

Appeal by Wakehurst F.C. against decision by Ballymena and Provincial Football League

The Appeals Board would wish to record their sincere thanks for the cooperation of both parties in dealing with this appeal.

In line with the procedures adopted by the Appeals Board since the commencement of the Covid 19 pandemic the matter was considered on the written submissions made by both parties.

This is an appeal by Wakehurst F.C. against a decision by the Committee of Ballymena and Provincial League to award Glebe Rangers a 3-0 win and consequentially three points as a result of Wakehurst not fulfilling a pre-arranged fixture with Glebe Rovers, which was to have taken place on the 24/8/2021.

There is a live issue between the Secretary of the League and the Wakehurst Secretary as to how and why the match was allegedly postponed and who postponed it or offered to postpone it. The panel has read the submissions from the club and the league and note the respective positions taken by the parties. The panel, for the most part, do not intend to take sides on these matters. Rather the panel will attempt, as best it can, to rely on the facts which are not in dispute and the rules of the league which are relevant to the situation.

For whatever reason the Secretary of Wakehurst did not or could not complete the registration of a goalkeeper, from Ballyclare Comrades, on the Comet System until approximately 10.30 PM on the evening of the 23/8/21. The match against Glebe was scheduled to take place the next evening less than 24 hours after the registration had been completed.

Under rule 8(B) of the league rules, a player, to be eligible to play in the league competition, has to be registered at least 24 hours prior to the game kicking off. Apparently after discussion between the parties it was accepted that this rule could be waived by the Secretary and Vice Chairman of the league so as to enable the match to be played by Wakehurst with a recognised goalkeeper. This panel is not convinced or persuaded that these gentlemen had the authority to do this under the relevant rules.

Notwithstanding this, it appears that the Wakehurst Secretary had informed his players sometime on the 23/8/21 that the game had been postponed. It is claimed by him that the League Secretary had informed him to make an application for a postponement and that this would be granted as the goalkeeper was a specialist position and this would be sufficient grounds for doing so. There is no reference to this in the rules whatsoever and it is obviously an area of dispute between the parties. The rules of the league do not actually provide for a procedure to be employed if a club seeks a postponement of a match. Rule 13(A) says that all scheduled matches are to be played on the date and kick-off time arranged. That rule goes on to say that if a team fails to fulfil a fixture, they may request a hearing with the committee with regard to them not completing a fixture. This request must be made in writing within four days of the match not being played. There is no evidence before the panel that this request was made.

As in all league rules, the clubs are responsible for registering their own players and making sure all formalities are completed. It is clear in this case that the player, for whatever reason, was not registered in time to play against Glebe under rule 8(A) and the panel would not deem this to be a sufficient reason to postpone this match. If the second team keeper was injured, then an outfield player could have played in nets.

Having considered the facts of this matter, it also has to be said that the panel find it unlikely that the Secretary of the League would invite Wakehurst the day before the match to make an application for a postponement and that this would be granted because of the unavailability of a goalkeeper which was classified as a specialist position.

There was reference several times to an issue with the transfer of a club keeper to Ballymoney. This is not relevant to this appeal.

It is the view of this panel that Wakehurst had no grounds to postpone this match without formal confirmation from the league committee that such a request was granted. The game could have and should have gone ahead with two full teams no matter who was the goalkeeper. The date and time of the match had been scheduled to take place as per rule 13(a) and should have gone ahead. If the club had an issue with this, then they should have requested a hearing in writing within 4 days to put forward their side of the argument. They failed to do so.

The league therefore was fully entitled to invoke rule 14(D) and award the game to Glebe with a score line of 3-0.

The Appeal therefore fails for the reasons given.