

FA NATIONAL SERIOUS CASE PANEL

DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION

CHAIRMAN SITTING ALONE

on behalf of
Gloucestershire Football Association

CORRESPONDENCE HEARING

of
Riley Woodman

CASE NUMBER 100598988-M

THE DECISION AND REASONS OF THE COMMISSION

Warning: This document contains offensive and/or discriminatory language

Sensitivity: Confidential

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Introduction

1. On 6th November 2021, Riley Woodman (the player) played for Andoversford FC against Abbeymead Rovers First, in a Gloucestershire Northern Senior League division 1 fixture.
2. The Match Official, Mr Mark Perry-Smith, submitted a report concerning conduct of Riley Woodman .
3. Gloucestershire Football Association investigated the reported incidents.

The Charge

4. On 17th November, 2021, Gloucestershire FA charged Riley Woodman with breach of FA Rule E3.
5. Charge One is Improper conduct - Assault or attempted assault against a Match Official
6. Alternative Charge One is -Improper conduct against a Match Official (including physical contact or attempted physical contact and threatening and / or abusive language /behaviour
7. The relevant section of FA Rule E3 (page 124) states :

“E3.1 A Participant shall at all times act in the best interest 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.

8. The Assault or attempted assault under Offences against Match Officials in the Disciplinary Regulations (page 195) states :

“96.3 Assault or attempted assault: acting in a manner which causes or attempts to cause injury to the Match Official (whether or not it does in fact cause injury), examples include, but are not limited to, causing and/or attempting to cause injury by spitting (whether it connects or not), causing and/or attempting to cause injury by striking, or attempting to strike, kicking or attempting to kick, butting or attempting to butt, barging or attempting to barge, kicking or throwing any item directly at the Match Official.”

9. The *Physical contact or attempted physical contact* under *Offences against Match Officials* in the Disciplinary Regulations (page 195) states :

“96.2 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 and equipment)”

10. Gloucestershire FA included with the charge letter the evidence that it intended to rely on in this case.
11. The club was required to respond to its charge by 24th November 2021.

The Reply

12. Riley Woodman has denied the charge.

The Commission

13. The Football Association (“The FA”) appointed me, Christine Harrop-Griffiths, as a Chairman member of National Serious Case Panel, to this Discipline Commission as the Chairman Sitting Alone to adjudicate in these cases.

The Hearing & Evidence

14. I adjudicated this case on 5th December 2021 as a Correspondence Hearing (the “Hearing”).
15. I had received and read the bundle of documents prior to the Hearing.
16. The following is a summary of the principal submissions provided to me. 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 I did not take such point, or submission, into consideration when I determined the matter. For the avoidance of doubt, I have carefully considered all the evidence and materials furnished with regard to these cases.

17. With the FA's standard procedures, the case was designated as "Deny – Correspondence Hearing".
18. The following evidence was provided in the case bundle.
19. The Match Referee, Mr Mark Perry-Smith, submitted a Witness Statement, undated, in which he stated that:

"Whilst refereeing the above football match I had reason to stop the game and speak to a player from Andoversford FC number 14 Riley Woodman. During the stoppage I asked him to remove a nose piercing and before I had a chance to speak to him about the foul for which the game was stopped he stated to me the following

'Who the Fuck do you think your speaking to? Eh? You r a fucking cunt .Who the fuck do you think your Speaking to? I will Fucking drop you in a second" at th is point he was nose to nose with myself and then headbutted me. The other players on the pitch then Intervened and removed him from the immediate area and I restarted when I made sure that he was nowhere at all in the area."

20. A subsequent submission from Mr Perry-Smith added more comments, the pertinent sections of which are:

"I had a throbbing headache which did not go away for the rest of the day...my details are I the handbook so there was nothing preventing anyone else from giving me more grief... I took the precaution of loading a voice call recorder on my phone, just in case"

21. Mr Riley Woodman submitted a statement in his defence:

"The allegations put forward against myself, Riley Woodman, are disturbing and a referee with the experience of himself should understand the consequences that accusations put forward lead to. Although I could write a lot on the decisions and judgements by the ref this game is rather focus it just on the personal incident with myself. Whilst I strongly agree that the respect for referees is a battle which grass roots football should always be looking to support, I also think there is a certain amount of respect that should be given in the defence of a player. This a game refereed and played by working class people, and sometimes I feel the attitude given by referees shows how values and empathy of the game and who plays it have gone. The game which was played had 3 red cards in which costs the players and teams a lot of money, for things which could have been avoided with a better attitude, understanding and emotion.

The incident with myself was a very short exchange of words, after already been yellow carded for my tackle I had gone into a header with a player with my eyes on him rather than the ball, which looking back on it I can understand the decision can be seen as a foul. The ref called me over in which a kept a distance of 2 metres which I felt was comfortable in order to have a conversation he then continued to get closer in which I informed him that I don't want him to come to close in distance with a business trip I was embarking on, on the Monday.

