

IN THE MATTER OF A REGULATORY COMMISSION

BETWEEN

THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

and

CRAIG MUDD

and

KARIM BELHOCINE

WRITTEN REASONS OF THE REGULATORY COMMISSION

Regulatory Commission: Sally Davenport (Chair) – Independent Legal Panel
Member

Kevin Bond – Independent Football Panel Member

Alan Hardy – Independent Football Panel Member

Secretary: Nathan Greenslade – Judicial Services Officer

Date: 24 March 2026

Venue: Held remotely via Microsoft Teams

Introduction

1. These are the written reasons of the Regulatory Commission (“the Commission”) that considered two charges (“the Charges”) against Craig Mudd (“CM”) and Karim Belhocine (“KB”).
2. CM is a coach for Sheffield Wednesday Football Club (“SWFC”).
3. KB is a coach for Watford FC (“Watford”).
4. On 10 March 2026, SWFC played a match (“the Match”) in the EFL Championship against Watford.
5. Both CM and KB were sent off following a confrontation in the second half of the Match (“the Incident”).

The Charges

6. By letter dated 12 March 2026 (“the CM Charge Letter”), The FA charged CM with misconduct for a breach of FA Rule E3.1 (“the CM Charge”). It was alleged that in or around the 62nd minute of the Match, CM acted in an improper manner by confronting an opponent, leading to his dismissal.
7. The case was designated as a Non-Standard case as the particular facts of the alleged misconduct were of a serious and/or unusual nature.
8. By letter dated 12 March 2026 (“the KB Charge Letter”), The FA charged KB with misconduct for a breach of FA Rule E3.1 (“the KB Charge”). It was alleged that in or around the 62nd minute of the Match, KB acted in an improper manner by confronting an opponent, leading to his dismissal.

9. The case was designated as a Non-Standard case as the particular facts of the alleged misconduct were of a serious and/or unusual nature.

The CM Charge

10. CM was sent the following documents together with the CM Charge Letter:

- Dismissal report from the Referee, Elliot Bell, dated 11 March 2026
- Email correspondence between The FA and the Fourth Official, Andrew Kitchen, dated 11 March 2026
- Email correspondence between The FA and the Assistant Referee, George Byrne, dated 11 March 2026
- Video clips of the dismissal

CM's Response

11. On 16 March 2026, CM submitted a Disciplinary Proceedings Reply Form. He admitted the CM Charge and indicated that he did not wish to attend a personal hearing. CM also submitted a witness statement dated 13 March 2026 and written submissions from a firm of solicitors acting on his behalf dated 17 March 2026.

The KB Charge

12. KB was sent the following documents together with the KB Charge Letter:

- Dismissal report from the Referee, Elliot Bell, dated 11 March 2026
- Email correspondence between The FA and the Fourth Official, Andrew Kitchen, dated 11 March 2026
- Email correspondence between The FA and the Assistant Referee, George Byrne, dated 11 March 2026
- Video clips of the dismissal

KB's Response

13. On 17 March 2026, KB submitted a Disciplinary Proceedings Reply Form. He admitted the KB Charge and indicated that he did not wish to attend a personal hearing. He also submitted a letter dated 17 March 2026.

Relevant Rule

14. FA Rule E3.1 states:

“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.”

The Hearing

15. The Charges were consolidated pursuant to Regulation 13 of the Disciplinary Regulations 2025/26 and were determined together at a joint hearing.

16. In advance of the hearing the Commission read the documents referred to above and viewed the video footage provided by The FA.

17. The following paragraphs summarise the evidence and written submissions considered by the Commission. They do not purport to cover all the points made. The absence of a point or submission in these Reasons should not imply that the Commission did not take that point or submission into account when deciding the cases.

The FA's Evidence

18. The Referee did not personally witness the Incident. In his Extraordinary Incident Report, he stated as follows:

“In the 62nd minute following a caution in front of the technical areas, Mr Mudd and Mr Belhocine became physically aggressive with each other and on the advice of the 4th official were both dismissed from the technical area.”

19. In his email to The FA dated 11 March 2026, the Fourth Official described the Incident in the following terms:

“In the 62nd minute, following a foul challenge, I became aware of a confrontation in the vicinity of the technical areas involving players and officials of both teams.

I witnessed Craig Mudd move from behind me, at the back of the technical area, to just outside the front of the Sheffield Wednesday FC technical area, and confront a member of staff from the Watford FC technical area, pointing towards him in a manner which appeared to be aggressive.

I then witnessed Karim Belhocine leave the Watford FC technical area to confront Mr Mudd.

