

IN THE MATTER OF AN APPEAL UNDER ARTICLE 14 OF THE IFA ARTICLES OF ASSOCIATION

Between

BELFAST UNITED FC

Appellant

and

COUNTY ANTRIM FA

Respondent

DECISION OF THE IFA APPEALS COMMITTEE

APPEAL COMMITTEE

Ms. Rachel Best KC (Chair)

Mr. Barry Finnegan (Vice Chair)

Miss Carla Dallas (Independent Member)

ATTENDEES

Jamie Bryson (Representative) for the Appellant

Ryan Arthurs (1st Team Manager Belfast United Football Club) Appellant

Martin Sloane (Vice Chair County Antrim Disciplinary Committee) Respondent

Bernard Thompson (Secretary) Respondent

INTRODUCTION

1. This is a decision of the IFA Appeals Committee (“the Committee”) following a Hearing which took place at IFA Headquarters on Monday 24th February 2025. The Appeal before the Committee related to a decision reached by the Respondent whereby, they had sanctioned Belfast United in the amount of £200.00 for match

abandonment. This sanction had previously been £300 but had been reduced on appeal.

2. AFC Stranmillis were also fined £300 but they did not appeal their sanction.

GROUNDS OF APPEAL

3. The Appellant confirmed that there were two grounds of appeal being advanced:
 - a. The match report submitted by the Referee (which grounded the disciplinary charge) was submitted “out of time” and was therefore not admissible.
 - b. There was new evidence which changed the position.

4. Taking each ground in turn:

a. The Match Report.

5. The match report in question said as follows: *“Match abandonment as a result of the incident between H8 and A14 and a mass brawl between both sets of Clubs and spectators occurred. Due to the nature of the brawl that occurred in the 89th minute the game was abandoned due to players, officials and spectators becoming involved. The match was abandoned as I was in fear for my safety, the safety of the players and officials from both Clubs. I must report both Clubs under Article 20.1 of the Disciplinary Code.”* This was submitted by the referee who was refereeing the relevant match between Belfast United and AFC Stranmillis. The match took place on the 6th November 2024 with a kick-off time of 2pm. The match report was submitted on 17th November at 19 10 hours.

6. The Appellant drew the Committee’s attention to Article 6.5 of the Disciplinary Code, which provides *the referee report must be submitted by the referee via the*

Comet System at the earliest opportunity following completion of the match and not later than 24 hours after the commencement of the match taking place.

7. The Appellant argued that as the match report was submitted after 24 hours from the commencement of the match it should not have been accepted by the Disciplinary Committee. In further support of this proposition the Appellant relies upon the case of *Cliftonville*. In the *Cliftonville* case the factual situation was very different to the present situation which involved a number of match reports being submitted about the same incident. In any event, the Committee considers that each case must be determined on a case-by-case basis.
8. In this case the Appeals Committee does not accept the Appellant's contention and is deeply concerned about the behaviour displayed at this match which led to each Club being given a substantial financial penalty. It is further of concern that people were put in fear for their personal safety in relation to the actions of those who were involved in the brawl. The Committee were provided with a photograph, as part of the evidence submitted by the Respondent, of a supporter with a significant gash in his face. Such behaviour cannot be tolerated in football. All are entitled to attend matches for their enjoyment and not be put in fear of their safety.
9. The Committee does not accept that any submission after the 24-hour period, particularly in these circumstances, renders the match report "*inadmissible*". The Disciplinary Committee were entitled to take it into account. This ground of appeal is therefore dismissed.

b. New Evidence

10. The second ground of appeal related to *new evidence* which the Appellant's representative said was not in existence at the time. This new evidence was a

letter from Mr. Colin Morrison, who is the Vice Chairman of AFC Stranmillis. This letter suggests that he disagreed with the statement in the match summary by the referee that the game was abandoned. This was of limited assistance to the Appellant.

11. A further account from Mr. Paul Hicks dated 2nd December 2024 was presented to the Committee (although it was accepted by the Appellant that this was in existence at the relevant time). Nevertheless, the Committee considered the content of this account. Mr. Hicks was a referee in a neighbouring football match on the day in question. The Committee agrees with the Disciplinary Committee's view that the relevant account was that of the referee who was in charge of the game in question. The Committee considers that this account was of limited assistance to the Committee in these circumstances.

12. The Committee does not consider either of these accounts to change the position and accordingly this second ground of appeal is dismissed.

DECISION

13. For the reasons set out herein, the Appeal is not upheld and the decision of the County Antrim FA of 2nd December 2024 stands.



R BEST KC

Interim Chair of Appeals Committee

7th March 2025