

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

Between:

EAST BELFAST FC

Appellant

V

THE COUNTY ANTRIM FA STEEL AND SONS CUP COMMITTEE

Respondent

APPEALS COMMITTEE

Rachel Best KC (Chair)

David Lennox

Rodney McVitty

ON BEHALF OF THE APPELLANT - Jamie Bryson

ON BEHALF OF THE RESPONDENT. - David Morrow, Adam Simpson, Chris Abbot

FACTS AND BACKGROUND

1. This was an Appeal against the Decision of the County Antrim FA (Steel & Sons Cup Committee) of the 11th August 2025 that the fixture between East Belfast FC and Dundonald FC was to be replayed.
2. The Appeal was mounted under three headings:
 - (i) Ultra Vires
 - (ii) Unfairness
 - (iii) Irrationality

3. The Committee wishes to extend its thanks and gratitude to both sides who provided very comprehensive submissions both written and orally. The approach to such matters is extremely helpful for the Committee in grappling with these issues and understanding the matters before it.
4. It was agreed before the Committee that there was little dispute on the facts. The Committee therefore found as a fact the following:
 - a. On Saturday 2nd August 2025 East Belfast played Dundonald and were leading 2-0 in the first round of the Steel & Sons Cup. There were approximately 74 minutes played when the Dundonald goalkeeper collided with the post and sustained a head injury. No other player was involved. The referee made the decision to abandon the match.
 - b. Whilst the Appellant was not a party to the referee's match report it did not seem to be in contention that this was submitted by email to the Cup Committee. The Appeals Committee finds as a fact that the following was advanced by the referee *"play was stopped on the 74th due to a serious head injury to the Dundonald goalkeeper. Unfortunately, the goalkeeper collided with the post, and therefore due to the player's safety I abandoned the game. At this time East Belfast had been 2.0 up in the game."* There was no dispute by the Appellant that this was an accurate description of what occurred.
 - c. Thereafter on the 4th August 2025 the Appellant received an email from the Respondent inviting observations on the abandonment. Dundonald was also invited to make observations and replied as follows: *"Thank you for the opportunity comment on this. Our only observation is that the referee was forced to abandon the game in the 72nd minute due to a bad injury to our goalkeeper which required an ambulance. We look forward to hearing the Committee's decision regarding this game."*

- d. East Belfast by correspondence of the 5th August 2025 wrote to the Cup Committee making a number of points:
- The abandonment was caused by a self-sustained injury by the goalkeeper for Dundonald FC. There was no involvement by any East Belfast player. East Belfast officials, coaches, players and medical staff all provided assistance to the injured player.
 - At the time of the abandonment due to the assessment of Dundonald Medical Staff that their player could not continue, the score line was 2-0 to East Belfast with 73 minutes played.
 - Both Clubs are members of NAFL and whilst the Steel & Sons Cup is not a NAFL competition, it is relevant to note that any game abandonment in which more than 60 minutes has been played the result generally stands.
 - The common practice is for the result to stand, and some leagues vary this between 60 minutes and 70 minutes as the cut off point. In either approach the game had exceeded the established cut off point. There was no good reason or exceptional circumstances which would justify any departure from the standard approach that the result should stand.
 - East Belfast ought not to be disadvantaged due to a situation which was not of their making and in respect of which they did not contribute.
- e. This matter was first discussed at the Steel & Sons Cup Committee on Monday 4th August 2025 of which Minutes have been provided. It is clear that there was a discussion about the abandonment of the game, and it was agreed at this Committee that the Clubs in question would be requested for their observations on the abandoned fixtures. The Committee was to be reconvened on Monday 11th August for further discussion.
- f. On the 11th August 2025 the Committee met again, the Minutes of which have also been provided. It is clear from these Minutes that the Members of the Committee who were present, discussed a range of options to remedy the abandoned fixtures. Those options included:
- (i) Declaring that the result of the fixture stands at the time of abandonment;
 - (ii) Replaying the fixture in full;

(iii) Playing the remaining minutes of the fixture.

- g. The Members clearly had a discussion that Rule 15 was not prescriptive in the action that the Committee was required to take in the event of an abandonment and in the absence of such, the Committee could determine the outcome.
5. It is important to note that the Appellant, correctly, recognised that the Committee had a discretion as to how to deal with this matter. The point that the Appellant made was that this was not a “unfettered” discretion and must be exercised in a lawful manner. The Appeal Committee agrees with the Appellant in this regard.
6. As can be seen from the Minutes of the Committee the fixture in question was to be replayed in full.
7. The Appeals Committee have had regard to Rule 15 of the Competition Rules which provides as follows: *If a match has been stopped by the referee before the completion of the time specified in the Rules, for any reason stated in Law five, the Committee shall have power to deal with the matter as they may determine.*
8. It was agreed that the report submitted by the Referee confirmed he made the decision to abandon the fixture due to a serious injury. In relation to the Laws of the game at 5.3 it is provided as follows: *The referee acts as timekeeper, keeps a record of the match and provides appropriate authorities in the match report, including information and disciplinary action and any other incidents that occurred before, during or after the match.*
9. It is undisputed, that the referee did provide the Cup Committee (Appropriate Authority) with a match report. There is no requirement to provide any other party with the match report; the only requirement is that the appropriate authority is provided with such. This was done.

10. The decision to replay the fixture in full was made pursuant to Law 7.5 (Laws of the Game) which provides as follows: *An abandoned match is replayed unless the competition rules or organisers determine otherwise.*
11. Therein lies the discretion for the Cup Committee in this regard.
12. The Respondent referred the Appeal Committee to a previous decision of this Committee in relation to an abandoned game involving St James Swifts in October 2018. The Respondent points to a relevant section of that decision which found that the Committee *were satisfied in accordance with the competition rules that the CAFA had the power to deal with the abandonment as they determined. The Board were satisfied that CAFA acted in accordance with the Rules of the competition and there was not any misdirection on their part.*
13. It is accepted that each matter must be dealt with on its merits and that whilst this may be of some interest it is not persuasive to this Committee. This Committee deals with this matter on its own facts and the various representations made before it.
14. Having considered carefully all of the facts and legal arguments made this Committee finds that in these circumstances the Respondent was entitled to determine that the match should be replayed. Whilst the Committee has sympathy for the Appellant, in the circumstances the discretion of the Respondent has been exercised in such a way that this Committee does not find that it is unlawful nor was it a fettered discretion.
15. Accordingly the Appeal is dismissed.

R BEST KC Chair

D LENNOX

R McVITTY