Frustratingly the ref bent down and told me to "take my fucking nose ringout". Which I then said "I don't expect to be spoken to like that", I called the ref a "Cunt" and said "who does he think he is speaking to". This language which is something I look back in embarrassment with. I did not threaten him in any way. He sent me off with a straight red card to my anger I again swore at the ref on his poor decision making and lack of empathy towards players after previous sending offs earlier in the game. We came within 3-4 yards of each other but at no point was there any physical contact or violence involved in the situation"

22. Phil Hendy, Club Secretary, Andoversford FC provided a witness statement (undated):

"I was the club linesman on the day that the incident with Riley Woodman took place.

I could see that the referee gave a foul against Riley in my half and I was about 25 yards away. In my opinion I thought it probably was a foul.

As I could see Riley disagree with the decision and an exchange of words taking place. I couldn't hear what was being said but it looked quite heated. I then saw the referee produce the red card, which I assumed was a second yellow {I even noted it on the matchday app as that).

There was definitely not any contact between the two individuals. I should also add that Riley walked off the pitch when the red was shown and was not escorted away by anyone.

I was then very surprised to be told after the game that it was a straight red. I was even more surprised to receive the GNSL minutes and FA report stating that police were involved and an assault had taken place."

23. Mr Hendy approached the opposition team manager, Matthew Robinson, to ask him to gather the view of his players on the alleged incident.

24. In the request to Mr Robinson, Mr Hendy made the following statement:

"The players and club witnesses are all agreed that he threatened the referee and indeed leaned in towards the referee, however no one saw any actual contact"

25. The response from Mr Robinson reads as follows:

From asking in the question in the group chat, my players believe this happened;

The player in question and the referee "came together" via their foreheads. Both the player and the referee stepped into this altercation (To make this perfectly clear, both the referee and the player made an effort to come together). However, at no time, in the opinion of my players, was there an headbutt or any sort of action that can be interpreted as an headbutt take place.

To be perfectly clear, they believe that your player DID NOT "throw" an headbutt or behave in a way that could be interpreted as an headbutt towards the official, or towards anyone else.

26. That concluded relevant evidence in this case.

The Findings & Decision

27. The player charged has denied the charge and provided a statement as shown in paragraph 21 but there is no evidence in mitigation.

Previous Disciplinary Record

28. The charge has been denied. Prior to setting sanctions, I sought the player's offence history. The player has nine(9) cautions in the previous five seasons.

Mitigation

29. There was no mitigation presented by Riley Woodman . I did not find anything in the case bundle that could be considered as mitigation either.

The Sanction

30. With Mr Riley's case being a denial of charge, which was subsequently found proven, the "*Credit for Guilty Plea*" was not available to be afforded in this case.

31. For the Assault charge, the relevant FA Disciplinary Regulations (page 194) on sanction states ³³: "*Assault or attempted assault:*

101.7.1 immediate suspension from all football activity for a period of between 5 years and 10 years, subject to the following:

101.7.2 where the Participant is aged 14 or under, the standard minimum suspension shall be 2 years; and

101.7.3 where any assault causes serious injury to the Match Official, the standard minimum suspension shall be 10 years.

101.8 an order that the Participant completes an education programme before the time-based suspension is served."

32. For the alternative E3 offence of physical conduct the sanction is:

- suspension from all football activities for a period of between 112 days and 2 years. The recommended entry point, prior to considering any mitigating or aggravating factors is 182 days.

- a fine of up to £150, with a mandatory minimum fine of £75.

- an order that the Participant completes an education programme before the time-based suspension is served or within 28 days of the Disciplinary Commission's decision, whichever is the later.

33. In coming to a conclusion, I have had to decide between the two potential

charges, i.e. Assault or Physical contact. Mr Woodman's assertion that they stayed 3 to 4 yards apart at all times is contradicted by the players and witnesses from his own and the opposition team. Mr Hendy's communication to the opposition manager states clearly:

" The players and club witnesses are all agreed that he threatened the referee and indeed leaned in towards the referee, however no one saw any actual contact "

Mr Robinson states that the two *" came together via their foreheads "*, but both sets of witnesses are clear that they saw no headbutt.

34. On the balance of probabilities, I am satisfied that no actual headbutt took place and therefore I find the Assault charge UNPROVEN
35. However, I am satisfied that Mr Woodman, abused, and acted in a threatening and confrontational manner towards the referee. No apology or mitigation were offered and the charge was denied. I therefore find the Alternate Charge of Improper Conduct (Physical Contact) PROVEN
36. After taking into consideration all circumstances in this case, the player is:
 - a. Suspended from all football activities for one year. The suspension to be backdated to the date of the interim suspension order (i.e. 17th November)
 - b. fined a sum of £120 (one hundred pounds); and
 - c. ordered to complete a face-to-face education course. This must be completed before the time-based suspension is served otherwise the participant will be suspended from all football activity until such time as he is in compliance with this order.
 - d. 5 (five) club penalty points to be awarded
37. The decision is subject to the right of appeal under the relevant FA Rules and Regulations.

Signed...

Christine Harrop-Griffiths (Chairman)

5 December 2021