

## IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

### APPEALS COMMITTEE

In the matter of an appeal by **BELFAST RAVENS FC** ('the Appellant') against a decision made by the **NORTHERN IRELAND WOMEN'S FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION** ('the Respondent')

#### Appeal Board:

Carley Shields

Mervyn Wheatley

Peter Clarke

#### Attendees:

1. The Appellant was represented at the hearing by Laura Adams (Co-Chair) and David O'Reilly (Co-Chair).
2. The Respondent was represented at the hearing by David Heron (Committee member), Linda Mitchell (Committee member), Valerie Heron (Chair) and Colette Young (Secretary).
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 12 June 2025 in relation to the Appellant's match against Maiden City Ladies ('Maiden City').
5. The decision was to award the fixture to Maiden City with a 3-0 win, deduct three points from the Appellant and fine the Appellant £50 for playing an ineligible player.
6. Rule 5.6 of the Respondent's League Rules states '*In accordance with Article 8.1 of the IFA Amateur Game Player Registration Regulations, amateur players (with an active registration) moving clubs will be required to complete a transfer. The transfer instruction must be submitted and approved by both clubs involved via the Football Management System. No NIWFA club may transfer more than 2 players from any other NIWFA club in any season. As per Articles 9 (Bridge Transfer) and Article 15 (Cancellation of a Registration and Retirement) players are not permitted to use an intermediate club or terminate a registration in order to circumvent this rule.*'
7. The Appellant signed three players from Civil Service Ladies ('Civil Service') during April and May 2025, the last one signed being deemed the ineligible player.

#### Points raised on appeal:

8. The Appellant made the following key points:
  - a. Ms Clark had not agreed to re-join Civil Service for the 2025 season. She had not played for them since last July and was unaware that they had re-registered her.

- b. An email circulated by the IFA on 7 February 2025 concerning the re-registration of female amateur players confirmed that *'it is essential that consent is obtained from each player (or guardian for players aged under 18) prior to selecting the individual for re-registration.'*
  - c. Ms Clark had not given permission to Civil Service to be re-registered, therefore without consent Civil Service's ownership of Beth's registration was invalid. This was a registration rather than a transfer.
  - d. Ms Clark has missed out on playing 7 or 8 matches with the first team since she was deemed ineligible and there are 5 matches of the season left to play.
9. The Respondent made the following key points:
- a. Each of the transfers was submitted and approved through the IFA's Football Management System (Comet), which clearly listed Civil Service as the player's previous club. This information would have been visible to the Appellant at the time of each transfer request.
  - b. If the Appellant were aware that Ms Clark had been re-registered without her knowledge or consent, it was their responsibility to raise that concern with the IFA before submitting the transfer request.
  - c. The Respondent is not in a position to re-interpret a player's registration status retrospectively, particularly since no issue was raised at the appropriate time.
  - d. As Ms Clark was found to be ineligible when she appeared in the match against Maiden City, the Respondent invoked its standard disciplinary procedure under its League Rules 5.13 and 5.14.
  - e. Civil Service were removed from the League as of 23 June 2025 following their forfeiture of three league fixtures this season, but this does not alter Ms Clark's registered status at the time of her transfer to the Appellant.

Analysis:

- 10. Rule 5.13 states: *'Any club playing an ineligible player or players (whether through non-registration, suspension or otherwise) in any match under the jurisdiction of the NIWFA shall be fined as per NIWFA Tariffs. This shall apply to each and every player breaching this rule.'*
- 11. Rule 5.14 states: *'The offending team will forfeit the match(es) in question, and a score line of three nil shall be recorded in favour of their opponents. The offending team will also be deducted 3 points. Notwithstanding the above, the winning team shall not be disadvantaged if the original score line was of greater benefit to that team's goal difference.'*
- 12. The Respondent acknowledges that they signed a third player from Civil Service, even though Ms Clark believed that she wasn't registered with Civil Service.
- 13. Ultimately, it is a club's responsibility to make sure that their players are eligible to play.

Decision:

14. Given the above, in accordance with Article 14(a) of the IFA's Articles of Association, the Appeal Board has decided to affirm the decision of the Respondent and the appeal is dismissed.
15. However, given that Civil Service has been removed from the League, the Appeal Board, in accordance with Article 14(f), instructs all relevant parties (the Appellant, the Respondent and the IFA) to ensure that Ms Clark's valid registration with the Appellant can be facilitated in time for the Appellant's next fixture to allow her to be available for selection for the remainder of the season.

**Dated: 29 July 2025**

**Carley Shields**

**Vice Chair**

**On behalf of the Appeal Board**