

**Football Association
Discipline Commission
Craig Langton
Reasons for Discipline Commission Decision
Monday 18th May 2015**

PARTIES

The Discipline Commission members were Mr. B. M. Jones, Mr. R. Pawley and Miss. A. Hashmi.

Mr. Craig Langton was present.

Mr. R. Smith, of the Judicial Services Department of the Football Association acted as Secretary to the Commission.

INTRODUCTION

1. These are the written reasons for an FA Discipline Commission hearing, (on behalf of Nottinghamshire FA), at the East Midlands Hilton Hotel, Derby on Monday 18th May 2015.

2. By letter of the 14th April 2015, Mr. Craig Langton, a referee, had been charged with Misconduct under FA Rule E3 – Improper Conduct – Improper Comments on a social networking site. The comments were deemed to be offensive on a social networking site.

3. By his Reply Form dated the 17th April 2015, Mr. Langton, admitted the Charge and requested the opportunity to attend a Disciplinary Hearing to enter a verbal plea for leniency. He confirmed, by that form, that he was aware that he was accepting the charge and that he would not be able to question the basis of the charge or reports from the County witnesses and that they would not be in attendance.

4. Notwithstanding the acceptance referred to in paragraph 3 above, on the same date Mr. Langton completed a 'notification of Request for a Personal Hearing' form and wherein he stated 'I do not agree with the charge of improper conduct. I need to offer my side of the facts. I have not intended to offend anyone'.

THE CHARGE

5. The Charge was as stated above and it was confirmed by screen shots of the Twitter comments posted by Mr. Langton.

EVIDENCE

6. As stated above the Commission had before them the various tweets and Mr. Langton confirmed that the offending tweet had been sent by him on the morning of Saturday 4th April 2015 and whilst he was still in bed.

7. This was in response to tweets indicating that someone was selling memorial tickets relating to the Hillsborough disaster. Charl JFT96 Hennessy had tweeted - '*@LFC this man is SELLING memorial tickets for between £5 - £10 dependant on the seating!!!! Absolutely disgusting!*'

8. Mr. Langton tweeted in reply - '*charlhennessy1 Scouse_ma. LFC typical scousers and you want us to believe your innocent in all this. #Blamethepolice*'.

9. This all took place at a time when the Hillsborough Inquests were taking place and had reached a very sensitive part of the proceedings, especially relating to the Police evidence.

CONCLUSION

10. Mr. Langton, at the earliest opportunity, admitted the charge brought against him. However, bluntly, bearing in mind the screen shot evidence he had little choice other than to make the admission.

11. The Commission were informed that Mr. Langton had no previous record of misconduct.

MITIGATION

12. Mr. Langton personally addressed the Commission.

13. Mr. Langton is a serving Fire Brigade Officer with in excess of 25 years service, and his wife a serving Police Officer. Complaints have been made to his employers and to his Union in addition to the one to the Nottinghamshire FA.

14. Mr. Langton told the Commission that he has apologised in writing to the person making the complaint 'charlhennessy' and that was done by his Union sending his letter to that lady. He was not able to produce a copy of his apology for the Commission to read. It should be noted that it is understood that the lady in question lost her father at the Hillsborough disaster.

15. Mr. Langton accepted that he had made a huge mistake and that his tweet was badly worded. That said he did not seem to show any real understanding of the offence/distress he had clearly caused by his tweet.

16. Following the tweet in question he received abusive phone calls; had take away meals delivered to his house and for some time had to park his car away from the house due to threats made.

17. Mr. Langton is a Level 4 referee and has been for some 7 years. He told us that he was top of the list for promotion in the East Midlands Pool and has done very well over the last two seasons. He was top of some 80 referees and had been awarded two Cup Finals but because of this matter they had been taken away from him. We had in our papers a 'character reference' from Nigel Prost the referee's co-ordinator at Nottingham Forest FC and Notts County FC and which we read with interest and noted.

SANCTION

18. Having very carefully listened to Mr. Langton and after hearing his previous good disciplinary record the Commission considered all aspects but in particular the early admission (no real option); the apology to the complainant; and the character reference and his experience as outlined in paragraph 17 the Commission then turned to the question of sanction.

19. The Commission were concerned that even today Mr. Langton did not seem to appreciate the seriousness of the matter and the upset that it had caused.

20. The Commission decided that the case warranted a sporting sanction (suspension) and a fine.

21. Clearly to make the sporting sanction (suspension) have any real meaning it had to be within the playing season and to impose an immediate suspension today would have no real effect on Mr. Langton's refereeing as many Leagues had completed their fixtures or would have done so in the next couple of weeks.

22. The Commission appreciated that in addition to whatever sanction was imposed by them the matter would automatically be reported to the Referees Committee of the Nottinghamshire FA and/or The FA. If that was not the case then the Commission would report the matter.

23. Having considered all the written and verbal evidence adduced the Commission ordered that:-

- a. Mr. Langton be warned as to his future conduct.
- b. Mr. Langton be suspended from all football and football activity including Refereeing from Monday 3rd August 2015 to Sunday 11th October 2015.

- c. Mr. Langton be fined the sum of £100.
- d. The personal hearing fee to be retained but there be no further order as to costs.
- e. The decision is subject to the appropriate Appeal Regulations.

Brian M. Jones (Chairman)

Roger Pawley

Miss. Arshia Hashmi

Thursday 21st May 2015.