



Football Association Disciplinary Commission

The Football Association on behalf of
Oxfordshire FA

v

Zac Blackman Case ID: 10045120M

WRITTEN REASONS

Factual Background and Chronology

1. These are the Reasons for the decision of the Disciplinary Commission which was heard by a one person Commission at 07.00 on 22nd January 2020.
2. The Commission member was Mr Michael Cloherty (National Panel).
3. The following is a record of the main points which the Discipline Commission considered.
4. The charge in question arose following a game between Oxford FC and Orks and Shorts on 3rd November 2019. Following the fixture a report was provided to Oxfordshire FA and details of the allegations were contained within this report.
5. By letter dated 27th November 2019 Mr Zac Blackman, a player for Oxford FC was charged with Improper Conduct Rule E3 Assault on a Match Official and he was also charged with a further breach of Rule E3 Improper Conduct Against a Match Official (including abusive language/behaviour).

6. No response was provided by Mr Blackman and the Commission dealt with this as a not guilty plea.

The Relevant FA Rules

FA Disciplinary Processes/General Provisions

Section 1

Rule E3(1) provides for:

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 dispute or use any one, or a combination of, violent conduct, serious foul play, threatening, abusive, indecent or insulting words or behaviour.

96.3 Assault: acting in a manner which results in an injury to the Match Official. This includes spitting at the Match Official (whether it connects or not).

101.5 mandatory suspension from all football and football activity for 5 years from the date of the suspension. Where the assault causes serious injury the review period should be extended to 10 years.

102 The recommend sanctions set out in paragraph 101 above should only be varied where appropriate aggravating or mitigating factors are present, save that they may not be varied to a level below the mandatory where stated.

The Evidence

- 6 The Commission had before them the following items to consider:
 - (i) A written statement dated 3rd November 2019 from Mr Garry Larner, referee for the fixture who reports that at 18.45 he was assaulted by Zac Blackman. Mr Larner was refereeing a number of 6-a-side matches and one was this fixture and he awarded a throw in against Mr Blackman who responded repeating 'The fucking whole ball did not cross the line'. The referee issued a blue card to sin bin Mr Blackman for dissent. Mr Blackman would not accept this and continued to argue aggressively and Mr Larner consulted with another referee, Mr Alex Bunn, and made the decision to abandon the game. Mr Bunn announced the abandonment of the game and this resulted in Mr Blackman ran towards Mr Larner and was stopped by Mr Bunn whilst shouting 'I'm going to knock you out' and I will rip your throat out'.

Mr Bunn seemed to calm Mr Blackman down and suggested he walk to the car park and this appeared to be happening when he started walking towards Mr Garner in what he did not feel was an aggressive manner and Mr Larner was of the view that Mr Blackman was going to apologise. The next thing that Mr Garner reports remembering is staring at the floor with a burning sensation on his face and ears and it was evident that he had been punched by Mr Blackman who walked away silently after the attack. Mr Larner's cheekbone swelled and he sought medical help from the local accident and emergency department who diagnosed soft tissue damage and bone bruising.

- (ii) An email timed at 16.19 on 7th November 2019 from Mr Alex Bunn, Referee coordinator for the fixtures that evening where he reports that Mr Larner had indicated the poor behaviour of the Oxford FC team and he was considering abandoning the game. Early in the second half a throw was awarded and Mr Blackman shouted at the referee that the whole of the ball did not go out and he kept repeating this whilst becoming more aggressive eventually saying 'the fucking whole ball did not cross the line'. Mr Bunn reports that Mr Larner indicated he wanted the match to be abandoned and Mr Bunn announced this and Mr Blackman ran towards Mr Larner who was stopped by Mr Bunn but he was shouting 'I am going to knock you out' and 'I will rip your throat out' whilst trying to get to Mr Larner. Mr Bunn calmed Mr Blackman down and after a few minutes and he suggested they should go to the car park when Mr Blackman detoured towards Mr Larner at a slow pace which made Mr Bunn feel that he was going to apologise to Mr Larner but he threw a punch which was delivered with force and connected on Mr Larner's cheek. Mr Blackman walked away without saying anything.
- (iii) An email timed at 17.06 on 7th November 2019 from Mr Larner who reports that his jaw was bruised and he was having difficulty eating and that the matter had been reported to the police.
- (iv) Numerous communications through email and the postal service to Mr Blackman asking for his involvement in this case.

Decision

- 7 As part of its work the Commission reminded itself of the standard of proof which was required in order to find the charge proven, which was on a balance of probability.
- 8 The decision of the Commission was to both charges, of Rule E3 Improper Conduct- Assault on a Match Official and Rule E3 Improper Conduct against a Match Official (including threatening and/or abusive behaviour), proven.

- 9 The factors taken into consideration in reaching this conclusion were the following;
- i. Mr Lerner provides clear evidence that he was attacked by Mr Blackman.
 - ii. Mr Bunn provides compelling evidence in corroboration of Mr Lerner's account
 - iii. The words used by Mr Blackman were abusive insulting and included a number of threats towards the official.

Sanction,

- 10 Having found the charge proven, the Commission was able to consider mitigation.
- 11 The Commission then considered the previous misconduct record of Mr Blackman and it showed he two previous findings of misconduct the first being in February 2016 for Improper Conduct against a Match Official (including threatening and/or abusive behaviour) where he was suspended for two games and received a fine of £35. The second finding was in March 2018 for the same offence where he was suspended for two games and was fined £20.
- 12 The Commission was not able to consider any mitigating factors owing to the lack of response by Mr Blackman.
- 13 The Commission referred to the Disciplinary Sanction Guidelines in arriving at its decision regarding sanction and rule 101.5 and 102 of the FA Handbook 2019/20.
- 14 Having weighed up all of the factors, the penalty imposed by the Commission was as follows:

Assault on a match official

- a. Mr Zac Blackman will be suspended from all football related activity for five years from the date of the initial suspension.
- b. Mr Zac Blackman will be fined the sum of £150.
- c. Mr Zac Blackman is severely warned as to his future conduct.
- d. Oxford FC will be awarded 6 penalty points.

Improper Conduct against a match official (abusive/threatening language)

- e. Mr Zac Blackman will be suspended from all football activity for 6 matches to be served concurrently with his suspension in (a) above.
- f. Mr Zac Blackman is fined £50.
- g. Mr Zac Blackman is severely warned as to his future conduct.
- h. Oxford FC will be awarded 6 penalty points.

15 There is the right to appeal in accordance with the FA Regulations.

22nd January 2020

Mr Michael Cloherty