**Appeal against the decision of the IFA Referees’ Committee by Stephen Bell**

**Appeals Board; Eileen Larkin (Chair), Peter Dornan & John Taggart.**

This matter is an appeal brought under Art 14 , Irish Football Associations Articles of Association by Mr Stephen Bell (the Appellant). The Appellant received notification from the IFA Referees’ Committee (the Respondent), on 26th October 2020 that he would not be re-nominated as a male assistant referee for the FIFA International panel for 2021.

The Appellant has lodged this appeal on the grounds that the Respondent had acted outside the FIFA Nomination Policy in arriving at their decision not to re-nominate him. The Appellant set out his reasons for believing he should have been nominated. These included his performance, potential and commitment records as a referee.

The Respondent submitted they had the discretion to make the decisions on nominations, as referred to in page 6 of the FIFA Nomination Policy;

‘All decisions are made at the discretion of the members of the referees committee regarding the appointment of FIFA officials’.

Further, they contended in this case they had adopted their policy for nominations properly.

We have considered the background to this appeal. Concerns had been raised about the conduct of FIFA appointed officials to the UEFA Europa League game between Nomme Kalju v Mura at the end of August 2020.

The Appellant was one of these officials. The referees committee commenced their own investigation into the matter. This resulted in an investigative meeting, whereby an agreed minute of same meeting was produced. In this minute, the Respondent did accept due to his behaviour in Estonia, that he had breached protocols.

As a result on 5th October 2020 the Respondent proceeded to sanction the Appellant with his suspension from the FIFA list of referees for the remainder of his 2020 nomination. There was no appeal of this decision by the Appellant.

On 26th October the Appellant was notified he would not be re-nominated for the 2021 FIFA referees panel.

In examining the facts laid before us, we did take note of S12 of the Regulations on the Nomination and Appointment of FIFA International Match Officials;

‘FIFA international match officials shall be role models. As such they are expected to behave with dignity and respect, while complying with all applicable FIFA regulations.’

In addition we had regard to the considerations to be undertaken by the referees committee under Section 11 – Potential of the Policy, which states

‘It is important that UEFA has confidence in and appoints our nominees to games as their failure to be appointed can adversely reflect on the wider standing of refereeing in Northern Ireland.

Unanimously, we consider the referees committee have not acted outside their policy. They explained that the personal conduct of the Appellant as a FIFA official in Estonia, which resulted in his suspension from the FIFA panel for the remainder of the 2020, was taken into account when considering him for re-nomination. In the circumstances we find this entirely appropriate. In fact, we would go further and suggest that the conduct admitted by the Appellant could not be ignored by the referees committee. In so doing, this would have disregarded not just the FIFA regulations regarding the need for their officials to act as role models, but also the importance placed on nominated IFA referees being selected for matches.

Therefore the appeal is dismissed.

04/11/20