

**Football Association Disciplinary Commission on behalf of  
Gloucestershire FA**

**In the matter of an Improper Conduct Charge against Christopher Skinner  
of Brockworth Albion**

**Reasons for Disciplinary Commission Decisions 25 January 2022**

1. The Disciplinary Commission, which was appointed by the Football Association, was formed by Roger Burden (Chair), Jen Gregory and Sheryl MacRae. Adam Wing was Secretary to the Commission, which was held on-line.
2. Christopher Skinner was charged under FA Rule E3- Improper Conduct against a Match Official (including threatening and/or abusive language/behaviour).
3. The charge arose during the game Chalford First v Brockworth Albion First played on 4 December 2021
4. Christopher Skinner denied the charge and asked for a personal hearing.
5. In Attendance for the County FA
  - Darren Brown, Match Referee
6. In Attendance for Christopher Skinner
  - Christopher Skinner
  - Matthew Cairns
7. Summary of the Evidence
  - I list below a summary of the evidence. As it is a summary, I do not purport to have included every detail submitted but, for the avoidance of doubt, the Commission carefully read, listened to, and considered, all the evidence.

8. Written Submissions on behalf of the County FA

- A report from Darren Brown, the Match Referee, in which he said that, during the game, he had to ask Mr Skinner to stop shouting at him, after which, the team substituted Mr Skinner to avoid him being sent off.

At the end of the game, Mr Skinner approached Mr Brown questioning Mr Brown's ability and pointing his finger in Mr Brown's face. When he stopped, whilst walking away he said "If I ever see you in town", to which Mr Brown replied "whatever" but Mr Skinner then accused Mr Brown of calling him a prick. Two of the Chalford Club associates walked Mr Brown to his changing room in fear of an attack.

9. Written Submissions on behalf of Christopher Skinner

- In his written response to the Referee's report, Mr Skinner denied shouting at the Referee and said that he was substituted as he was injured with a thigh tear. Mr Skinner said that after the game, he asked the Referee what gave him the right to speak to Mr Skinner the way that he did but he was shouted at. Mr Skinner then said "I defy you to speak to me if I ever see you out". Mr Skinner said that it would make no sense for him to have said "town" as he lives in Brockworth and he does know where the Referee lives.

Mr Skinner went on to say that the Referee was not escorted from the field by Chalford Club associates. In fact, Mr Skinner said that it was him that was ushered away by Chalford players and some of his own team members. At this point Mr Brown was heard to call Mr Skinner a "prick".

- Attached to Mr Skinner's letter was an email from Ben Powell, the Chalford Manager, in which Mr Powell said that he thought that both teams got frustrated with the Referee's decisions and the inability of either Captain to discuss decisions with the Referee as they were spoken to arrogantly or rudely and that Mr Powell had been told to "shut up" having asked politely.
- Mr Skinner then added some personal details and some additional comments about the Referee but did not expand on the conversation that formed the reason for the charge.
- An email from Matt Cairns, a player for Brockworth Albion, in which he criticised the Referee's performance and the way that he spoke to players.

Mr Cairns said that Mr Skinner was substituted due to an injury and that he could confirm that the Referee did call Mr Skinner a “prick”.

Mr Cairns said that nothing was said by Mr Skinner to the Referee about “seeing him up town”, Mr Skinner just asked the Referee why and how he was able to call Mr Skinner a “prick”.

10. Verbal Submissions on behalf of the County FA

- Darren Brown told us that he was content with his match report and had nothing to add to it. He told us that Mr Skinner approached him to within a foot and wagged his finger in his face, questioning decisions during the game.

Mr Brown told him to stop. When we asked Mr Brown what Mr Skinner said, Mr Brown replied “I’ll see you in town” “that sort of thing”. He said that Mr Skinner was walking away at the time and no-one else was around to have heard it.

When we asked Mr Brown to clarify exactly what Mr Skinner had said, Mr Brown replied that it was what he had put down in his report “or words to that effect”. He told us that he did not write the words down in his notebook but had remembered them for his report. He denied shouting at anyone or calling Mr Skinner a “prick”

He said that he was sure that Mr Skinner had been substituted to avoid being sent off, and that Mr Skinner was not injured. He also said that, although he did not know Mr Skinner personally, he had refereed him before and he was very vocal and aggressive in his nature.

