

Desertmartin FC v Ballymena and Provincial Football League

Before the IFA Appeal Board on 4 May 2022

Carley Shields (Chair), Ciara McReynolds & Stephen Shaw

This is an appeal by Desertmartin FC ('Desertmartin') against the eligibility ruling and associated sanctions imposed by Ballymena and Provincial Football League ('the League') regarding the registration of Daniel McIlhatton.

Background:

Mr McIlhatton asked Desertmartin if he could register for them, however this was at a time outside one of the specified registration periods. Desertmartin state that they contacted the League secretary to ask if they could register a player outside the registration window (5 November 2021).

They state that they were informed that they could register a player, but he was not eligible to play until January 2022. Desertmartin claim that they were not informed that the player would have to be re-registered in January.

Desertmartin proceeded to register Mr McIlhatton on Comet but did not play Mr McIlhatton in any games prior to 1 January 2022. His first game took place on 8 January 2022.

In and around 26/27 March the League became aware that Mr McIlhatton had not been properly registered during a registration period as per Regulation 3 of the Professional Game Playing Registration Regulations and expelled Desertmartin from three cup competitions, deducted league points and ruled Mr McIlhatton ineligible for the remainder of the season.

Analysis:

The League has no recollection of informing Desertmartin that they could sign Mr McIlhatton when they did. The League accepts that Desertmartin were not trying to deceive or be dishonest, and that their actions were what they believed were acceptable.

Regulation 3(a) of the Professional Game Player Registration Regulations states '*Players may **only** (our emphasis added) be registered during one of the two annual registration periods fixed by the relevant association...*' There are exceptions as set out in Regulation 3, but the Appeal Board do not believe Mr McIlhatton can avail of any of those.

Regulation 3(d) states '*The following registration periods will apply: 9 June 2021- 31 August 2021; 1 January 2022 – 31 January 2022.*'

Conclusion:

Given the clear wording of Regulation 3(a), in that players may only be registered during one of the two annual registration periods, regardless of what Desertmartin claim they were told by the League, they should not have registered Mr McIlhatton when they did unless he satisfied one of the exceptions as set out in Regulation 3.

Although the Appeal Board is sympathetic towards the plight of Desertmartin the Regulations are clear and therefore the Appeal is therefore dismissed.

The Appeal Board would like to thank the parties for their submissions.

End.