

FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION

AMATEUR FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

V

SAM RANK

CASE ID: 10847620M

WRITTEN REASONS

Background and Chronology

1. The Football Association convened a Disciplinary Commission on 28 December 2023 on behalf of the Amateur FA to adjudicate upon a disciplinary charge levied against Sam Rank.
2. The Commission members were Yunus Lunat (Independent Chairman of the FA National Serious Cases Panel), Peter Sowton and Councillor Mark Tucker JP (Independent members of the FA National Serious Cases Panel). Jon Fancy of the Hampshire FA acted as secretary to the Commission.
3. The charges arose out of a match played on 11 November 2023 between Civil Service Fourth and Old Parkonians Third in the AFA Senior Novets Cup.
4. It was reported by the referee Patrick Carton that in the 90th minute he had shown a red card to Sam Rank for screaming at an opposition player that he was going to “*break his fucking legs*”. The match went to penalties when Mr Rank continued to hurl abuse at

the referee from the side of the pitch calling the referee a “*useless cunt*” and a “*prick*”. He initially refused to abide with the referee’s request to leave the pitch side by replying “*I don’t care, abandon the game*” before being ushered away by the players. Then after the completion of the penalties Mr Rank aggressively approached the referee again and said “*your (sic) fucked now, you don’t know who I know*”. Mr Rank laughed when the referee asked him to go away before repeating this comment. To make matters worse, Mr Rank approached the referee again whilst the referee was collecting his belongings and continued to hurl abuse calling the referee “*a cunt*” before repeating that the referee was fucked and that his life won’t be worth living. The referee asked him to go away at which he curiously said that “*his contacts in the FA were so high that the result would be reversed and that I would never referee again*”. He was then encouraged to walk away but not before puffing his chest out, opening his arms and walking toward the referee in an aggressive and combative manner shouting, “*fucking make me you prick what are you going to do about it*”. He was then ushered away by the players.

5. By letter dated 06 December 2023 the Amateur FA charged Sam Rank with misconduct with a breach of FA Rule E3 for Improper Conduct against a match official (including threatening and/or abusive language/behaviour).
6. The player had filed a response to the charge pleading guilty and requesting a personal hearing for a plea of mitigation before a Commission to determine sanction.
7. A remote hearing was therefore arranged. The player represented himself at the hearing.
8. The following is a summary of the principal issues and matters considered. It does not purport to contain reference to all the issues or matters considered, and the absence in these reasons of reference to any particular point or submission made by any party should not be read as implying that it was not taken into consideration. For the avoidance of doubt, all the evidence and materials furnished was taken into consideration.
9. **The Relevant FA Rules:**
Rule E3.1 provides that:

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.

Regulation 96 of the FA Disciplinary Regulations specifies offences against match officials into three categories – Threatening behaviour; physical contact or attempted physical contact and assault or attempted assault. The first is relevant to the charge. Regulation 96.1 defines threatening behaviour as:

“Words or action that cause the match official to believe that they are being threatened. Examples include but are not limited to the use of words that imply (directly or indirectly) that the match official may be subjected to any form of physical abuse either immediately or later, whether realistic or not, the raising of the hands to intimidate the match official; pretending to throw or kick an object at the match official.

The Evidence and Hearing

10. The Commission had been provided with a bundle of evidence consisting of 18 pages containing witness statements prior to the hearing which the Commission confirms it had read and considered in advance.
11. At the commencement of the hearing the Chair asked Mr Rank to confirm that he had the case papers with him and had the opportunity to consider them. Mr Rank confirmed he had the case papers but that he had not read all of them but wanted to proceed with the charge. He declined the opportunity of an adjournment to allow him to review the case papers.
12. The Chair then raised the basis of the plea with Mr Rank and explained that his statement and admission was limited to abusive behaviour but there was no admission to any threatening behaviour. On that basis the Commission was reluctant to accept the plea and were minded to proceed on a not guilty basis.
13. Mr Rank however insisted that he wanted the matter to be determined the same evening and that he simply wished to admit to the charge. Mr Rank was insistent on putting his version to the Commission. The Chair explained on 7 occasions that an

admission would mean that the sanction would be determined on the basis of the entirety of the referee's report, and an acceptance of the report. The Chair went to the length of reading the extract of the referee's report making reference to the threat on a number of occasions and asked Mr Rank to confirm the he understood and accepted the report. Mr Rank confirmed that he understood and was insistent on proceeding with his guilty plea.

Sanction

14. As the charge had been admitted the Commission was informed of Mr Rank's previous disciplinary record over the past five seasons which included one relevant offence from the 2021/22 season for Improper Conduct (not threatening behaviour) for which he received a 2 match ban and a £40 fine.
15. The Commission heard a plea of mitigation from Mr Rank. He referred to his extensive coaching for the junior set up at Shields Academy where he coached 3 age groups, and that he provided specialist coaching to Woodford Town in the Essex Senior League and pre-season for his team. He also referred to a very stressful job and that football was his release.
16. Aggravating and mitigating factors were then considered. The Commission felt there were significant aggravating factors including the following:
 - A lack of insight and remorse.
 - Mr Rank seeking to blame the referee's performance for his conduct.
 - His misconduct and threats were persistent and repeated.
 - The misconduct and threats were made *after* Mr Ranks had been sent off, which should have been an opportunity to calm down and reflect.
 - He should have left the vicinity of the pitch after being sent off. To make matters worse he re – entered the pitch to abuse and threaten the referee.
 - As part of his submissions, he sought to blame the standard of refereeing for the decline in amateur football participation numbers.
17. Reference was made to all of the FA rules including the Disciplinary Regulations and Sanction Guidelines in arriving at the sanction.
18. The following sanction was imposed:

- (i) Sam Rank will be suspended from all football for 147 days. This will be by way of playing matches (including friendly matches) in accordance with Regulation 61 of the FA Disciplinary Regulations.
- (ii) He will pay a fine of £80.00.
- (iii) He will complete an FA Equality Education Course (on line) which must be undertaken and completed within 28 days of this decision or before the expiration of the suspension, whichever is later, failing which he will be suspended until such time as he has completed the Education Course.
- (iv) Old Parkonians FC will be subjected to 8 disciplinary points.

19. There is a right of appeal in accordance with the FA Regulations.

01 January 2023

Yunus Lunat (Independent Chairman)

Peter Sowton

Councillor Mark Tucker JP