

**Disciplinary Commission ("The Commission")**

**Oxfordshire Football Association (OFA)**

**In the matter of Mr. BEN READHEAD – Case ID: 9688600-M**

**Hearing Summary including Written Reasons**

1. This is a hearing summary and includes written reasons for the decision of the Disciplinary Commission which sat on Thursday 31<sup>st</sup> January 2019.

2. The Commission members were Mr. B King (Chairman), Mr. T Williams and Mr. P Lyon (independent member). Mr. S. Honey was Commission Secretary.

3. Mr. Readhead had been charged by OFA in respect of the following matter:-

Charge: FA Rule E3 - Improper Conduct against a Match Official (including physical contact and threatening and/or abusive language/behaviour)

With an alternative, lesser charge of:

Charge 2: FA Rule E3 – Improper Conduct against a Match Official (including threatening and/or abusive language/behaviour)

The charges were further detailed as follows:

“Details: Ben Readhead “the manager” is charged with FA Rule E3 Improper Conduct against a Match Official (including physical contact and threatening and/or abusive language/behaviour)

Also as an alternative charge FA Rule E3 – Improper Conduct against a Match Official (including threatening and/or abusive language/behaviour)

The circumstances are:-

On 24<sup>th</sup> November 2018 in the Witney & District FA league game between Combe Junior Sports First v Witney Royals First the manager was abusive to the Referee and after being requested to remove his player, previously dismissed in the game, from the side of the pitch made no attempt to do so.

As the game ended the manager, then joined by the dismissed player, abused the referee back to the changing rooms and it is alleged that the manager then pushed the referee towards the changing room doors.

4. The OFA received a misconduct report from the match referee, Mr. Martyn Holder, in which he reported misconduct by Mr. Readhead. In that report he stated;

As I was leaving the field both Mr Cross, the player, and his Manager berated me all the way to the changing room. The manager continued to state he was going to report me for

swearing at his player while Mr Cross said “you told me you didn’t give a shit what I said and you’re not man enough to fucking admit it”. I did not reply, he then followed me to the changing rooms and said “go on fucking admit it you swore at me”. At this I turned and said “I did not swear at you” the manager then pushed me towards the changing room door “I said get your hands off me”, the manager replied “it’s your fault for winding him up”!

5. As a result of the content of that misconduct report the OFA undertook an investigation, during which it sought further information from Mr. Holder and sought observations from Combe Juniors First and Witney Royals First.

6. Referee.

The following additional information was received from Mr Holder

*“In the 75th minute of the game I was about to caution Mr Cross for Dissent when he said “I don’t give a fuck what you do”. I said “For that I’m sending you off”. He said “Do what you fucking like”. I said “I need your name please”. He replied “That’s your fucking problem”. I showed him a red card and had to request his name from The Royal’s Captain. In the 89th minute I gave a foul against Royals when I heard a voice say “How can you make a decision like that”. I saw it was Mr Cross who I thought had left the area. I said “You were sent off please leave the field”. He replied “It’s a free country I’ll go and stand over there”. I said to The Royals Manager who was stood nearby “Please get your player to leave the field”. The manager replied “You swore at him what do you expect”. I said “I have not sworn at him now get him to move from the area”. At this Mr Cross moved approximately 10 yards away. I said to The Manager who I only know as “Ben”. I will be reporting your club for failing to control your players”. He replied “you brought this on yourself by getting on your high horse”. As there were only a few seconds left I restarted play and blew the final whistle. As I was leaving the field both Mr Cross and his manager berated me all the way to the changing room. The Manager continued to state he was going to report me for swearing at his player whilst Mr Cross said “You told me you didn’t give a shit what I said and you are not man enough to fucking admit it”. I didn’t reply. He then followed me to the changing room and said “Go on fucking admit it you swore at me”. At this I turned and said “I did not swear at you” The Manager then pushed me towards the changing room door “I said get your hands off me” The manger replied “It’s your fault for winding him up”!*

*I was available next Saturday but having been subjected to the above I am considering finishing as it’s certainly not worth £35 to be subjected to intimidation like that with no attempt by Witney Royals to control their players.*

*I will be in touch if I change my mind.”*

7. Witney Royals First

The foregoing is a summary of the principal submissions provided to the Commission. It does not purport to contain reference to all the points made, however the absence in these reasons of any particular point, or submission, should not imply that the Commission did not take such point, or submission, into consideration when the members determined the

matter. For the avoidance of doubt, the Commission carefully considered all the evidence and materials furnished with regard to this case.

- a. Manager Ben Readhead wrote a comprehensive five page statement which was emailed to the WDFA officials and forwarded to Oxfordshire FA. He also wrote a two page letter directly to the referee of the match.
- b. Ben Readhead also took the decision to suspend his management duties for the club until the matter was resolved as he felt strongly that he had been misrepresented in comments posted on Facebook by the referee.

#### 8. Combe Juniors Sports First

A written response was not received.

9. At the conclusion of the investigation the charge was raised against Mr. Readhead by the OFA on 4<sup>th</sup> January 2019.

10. An on-line response to the charge raised against Mr. Readhead was received by OFA in which he entered a plea of “not guilty” and after correspondence indicated he was content for the matter to be dealt with by a Commission in his absence. A written response was received from Mr Readhead.

*“Following my telephone conversation and previous correspondence I still plead not guilty to the charge presented and strongly deny the allegations made.*

*However on reflection please could I amend my request for a personal hearing and change this to a correspondence hearing instead, while still strongly pleading not guilty.*

*As you will see from my 2 statements provided, 4 witness statements and opposition team statements the allegations brought against me are simply not true and in my view have been taken out of context and do not portray me in the correct light.*

*I feel that I acted in the best way possible to control my player, the referee and to help all parties involved.*

*To reiterate at no point do I consider my behaviour to have been aggressive and at no point did I assault the referee and this is simply not true.*

*I look forward to hearing from you in reference to this matter and if there is anything further you need please do not hesitate to contact me”*

11. The Commission had convened at the OFA offices to consider the matter.

12. All the available evidence in this matter had been supplied in advance to all its members and had been studied by them.

13. The foregoing is a summary of the principal submissions provided to the Commission. It does not purport to contain reference to all the points made, however the absence in these reasons of any particular point, or submission, should not imply that the Commission did not take such point, or submission, into consideration when the members determined the matter. For the

avoidance of doubt, the Commission carefully considered all the evidence and materials furnished with regard to this case.

14. Mr. Readhead had entered a “not guilty” plea in respect of the charge.

The Commission looked at all the circumstances

- The dismissal of Mr Cross
- The perception by Mr Readhead and the player that the Referee had sworn at him
- The inconsistency between the Referee and the club on events
- No independent witnesses
- That Mr Readhead did step in between the player and Referee when proceeding towards the clubhouse and changing rooms to prevent the situation escalating.
- That there was no evidence that Mr Readhead had threatened the Referee.
- On his own admission Mr Readhead did turn the Referee around but this was done with the intention of keeping the player away from the Referee.

After considering all the evidence, the Commission were unanimous that in respect of Count 1 and on the balance of probabilities a “not proven” verdict was applicable.

The Commission then went on to consider Count 2 the alternative Charge and again the Commission were unanimous that on the balance of probabilities a “not proven” verdict was applicable.

B. King

T. Williams

P. Lyon

03 February 2019