

# IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

## APPEALS COMMITTEE

**In the matter of an appeal taken by FC Antrim (“the Appellant”) against a decision taken by Ballymena Saturday Morning Football League (“the Respondent”)**

### **Appeals Board**

James Tracey (Chair)  
David Lennox  
Mervyn Wheatley

### **FC Antrim (Appellant)**

Sean Hanna  
Jamie Bryson (Legal Representative)

### **BSML (Respondent)**

Brian Montgomery  
John Stewart  
Philip Davidson

### **Decision**

This is the unanimous decision of the IFA Appeals Committee which was reached following a hearing on Tuesday 30 June 2026. The Panel considered a significant volume of material and written submissions in addition to hearing from representatives from FC Antrim and the Ballymena Saturday Morning League (BSML). The Appeals Committee are grateful to both parties for their comprehensive and detailed submissions, both orally and in writing.

For the reasons set out below, the Appellant’s appeal is rejected.

### **Issue**

1. This appeal was brought by FC Antrim against the decision of BSML issued on the 08 May 2026.
2. On 31 March 2026, the Appellant transferred Mr Conan McAuley from Newington FC, an intermediate club.
3. Mr McAuley played three games for the Appellant on the 11<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> of April 2026.
4. On the 29<sup>th</sup> April, following a time in which Mr McAuley has already played on 3 occasions, the Appellant sought clarity from the Respondent as to Mr McAuley’s status as a high-grade player.

5. On the 7<sup>th</sup> May 2026, the Respondent held a disciplinary meeting. The BSML Council confirmed a Breach of Rule 2A of the BSML Rules for 25/26, finding the Appellant guilty of playing an ineligible player on three occasions in the BSML.
6. Utilising Rule 1 of the aforementioned rules, the BSML Council deducted 9 points that had been awarded to the Appellant, stating that the Council *'have the right to take appropriate action against any club whom they consider has brought the League or football into Disrepute'*
7. The Appellant states that the sanction power in Rule 2 sets a baseline for the sanction and sets out what they believe to be core elements that must be present in order to sanction for a breach. The Appellant provides that a protest must be lodged as per rule 7, which cannot be viewed as a discretionary element, but a mandatory requirement.
8. In essence, it is the Appellant's position, that if a protest is not lodged pursuant to Rule 7, the BSML Council have no power to sanction for a breach of Rule 2.

### **Relevant findings of fact**

1. Mr McAuley Transferred from Newington FC to the Appellant on the 31 March 2026.
2. Mr McAuley played on three occasions for the Appellant, on the 11<sup>th</sup>, 14<sup>th</sup> and 18<sup>th</sup> April.
3. It is accepted by the Appellant that the player fielded was ineligible. In their appeal, the appellant specifically stated *'On 1<sup>st</sup> May 2026 clarity was provided that indeed Mr McAuley was a senior grade player, and therefore ineligible. This is accepted'*

### **Findings**

4. It isn't disputed that the appellant fielded an ineligible player for three matches between 11 April 2026 and 18<sup>th</sup> April 2026.
5. BSML Council have utilised Rule 1 of their rules, to deduct 9 points from the Appellant, citing a Breach of Rule 2, despite a protest not being lodged per Rule 7.
6. This Committee has to consider the situation whereby if a protest is not lodged per Rule 7, any number of teams may field illegible players for a prolonged period of time and not face reprimand. Plainly, this committee finds that this would bring the game into disrepute and as such, Rule 1 may be engaged by the BSML Council.
7. Whilst the Committee accepts that the Appellant brought the status of Mr McAuley to the BSML, it is for the Appellant to clarify a player's status before fielding said player in a match. A player's status can be referenced on the Comet system with relative ease.
8. There simply cannot be a situation where a team can benefit from the fielding of an illegible player, as escape punishment. This is a slippery slope which could call into question the integrity of the game.
9. However, this Committee is sympathetic to the Appellant, and accepts that the BSML Rules are subject to interpretation, and as such, misinterpretation. The Committee

would strongly recommend a review of the rules, with emphasis placed on clearer and concise language for future iterations.

10. The appeal is dismissed.

**James Tracey (Chair)**

**David Lennox**

**Mervyn Wheatley**