

IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION APPEALS COMMITTEE

In the matter of an appeal by Crewe United Football Club (hereinafter referred to as the Appellant) against a decision of the Mid Ulster Football League Management Committee (hereinafter referred to as MUFL or Respondent) against a decision to award a 3-2 win to Bourneview Mill FC following the abandonment of a match played on 20th May 2023.

Appeals Board

Mr Barry Finnegan (Vice-Chair)

Ms Emma McIlveen

Mr David Lennox

Decision:

This is a decision of the IFA Appeals Board following a Hearing which took place at IFA Headquarters on Tuesday 6th June 2023. It concerns an appeal brought by Crewe United Football Club ('the Appellant') against a decision reached by the Management Committee of the MUFL ('the Respondent') on 29th May 2023 to award a 3-2 victory to Bourneview Mill FC as a consequence of a match abandonment on 20th May 2023 between Bourneview Mill FC and the Appellant.

Having regard to the reasons set out below, the unanimous decision of the Appeals Board is that the appeal shall be dismissed and hence the original decision reached by the Respondent to award a 3-2 win to Bourneview Mill FC shall stand.

Attendees:

The Appellant was represented at the Hearing of this appeal by Jordan McClurkin B.L, Counsel, Eamon McCarthy, Manager and Thomas McKenna, all of whom provided evidence to the committee. The Respondent was represented by Stephen Magill, Secretary and Maurice Johnston, Vice-Chair, both of whom also provided evidence to the Appeals Committee. The Appeals Committee would like to express their gratitude for the helpful and informative manner in which all of the attendees conducted themselves during Hearing.

In addition to the evidence submitted on behalf of the Appellant and Respondent the Appeals Committee noted the detailed written submissions filed by both parties. The Committee has made the following findings following a detailed analysis of the facts available:-

1. It is accepted by both parties that a Bourneview Mill FC player sustained a significant injury in and around the 84th minute of a match played against the Appellant on 20th May 2023 at which time the scoreline stood at 3-2 in favour of Bourneview Mill FC.
2. The precise nature of the injury is somewhat unclear. The Appellant stipulate in their correspondence of 20th May 2023 addressed to the Respondent that "he had dislocated his ankle" whilst the Respondent stipulate in their letter of 5th June 2023 addressed to the Secretary of the Appeal's Committee that the injury was a "broken fibula and dislocated ankle diagnosis."
3. What is not disputed by the parties is that this injury led to a not inconsiderable stoppage in play whilst the initial injury was assessed, and medical assistance sought from Northern Ireland Ambulance Service. The stoppage in play was estimated to have arisen to at least 30 minutes before the referee, in conjunction with an independent referee observer as well as

management for both sides, elected to abandon the match. At the time of abandonment the medical personnel had not arrived on site and neither club were responsible for ensuring that such facilities should be made available at the match in question.

4. Upon receiving notification of the abandonment the Respondent's Management Committee reviewed the information available during a meeting on 29th May 2023 to include submissions from the two clubs, the referee and referee observer. The committee then unanimously agreed to apply the MUFL Rule 11 b (i) which stipulates as follows:-

"If for any reason a match has been terminated by a Referee due to circumstances over which neither competing team has control, the result at the termination of play shall stand provided that the duration of the match has not been less than an hour."

5. With this in mind the Respondent elected to award a 3-2 victory to Bourneview Mill FC in light of the fact over 60 minutes had been played and this was the scoreline at the time of the match abandonment.
6. The Appellant have appealed this decision on a variety of different grounds however during the course of the Appeal Hearing Mr McClurkin B.L focused primarily on the contention that the match referee had not allowed sufficient or equitable time for the injured player to be removed from the field of play. This led to a "disproportionate" decision to abandon the match in question which ought to have been the "last port of call."
7. The Appellant's general position was that, notwithstanding the severity of the injury sustained by the Bourneview Mill FC player, the match could still have been facilitated after appropriate medical treatment had been administered and the player removed from the field of play. Mr McClurkin, as a matter of example, made reference to the situation which unfolded in a Euro 2020 group stage match between Denmark and Finland during which Denmark's Christian Eriksen collapsed due to a cardiac arrest and the game did resume, albeit at a much later stage, once the player had been treated and taken to hospital for further treatment.
8. The majority of Respondent's evidence was submitted by Mr Johnston who discussed the process adopted by the referee in determining that the match should be abandoned to include the length of time between the injury -induced stoppage and potential resumption of play.
9. Reference was made to IFAB Law 7 – Duration of the Match, as well as well as IFAB Law 5.7 under the Laws of the Game and it was pointed out to the committee by Mr Johnston for the Respondent that the Management Committee considered that the referee had sufficient power to order the match abandonment, and had taken the correct decision bearing in mind the series of events which had unfolded on the day to include the delay associated with the injured player receiving necessary medical treatment.
10. Mr Johnston also referred to the Respondent's view that in such circumstances, the Management Committee did not believe either of the two clubs competing in the match in question were responsible for the abandonment and hence pursuant to MUFL Rule 11 b (i) the result at the time of play ought to stand accordingly.

11. Having regard to all of the evidence, the Appeals Committee finds that the match referee had sufficient scope under the IFAB Laws of the Game to abandon the match bearing in mind the severity of the injury sustained, the delay in the player receiving expert medical treatment and the accompanying uncertainty surrounding when the match could be restarted. The Committee also took into account the psychological impact an injury of this type would have on the participating players, to include the team-mates of the injured player in particular. It was also borne in mind that the referee's written report made reference to the fact the medical advice provided by the emergency operator was not to remove the player from the field of play and to ensure he remained in place until such time as ambulance staff arrived to administer treatment.
12. The Appeals Committee therefore finds that the referee adopted a sensible, logical and pragmatic approach, allowed matters to unfold, consulted with the appropriate parties and thereafter determined that the match should be abandoned given the circumstances.
13. Pursuant to Law 7.5 of the IFAB Laws of the Game an abandoned match is replayed unless the competition rules or organisers determine otherwise. In this case, not only do the competition rules stipulate that the result at the time of play will stand in an abandoned match where neither team was held to be the cause, but the "organisers" had also convened a Management Committee Meeting to review the circumstances surrounding the abandonment and determined that the result at the time of the abandonment would stand.
14. It therefore follows that as no fundamental error or lack of judgement has been identified in terms of the referee's decision to abandon the match in question, or in the Respondent's interpretation and application of both the appropriate Laws of the Game and league rules, the Respondent's original decision should be upheld.
15. Therefore having regard to the reasons set out above, the unanimous decision of the Appeals Board is that the appeal shall be dismissed and the Respondent's original decision to award a 3-2 victory to Bourneview Mill FC shall stand.
16. This decision was delivered orally to the parties on Tuesday 6th June 2023.

Dated: 18th June 2023 Barry Finnegan, Vice-Chair. On Behalf of the Appeals Board