

The Football Association Disciplinary Commission

(‘The Commission’)

Sitting on behalf of AFA

In the matter of:

Ryan Pearson

Case Number: 11448184M

Disciplinary Commission Decision:

1. The members of the Commission were Mr Les Pharo (Chair), Mrs Sheryl MacRae and Mr Mark Scott. The secretary to the Commission was Lauren Halsey. All were appointed by the FA.

2. The Charges:

Mr Ryan Pearson of Reigatians AFC was the subject of one charge:

A breach of Rule E3: Improper conduct against a match official (including physical contact or attempted physical contact and threatening and /or abusive language / behaviour).

There was an alternative charge, which may be considered by the Commission :

A breach of FA Rule E3:

Improper conduct against a match official – (including threatening and/or abusive language/behaviour).

3. **The Rules:**

Rule E3:

“A Participant shall at all times act in the best interests of the game and shall not act in any manner which is improper, or brings the game into disrepute, or use any one, or a combination of, violent conduct, serious foul play, threatening, abusive, indecent or insulting words or behaviour”.

“Physical contact or attempted physical contact: physical actions (or attempted actions) that are unlikely to cause injury to the Match Official but are nevertheless confrontational. Examples include, but are not limited to: pushing the Match Official or pulling the Match Official (or their clothing or equipment)”.

4. The charges were brought by the AFA, as a result of a report from the match referee, Mr Jay Knight, who reported that on the 8th of October 2023, in a match between Old Chigwellians First and Reigatians First, in the AFA Senior Cup, Mr Pearson kicked the match ball at him with force. At the end of the match, he further reported that the words,

“you’re fucking shit ref”, were said to him by Mr Pearson, and when showed a red card, he aggressively approached the referee, and when prevented from doing so by an assistant referee, used the words, “I will smash their fucking heads in”.

5. When the matter was investigated by the County Association, the evidence was gathered, resulting in the charges as shown, being raised.

6. **The responses:**

Mr Pearson had denied the matter against him, and asked for a personal hearing, which was held on 6th December 2023. Based on the not guilty pleas, the burden of proof rests with the AFA to prove these matters, on the balance of probabilities. The balance of probabilities standard means, that the Commission is satisfied an event occurred, if the Commission considers that, on the evidence, the occurrence of the event was more likely than not.

7. The following is a summary of the principal submissions considered by the Commission. It does not purport to contain reference to all points considered. However, the absence in these reasons of any point, or submission, should not imply that the Commission did not take such point, or submission, into consideration when reviewing the matters. For the avoidance of doubt, the Commission carefully considered all the evidence and materials furnished regarding these cases.
8. There were written reports to consider on behalf of the County, in these matters, from the match referee, Mr Knight, and the assistant referee, Mr Dwayne Uylett.
9. In response to the charges there were reports from Mr Ryan Pearson, Mr Rory Taylor, and Mr Andy Setters, the secretary of Reigatians AFC.
10. Attending the hearing on behalf of the County Association were Mr Knight, and Mr Dwayne Uylett.
11. Attending the hearing in response to the charge were Mr Pearson, Mr Andy Setters, and Mr Shane Wootton, the manager of Reigatians.
12. The procedures and charges were explained to Mr Pearson, and it was ascertained that he had seen the case papers in these matters.
13. The match referee, Mr Knight, stated that he had no changes to his report, and in answer to questions from the Commission, said that at the kick off, after a goal, the ball was kicked at him with force, but did not hit him. He said there was no physical contact on him, but there was on his assistant, who had stepped in front of him to protect him, which he described as a shoulder barge. He said he clearly heard the reported words used by Mr Pearson towards him. When asked, he stated that other players had to pull Mr Pearson away, after the contact with the assistant. He said there was no conversation with the manager or the club about this matter. He said his position was in the direction of the left back, and that the ball was not kicked as the usual kick off style, but kicked with force, and he believed it was directed at him.
14. He said, when he showed the red card, Mr Pearson started to come back towards him, and was swearing at him, as in his report. He said, when asked, if the contact with his

assistant pushed him back at all, and he said it did not. He stated that he was fearful of his safety, due to the words being used towards him, the aggressive attitude, and the anger and threats towards him, from Mr Pearson.

15. Mr Pearson had no questions of Mr Knight.

16. Mr Dwayne Uylett, the assistant referee, gave his account, and stated he had no changes to make to his submitted report. When questioned by the Commission he said that he believed the ball was kicked at the referee, and that the referee had sent off Mr Pearson for telling him to “fuck off”. When asked what occurred next, he said that Mr Pearson came back towards the referee, and that he had stood in front of the referee to protect him, as he was bigger than the referee, and that Mr Pearson had made contact with him. He said the contact consisted of chest to chest. He stated that Mr Pearson had to be dragged away by others.

17. When asked if he had run to the referee to assist him, he said he had not, as he was already nearby. He said that he had fears for the safety of the referee, due to the aggression and anger shown by Mr Pearson. When asked if he personally feared for his safety, he said “yes, because they were in a remote location, and it would have been difficult to get any assistance to them”.

