

THE APPEALS COMMITTEE OF THE IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

APPEAL AGAINST A DECISION OF THE CO ANTRIM AND DISTRICT
FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION DATED 20 OCTOBER 2026

Between:

DUNDELA FC

Appellant

-and-

THE CO ANTRIM AND DISTRICT FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

Respondent

DECISION ON APPEAL

Background

1. The Appellant is currently due to play a Co Antrim Shield tie ("the Fixture") against Ballymena United FC on 3 November 2026. The Respondent is the organiser of the tournament, and arranges its fixtures. The Appellant asked the Respondent by email dated 15 October 2026 for the Fixture to be postponed, as three of the Appellant's players (including two goalkeepers) had been selected as part of the Northern Ireland squad for the UEFA Regions cup intermediate round, taking place in Albania between 28 October and 5 November 2026. The players concerned had been notified by letters dated 15 October by the IFA that their selection for the squad was confirmed.
2. The Appellant's email of 15 October invoked rule 7(h) of the Respondent's competition rules, specifying that two of the players involved were goalkeepers. The Respondent's reply, in an email dated 20 October, declined the request, on the grounds that the international event was not recognised in the FIFA International Match Calendar and that, accordingly, rule 7(h) did not apply.

The appeal to this Committee

3. The Appellant has appealed against the Respondent's refusal to reschedule the Fixture, and this Committee has agreed to hear the appeal on an urgent basis, given that the Fixture is to be played on 3 November. From the papers submitted in support of, and in opposition to, the appeal, it is clear that the dispute resolves to the proper interpretation of rule 7(h). As both parties have provided written submissions to this Committee on this point, the Committee is satisfied that it can determine the appeal on the papers.

Discussion

4. Rule 7(h) says this: *"in the event of a club having two or more players selected to represent their national association in matches recognised by the FIFA International Calendar or Divisional Association representative team(s) in a competitive fixture they shall be permitted a postponement of their scheduled fixture during the period of release in respect of such fixtures. Furthermore, a club whose goalkeeper is selected to represent their National or Association representative team(s) shall also be permitted a postponement due to the specialist position"*.
5. The Appellant submits in summary that rule 7(h) creates two distinct entitlements to a fixture postponement, by reason of the language used: it is argued that the final sentence of rule 7(h) constitutes a separate entitlement where goalkeepers are involved, due to the technical and specialist nature of that position. The words *"...in matches recognised by the FIFA International Calendar or Divisional Association representative team(s) in a competitive fixture..."* qualify the entitlement created by the first sentence, but are absent from the second sentence – hence the distinction. Alternatively, the Appellant submits that if there is ambiguity as to whether or not rule 7(h) does create two distinct entitlements, that ambiguity should be interpreted and applied in the Appellant's favour. In further support of those submissions, the Appellant has drawn our attention to the fixture postponement provision in rule 20(b) of the NIFL Championship Rules and Regulations where international events are concerned, and to the differences between that provision and rule 7(h).
6. The Respondent argues that the use of the words "furthermore" and "also" in the second sentence of rule 7(h) shows that the goalkeeper provision is supplemental to the preceding provision and should therefore be read within the framework and qualifying circumstances already established by it. The Respondent recognises the unique and specialist role of the goalkeeper, but argues that its effect is to reduce the number of players needed to trigger the

postponement entitlement from two or more to only one (where that one player is a goalkeeper).

7. Having considered these submissions, and the other materials submitted in support of the parties' respective positions, we consider that the Appellant's reading of rule 7(h) is correct: in our view, the use of the words "furthermore" and "also" in the final sentence of rule 7(h) demonstrate an intention to treat goalkeepers in a distinct way, creating two separate rights to a postponement – one for outfield players, one for goalkeepers.

Disposal

8. The appeal is therefore allowed: the fixture on 3 November will be postponed to a date to be agreed between the Appellant, Ballymena United and the Respondent.

28 October 2026

Craig Dunford KC (chair)

David Lennox

Simon Walls