

Ballinamallard United FC v Northern Ireland Football League

Before the IFA Appeal Board on 5 May 2022

John Greer (Chair), Peter Dornan & Carla Dallas

This is an appeal by Ballinamallard United FC ('Ballinamallard') against the eligibility ruling and associated sanctions imposed by Northern Ireland Football League ('the League') regarding the registration of Steven Drumm.

Mr Drumm registered as an amateur player for Ballinamallard on 10 September 2021. In the period to 31 December 2021 the player participated in seven matches for Ballinamallard in the NIFL Championship Development League. The League identified that Mr Drumm was ineligible to play in these matches as he had been registered outside of the designated registration periods (transfer windows) specified within the IFA Professional Game Registration Regulations. In line with the League rules the club was fined £220 and the result of every one of the seven matches recorded as a 3-0 defeat.

Ballinamallard contend that the registration requirements for which they are being sanctioned do not apply as the Championship Development League is not explicitly mentioned in Rule 2(a) of the NIFL Player Registration Regulations and instead rely on an assumption that the player was correctly registered in line with the IFA Amateur Player registration Regulations.

In response the League states that the Championship Development League is not a purely amateur league as professionals are permitted to play and as such all registrations must be carried out in accordance with Rule 24(a) of the League Rules and during the designated registration periods.

The Appeals Board considers that the key issue here is whether the Championship Development League is a purely amateur league and therefore which registration criteria will apply to the player concerned. On the evidence of NIFL it appears the Championship Development League is not a purely amateur league as professional players may take part and the League Rules are clear at Rule 24(a) that players must be registered in accordance with the IFA Professional Game Player Registration regulations. As such it is clear that Mr Drumm who was registered as an amateur player outside the designated registration periods was ineligible to play.

The Appeals Board accepts that the omission of the Championship Development League from the NIFL Player Registration Regulations is puzzling and may give rise to some confusion. However it is the responsibility of clubs to ensure that players are properly registered and to make further enquiry if in any doubt. In this instance the League Rules are clear and accordingly the appeal must be dismissed.

The Appeals Board would wish to thank all parties for their assistance and cooperation in dealing with this matter.