18. Mr Pearson had no questions of Mr Uylett.

19. This completed the verbal evidence on behalf the County Association.

20. In response to the charge, Mr Pearson was asked if he wished to change anything in his written responses. He said he did not. He was asked to give his account, and when questioned by the Commission, said that he had not kicked the ball at the referee, but had kicked it out of play towards the left back, but he did accept the language reported was used by him. He said he had no recollection of making physical contact with the assistant referee, and denied saying, “I will smash their fucking heads in” as was reported. He did however admit saying, whilst at the side of the pitch, that he was pissed off and wanted to “punch them”, but it was a conversation between him and Shane. He said, when asked, why he felt the way he did, he said it was the decisions and a remark from the referee, concerning his team’s shooting ability. It was suggested that he had lost control and because of that he may not recall what exactly did happen. He denied being unable to remember the sequence of events. He agreed that the officials would have feared for their safety due to his behaviour, and his remarks, regarding punching them, but saying he did not make the remark directly to them, and then apologised for making them feel the way that they did.

21. Mr Wotton then gave his account, and when questioned by the Commission, said when asked, that he had heard Ryan say something like “I want to punch him” but did not think he meant punch the referee. He stated he was playing as left back, and that he did not recall how far Ryan (Mr Pearson) was from the referee, but remembered the ball going in the air over his head. He said it was not kicked directly at the referee. He said, when asked, that Ryan may have been frustrated, and that he had heard the comment from the referee to Ryan. He was asked how far away he was, and he was unable to recall. He agreed that assistant went to the referee, and that he saw Ryan walk towards them, and heard Ryan saying, “you’re a shit ref”. When asked how he felt the officials

would be feeling due to the behaviour, he said he had no idea. He did not see any contact of any official.

22. Mr Setters then agreed he had no changes to his submitted statement, and when questioned by the Commission, said in response, that in the lead up to the red card, he saw the ball kicked out of play, and then the players shaking hands. He said the ball was not kicked directly at the referee, it was kicked towards the corner of the pitch, and that the referee was not in the line of the kick. He stated that Mr Pearson (Ryan), was talking to him saying he was annoyed about the referee making sarcastic comments. When asked if he had heard bad language, he said he did at the red card event, as they were walking Ryan off the pitch. When asked what he meant by helping him off, he said he just wanted to get him away and off the pitch. He said he did not believe Ryan was angry, but was frustrated.
23. He said he saw no contact between Ryan and an official. He was asked if he had to restrain Mr Pearson, and said he did not, he was guiding him. When asked to explain that comment, he stated he was getting him away from a situation. He agreed, when asked, that Mr Pearson was verbal, but that was due to his frustration. He did not recall any swearing from Mr Pearson, but was unable to recall all the conversations. He continued to say throughout his account that Mr Pearson was just upset and not threatening. He did not recall words such as, “could have punched him” or similar said by Mr Pearson.
24. Mr Pearson said that he had presented all the evidence he wished to present, and in his closing submission, said that he was sorry for the language used, and he appreciated it was wrong, and that his actions would have caused them to fear for their safety. He said he understood that there would be a sanction for his behaviour, and he would accept whatever that punishment was.
25. The Commission then considered the verbal and written evidence on behalf of the County, and the following points were noted: the referee was clear and concise in his verbal account, which was as his submitted report. He witnessed the contact on his assistant, and described it as chest to chest. He said he felt threatened, by the incident. The assistant referees verbal account was also as his written submission. This did not change during questions put to him by the Commission. Both were considered as credible witnesses.
26. The response to the charge the verbal evidence from Mr Pearson and his witnesses was considered, and the following was noted: Mr Pearson admitted that he had lost his temper. He had admitted using foul language towards the referee, and during his verbal account, and in his summary of the case was wholly apologetic for that behaviour. Mr Setters however, despite being close, apparently heard no swearing. Mr Pearson said that he did not believe there was any contact between him and the assistant referee, but that he did attempt to confront the referee, and admitted making comments about “punching them”, but in a conversation to another person, and that this would have caused the officials to feel threatened.
27. In reaching their decision, the commission noted that there was no dispute. There was “attempted physical contact” between Mr Pearson and the referee. The dispute arose only on the allegation of contact. There was also no dispute that abusive language was

used, nor that he was led away from the officials, and he agreed that the referee would have felt for his safety. It was a majority view that the ball was not kicked at the official, but kicked as the game was ending, and in frustration. The issue was then to determine, if as reported, there was contact to the assistant referee, having into account the verbal comments were accepted, the commission took the unanimous view that the more likely version of events, was that offered by the match officials, and therefore the following unanimous decision was reached in respect of Mr Ryan Pearson:

For a breach of Rule E3: Improper conduct against a match official (including physical contact or attempted physical contact and /or abusive language / behaviour: the commission found this charge proven

Proven.

The Alternative charge was therefore not considered.

28. Mr Pearson was recalled, and he was informed of the decision. His record was made known to the commission, and he was asked if he wanted to offer any mitigation in this matter, and he said that due to his age he did not have much more playing time available to him, and therefore he requested leniency. He again apologised for his behaviour. He also asked the commission to take into account his playing record. He further stated that he would accept the punishment given as he realised his behaviour was not acceptable.

29. The commission then considered sanction, and in doing so took into account the record of Mr Pearson, his apologies throughout the hearing, and the FA Sanction Guidelines, and having done so they made the following unanimous decision, re sanction:

Mr Pearson is suspended from all football activity for a period of 182 days. This suspension will be back dated to the date of his interim suspension.

He is fined the sum of £75.00.

He is to undertake a face-to-face education course, which must be completed prior to the suspension period being served. Failure to do so will result in a sine-die suspension being imposed until the course is completed.

10 penalty points are awarded against Reigatians AFC.

30. There is a right of appeal against any of these decisions, in accordance with the relevant provisions set out in the prevailing FA Rules and Regulations of the association.

Mr Les Pharo (Chair).

Mrs Sheryl MacRae

Mr Mark Scott.

8th December 2023