11. Verbal Submissions on behalf of Christopher Skinner

- Christopher Skinner told us that he was content with his written submission but wished to dispute much of the Referee’s evidence. He said that he did not know the Referee on a personal level and was now aware that they lived nowhere near each other, so the Referee’s allegation that Mr Skinner had said “I’ll see you in town” made no sense. He confirmed that he had been Refereed by Mr Brown many times. He said that, early in the game Mr Brown had shouted at him “I am not standing for you today” and shouted at Mr Brown to “go away”. When Mr Skinner appealed for a free kick he said that Mr Brown shouted at him “shut up, go away”.

Mr Skinner said that he was substituted because of a thigh injury and was carried off the field. He said that, after the game, he hobbled onto the pitch to shake players' hands, saw the Referee, and politely asked him why he had spoken to Mr Skinner in that way and said "I defy you to speak to me like that if I see you out".

When we asked what Mr Skinner had meant by this comment, as it could be taken as a threat, he replied that he felt that the Referee was taking advantage of his uniform and so Mr Skinner wanted to make the point that Mr Brown would not have done it "in normal life".

Mr Skinner said that there were several people around at the time as people were shaking hands and moving to the changing rooms. He also said that the Referee was not walked off by Chalford Club people, but he simply walked to the changing rooms with two elderly members of Brockworth.

- Matthew Cairns told us that he was no more than 10 yards away from Mr Skinner and the Referee, and that there were several players on the pitch, mainly from Brockworth, as they had to walk across the pitch to the changing rooms.

He confirmed that Mr Skinner had been substituted because he was injured but did not recall him being carried off.

He said that Chris was limping after the game and went to the Ref in a calm manner but he was ushered away so that he didn't get too close to the Ref. Mr Cairns then turned to walk away and heard the Ref shout "prick". He said that, although he didn't see the words come out of his mouth, the Ref had been shouting throughout the game and his voice was easily recognisable.

Whilst a member of the Commission was putting questions to Mr Cairns, Mr Skinner interrupted and said that he objected to a particular question. I explained that the procedures do not allow him to do this.

Mr Cairns said that he did not hear any conversation between Chris and the Referee along the lines of "if I see you out" or "if I see you in town". He said that he saw the Referee walking back to the changing rooms with a couple of Brockworth members, who he believed were members of the Club's Board.

12. Closing Submission on behalf of Christopher Skinner

- Mr Skinner apologised for interrupting our questions and said that he was not familiar with the procedures. He said that he was not literally carried off but had to be assisted off as it was difficult for him to walk unaided at the time. He said that he was content with the questions that had been asked and that he had received a fair hearing. He said that this allegation had affected him deeply and he had stopped his involvement in several football activities whilst waiting for the matter to be resolved.

13. Our Deliberations on the Evidence.

- We found it very difficult to place much reliance on the Referee's evidence. He had been very imprecise about exactly what had been said. He told us that there was no-one else nearby during that conversation, yet it happened on the pitch, immediately after the game when players and officials had to walk across the pitch to the changing rooms. He insisted that Mr Skinner was not injured when he was substituted. He also said that he had to be escorted away by two of the opposition Club members.
- Mr Skinner came across as calm and credible but we noted his interruption during our questions. We all felt that this showed a different side to him and that he might well have "a short fuse" which might have led him to saying something that he later regretted.
- Mr Cairn's evidence was not entirely consistent with Mr Skinner's but the inconsistencies were not significant and were an indication that he had not attended merely to confirm everything that Mr Skinner had said. He had confirmed that Mr Skinner was injured, that there were several people near to the Referee at the time of the conversations, that the Referee tended to shout at players, and that the Referee was not escorted away by two Chalford officials for his own safety.
- Based on our assessment of all the evidence, we felt that we could not rely on the Referee's version of the conversation or other events and would accept Mr Skinner's version.
- That then led us to consider whether or not Mr Skinner's version of the conversation amounted to a threat. It was obviously not a clear and direct threat but it could be deemed as a threat depending on the context.

- Not only was it not a clear threat but we found Mr Skinner's explanation of the context to be credible in the circumstances ie that Mr Skinner was making the point to the Referee that he felt that the Referee was taking advantage of his official position in a way that he would not be able to do away from the football pitch.
- There was convincing evidence (including the written submission from the Chalford Manager) that the Referee's attempts to assert himself came over as loud and aggressive, which supported Mr Skinner's reasoning.

14. Our Decision on the Charge

- The standard of proof for these matters is the balance of probability. This means that for the charge to be proved, we have to be satisfied, based on all the evidence, that it was more likely than not that Christopher Skinner used threatening and/or abusive language/behaviour towards the Referee.
- As a result of our assessment of the evidence, we all agreed that the standard had not been met. We found the charge not proven.

15. These decisions can be appealed in line with FA Regulations.

Roger Burden

Chair

26 January 2022