Mr Mudd confronted Mr Belhocine, pushing him back, and Mr Belhocine then advanced towards Mr Mudd, moving his body into Mr Mudd’s personal space in a provocative and aggressive manner, and moving his head towards Mr Mudd, although I do not believe that any contact was made with the head. Both made physical contact with one another.

Several more pushes appeared to be exchanged, as other members of staff from both sides sought to calm the situation, and all technical area staff then returned to their own technical areas.

Due to the confrontational nature of their actions, I then informed the referee that what I had witnessed by Mr Mudd and Mr Belhocine constituted aggressive behaviour, and that both would need to be sent from the technical area.

I did not witness any further misconduct.”

20. Assistant Referee George Byrne, in his email dated 11 March 2026, stated that his primary focus had been on dealing with the original foul. However, he confirmed that he did witness CM and KB *“leave their respective technical areas and demonstrate aggressive attitude to enflame the confrontation”*. He did not witness any other specific actions or language.

CM’s Statement

21. In his witness statement CM described the Incident in the following terms:

“3.1 In or around the 62nd minute of the Fixture, a foul was committed by a player of the Club and, as a result, a WFC player ended up on the floor close to our technical area.

3.2 I observed the WFC manager run from his own technical area towards the players. He was gesturing with his hands in the air and, in my view, appeared to be attempting to influence the match official to send the Club’s player off. In my opinion, this was not appropriate behaviour, regardless of whether the foul warranted such a sanction.

3.3 In response to what I saw, I moved to the front of the Club’s technical area and pointed towards the WFC manager, indicating that he should not be encroaching into our area and should remain within his own technical area. My intention was solely to: (i) encourage the WFC manager to return to his own technical area to avoid any unnecessary confrontation; and (ii) prevent any potential influence being exerted by the WFC manager.

3.4 It was at this point when another member of the WFC technical team - who I understand to be Mr Karim Belhocine (“Mr Belhocine”) - ran across aggressively and made physical contact with me.

3.5 The Fourth Official, Mr Andrew Kitchen, confirms in his report that he witnessed Mr Belhocine "leave the Watford FC technical area to confront [me]" and that Mr Belhocine was "moving his body into [my] personal space in a provocative and aggressive manner, and moving his head towards [me]."

3.6 Whilst my natural reaction at this point was to stand my ground, I did not initiate any aggressive behaviour towards Mr Belhocine. I did not use any threatening or abusive language or demonstrate any signs of physical violence.

3.7 The subsequent movement by me back towards Mr Belhocine was as a direct result of one of the Club’s own staff members pushing me in the back. This was not an aggressive act - the staff member was trying to prevent me from treading on an injured WFC player who unbeknownst to me was lying on the ground behind me.

This can be seen clearly on the video evidence.

3.8 After this brief stand-off, the situation de-escalated of its own accord. I returned to my designated seat without further incident. I did not pursue the confrontation or re-engage with any member of the WFC staff at any stage after the initial incident.

3.9 It was shortly after this that the referee, Elliot Bell (“Mr Bell”), showed both myself and Mr Belhocine a red card. As myself and Mr Belhocine, we were both disappointed with the referee decision to show us red cards but no other altercation or other communication happened between myself and Mr Belhocine.”

CM's Submissions

22. In his witness statement, CM also provided context and mitigation that he asked the Commission to consider. His solicitors also commented on the Incident and made submissions as to the appropriate sanction. The points made included the following:

- CM's conduct had been "*reactive and protective in nature*". The Watford manager had run from his technical area towards the players. CM had pointed at him to say that he should not be encroaching into SWFC's technical area.
- At that point KB had run across aggressively and made physical contact with CM. KB had been the one to initiate the physical element of the confrontation.
- CM's initial reaction had been to stand his ground, but he had not initiated any aggressive behaviour towards KB.
- A subsequent movement by CM towards KB had been a direct result of one of SW's staff members pushing him in the back to try to prevent him from treading on an injured Watford player on the ground behind him.
- The situation was brief (a matter of seconds) and deescalated of its own accord. CM had disengaged voluntarily.
- No injury had been caused.
- The Match had not been broadcast on national television.
- CM had accepted the CM Charge at the earliest opportunity. He had accepted that what he did was wrong and apologised for his conduct.
- Apart from one misconduct charge in August 2024, CM had an impeccable disciplinary record. The previous charge involved an entirely different type of offence.

