

IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

APPEALS COMMITTEE

In the matter of an appeal by **COOKSTOWN YOUTH FOOTBALL CLUB** ('the Appellant') against a decision made by the **BALLYMENA AND PROVINCIAL FOOTBALL LEAGUE** ('the Respondent')

Appeal Board:

Carley Shields

Kieran McMahon

David Lennox

Attendees:

1. The Appellant was represented at the hearing by Niall Hunter (Cookstown Youth Representative).
2. The Respondent was represented at the hearing by William McIlroy (Secretary) and Ian Shiels (Chairperson).
3. The Board thanked the parties for their written and oral submissions and for their attendance at the hearing.

Background:

4. The appeal is against a decision of the Respondent made on 18 April 2025 that the Appellant failed to ensure that Rule 11(a) of the Ballymena and Provincial League Rules ('the League Rules') was followed when they played Greenisland Dev on 29 March 2025. The Respondent determined that the Appellant would forfeit the game 3-0 and pay a fine of £25 to the Respondent.
5. Rule 11(a) of the League Rules states: *'It is the responsibility of each club to ensure that, all the Players named on the Comet System are eligible to play. Names of Players and Team Officials to be confirmed on the system prior to the Game by a Responsible Person who should be present at the game. The League secretary will have the authority to carry out spot checks on the Players named by a Team to ascertain that the Players named are/were eligible to play in any game. Any abnormalities brought to the attention of the committee, will be dealt with as they may determine.'*

Points raised on appeal:

6. The Appellant made the following key points:
 - a. In the letter sanctioning the Appellant, the Rules listed did not state that a club will have to forfeit the match 3-0 to their opponents.
 - b. The Appellant states that they raised the issue of a malfunction as a ticket on the Comet system and were advised that an update may be needed on the phone app.

- c. There is an inconsistency with the rules applied by the Respondent. In particular, on two occasions when issues were brought to their attention the Respondent failed to take action.
 - d. There was no attempt to deceive their opponent or to break the League Rules.
 - e. It is not often that the Appellant is in this position and it tries to adhere to the League Rules at all times.
7. The Respondent made the following key points:
- a. The Respondent referred to the email from Niall Hunter dated 30 March 2025 in which he stated 'Total oversight on our behalf...'
 - b. They questioned, why did the Appellant not raise the issue of teams being treated differently at the time and where is the proof of this?
 - c. Examples were provided of decisions taken by the League Committee this season.
 - d. Rule 11(a) includes the phrase '*Any abnormalities brought to the attention of the committee, will be dealt with as they may determine.*'
 - e. Monetary penalties mean nothing to teams, they will pay a fine if it means saving a game.

Analysis:

- 8. The Appeal Board considered carefully the points made by both parties and acknowledges that the Appellant did not intend to breach the League Rules.
- 9. Unfortunately, there appears to have been a technical error with the Comet app on the Coach's device, which according to the Appellant, seemed to remedy itself once the app was updated.
- 10. That being said, the League Rules are there for a reason and it is always up to the Club, not the League, not the referee nor anyone else, to ensure that the names of all players and team officials are confirmed on the system prior to the game, and that means making sure that the Comet app is up to date and working correctly.
- 11. In terms of the Appellant being treated differently, the Board noted that no proof was given for consideration, only the oral submissions of the Appellant. On the other hand, the Respondent was able to provide examples of a consistent approach to sanctioning clubs that broke League Rules.
- 12. Given the above, in accordance with Article 14(6)(a) of the IFA's Articles of Association, the Appeal Board has decided to affirm the decision of the Respondent and to dismiss the appeal.

Dated: 14 May 2025

Carley Shields

On behalf of the Appeal Board