

APPEALS COMMITTEE

FC Antrim v Ballymena Saturday Morning League

Ciara McReynolds (Chair), Ian Beggs, Jonathan Burgess

The Appeals Board would firstly wish to place on record its thanks to all parties in the appeal for their co-operation. In line with the procedures adopted since the Covid-19 pandemic, this matter was considered by the Appeals Board on written submission provided by the parties.

This is an appeal by FC Antrim against the decision of the Ballymena Saturday Morning League ('BSML') to disqualify Antrim from the Zala Sports Cup and implement a fine in the sum of £50.

The facts are as follows:

- On 2nd October 2021, FC Antrim and Riverdale FC were due to play the 3rd round of the BSML Zala Sports Cup.
- FC Antrim confirmed their team via Comet at 09.54 on the same date. The team included John Hamilton (Mr Hamilton) as Goalkeeper and Jonathan Cunningham (Mr Cunningham) as Goalkeeper Coach.
- At 14.12 Riverdale FC submitted a report to the BSML secretary with their concerns in respect of Mr Hamilton being recorded as the Goalkeeper when in fact it was Mr Cunningham.
- The secretary of FC Antrim ('Mr Devlin') noted after the game that an error had been made wherein Mr Hamilton was incorrectly named as the goalkeeper in place of Mr Cunningham. Mr Devlin contacted the referee to rectify same. It appears messages were forwarded to the referee and a telephone call took place. No evidence was provided from the referee directly.
- On 3rd October 2021, Mr Devlin contacted the referee on a further occasion. The referee returned to Mr Devlin to advise the league does not allow for the amendment.
- On 3rd October 2021, a protest was lodged by Riverdale FC. The protest provided a photograph of Mr Hamilton alleging he was not the goalkeeper played by FC Antrim.
- On 11th October 2021, the initial hearing commenced and adjourned for further evidence.
- On 14th October 2021, the hearing reconvened. On conclusion of the hearing, BSML Council unanimously upheld Riverdale's protest finding FC Antrim played an ineligible player on 2nd October in contravention of BSML Rule 2C. The BSML Council awarded the cup tie to Riverdale FC with a 3-0 result and fined FC Antrim £50.

Appeal hearing

The Appeals Board considered in detail the submissions and annexes provided by FC Antrim, BSML and the BSML Rules for 2021 - 2022.

Of particular relevance is Rule 2B which states:

'the secretary...must FIFTEEN MINUTES before appointed match kick off time complete and confirm their FINAL LIST of eligible players on the Comet System and must certify the accuracy of the information provided.'

The Appeals Board considers the secretary submitted the final list in time however the accuracy of same was defective. The Appeals board accepts that the inclusion of Mr Hamilton was a human error and no evidence has been provided to establish this error was made knowingly.

Of further relevance is Rule 2C which states:

'no changes on the FINAL LIST can be made unless agreed by referees.'

The Appeals Board notes FC Antrim's submission that no time limit is noted within the rule. The Appeals Board considers the time limit is prior to the commencement of the game. To amend the list after the game would underestimate the requirement for a 'final' list.

The Appeals Board sympathises with FC Antrim on the basis of their human error however it remains incumbent that care and due diligence is taken by all clubs in confirming their final list in the Comet System. The Board could not find any compelling evidence that the BSML had erred in their decision nor their interpretation of the League Rules and it is unanimously agreed that the appeal be dismissed.