KB's letter

23. In the letter referred to in paragraph 13 above, KB accepted that he should not have left the technical area and engaged with SWFC staff. He asked the Commission to take the following points into account:

- The Incident had occurred following a late and dangerous tackle by a SWFC player on the touchline.
- KB's initial reaction had not been intended to be aggressive in any way, he had sought to put himself between the Watford manager and the SWFC players and staff, who in his opinion had reacted in an aggressive manner to the manager's instinctive response to the tackle.
- The footage clearly showed that CM had been the one who instigated the physical contact by pushing KB twice. KB's actions were purely in response.
- KB had faced up to CM, at which point CM had grabbed hold of his jacket and ripped it.
- The Incident had been a brief coming together and from KB's side had not gone beyond brief physical contact. He had remained calm.
- KB accepted that even though he was being goaded, he should not have reacted as he did to the behaviour of SWFC players and staff members. He had let himself and his club down.
- KB had a clean disciplinary record.

The FA's Submissions

24. In its written submissions, The FA summarised the Charges and the factual background. It reminded the Commission that both cases had been designated as Non-Standard by the FA, meaning that the Commission had a discretion to impose one or more of the sanctions listed in paragraph 41 of the Disciplinary Regulations Part A – General Provisions. In terms of aggravating factors, it pointed out that this was not a purely verbal altercation, there had been physical contact. Furthermore, CM and KB were both experienced participants. The admission of the Charges and the expressions of remorse were mitigating factors. The FA invited the Commission to impose at least a one-match ban in each case, together with a financial penalty in excess of the Standard Penalty of £1,000.

The Commission's Decisions on Sanction

25. Prior to the Commission's deliberations on sanction, the Secretary confirmed that CM had one previous proven misconduct charge on his record for the 2025-2026 season and preceding five seasons. That charge dated back to August 2024, when CM had been an Assistant Coach with the U21 team at Manchester City FC. He was given a £400 fine. The Secretary also confirmed that KB had no previous proven misconduct charges against him over the same period of time.
26. The Commission discussed the video footage and the differing accounts of the Incident put forward by CM and KB, in particular as regards who had initiated the confrontation. It did not accept either version of events in its entirety. It concluded that CM and KB were equally to blame. Both had been at the rear of their respective technical areas and neither had needed to rush forward and get involved. They had moved out of their technical areas and had pushed one another repeatedly. The Commission did not accept the submission that CM's movement towards KB (and by extension any contact made) had been a direct result of a SWFC staff member trying to prevent him from treading on an injured Watford player on the ground behind him. This was not borne out by the video footage. Furthermore, the Commission did not accept that KB's actions had been purely reactive, noting the Fourth Official's description of him as provocative and aggressive.
27. The actions of CM and KB had caused players and staff members from both clubs to get involved. They had escalated the situation unnecessarily and could have caused injury, particularly as there was a player lying on the ground at the time. While the Incident had been relatively short-lived, both participants had had to be physically restrained by other members of their staff. It could not be said that they were calm. Clearly their actions portrayed the game in a negative light.
28. As the Charges were both Non-Standard, the Commission had a discretion as to the appropriate sanction. It noted that the Standard Penalty Guidelines provide for a £1,000 fine for other technical area staff in cases where a Standard Penalty is accepted. It noted that this

was not a case that included abusive/insulting language/confrontational behaviour towards a Match Official. It therefore disagreed with The FA's submission that the Standard Penalty would also include a one-match touchline ban. However, it concluded that a touchline ban was appropriate in the circumstances. The Incident had been confrontational. It had involved aggression and physical contact between two experienced participants who had admitted that their conduct fell short of what was expected. The confrontation had taken place during the Match, in full view of the crowd, and had led to an unsightly, albeit brief, melee. The Commission debated whether to impose a two-match ban. However, it accepted that the Charges had been admitted at the earliest opportunity and that both CM and KB had apologised and shown remorse, albeit that this was tempered by each seeking to ascribe the lion's share of the blame to the other. KB's clean disciplinary record was a point in his favour. The Commission debated whether CM's prior proven misconduct charge was an aggravating factor in his case, but concluded that it was not, given that it was for a totally different type of offence (delaying the restart of a match). Having taken into account the mitigating factors, the Commission decided that a one-match touchline ban was appropriate in each case.

29. The Commission also decided that a financial penalty was also appropriate. Both participants had provided details of their income from football. Again, the Commission exercised its discretion, given that the Charges were Non-Standard. After taking into account the aggravating and mitigating factors set out in paragraph 28 above, it decided to impose a fine of £1,200 on each participant.

30. The Commission made the following orders:

- CM is to serve a touchline ban until such time as SWFC has completed one First Team Competitive Match in an approved competition.
- CM is to pay a fine of £1,200.
- KB serve a touchline ban until such time as Watford has completed one First Team Competitive Match in an approved competition.
- KB is to pay a fine of £1,200.

31. The decisions of the Commission may be appealed in accordance with the relevant Appeal Regulations.

Sally Davenport

Kevin Bond

Alan Hardy

26 March 2026