages the League to carefully check their rules before publication. Indeed, the Committee identified several typographical errors within the rules.
20. The Respondent may wish to consider the following further amendments to their Rules:
 - a) Use headings throughout the rules so it is clear what each section of the rules deals with.
 - b) Review Rule 15 so that it deals with issues with match cards only.

- c) Consider new section which clearly explains the process where there is a last-minute change to the lineup. Consider making notification of any changes to the starting lineup mandatory. Clearly outline the sanctions for clubs who do not notify their opponents of any changes.
- d) Consider new catch all provision which gives the League discretion with respect to sanction.
- e) Ensure the Leagues clearly capture all fundamental principles which you expect clubs and players to follow.

21. The Respondent may also wish to consider training for their Management Committee with regards to how protests should be handled.

CONCLUSION

22. For the reasons stated herein, this appeal is allowed, and the decision reached by the Respondent dated 8th December 2023 is accordingly quashed. No replay is therefore required and the result of the fixture of the game played between Crewe United vs Valley Rangers on 11th November 2023 therefore stands.

Dated: 18 January 2024



Emma McIlveen BL

Chair of the Appeals Committee