

IN THE MATTER OF A REGULATORY COMMISSION

BETWEEN

THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

AND

GILLINGHAM FC

AND

COLCHESTER UNITED FC

WRITTEN REASONS OF THE REGULATORY COMMISSION

Regulatory Commission: John Finlay (Chair) – Independent Legal Panel Member

David Unsworth – Independent Football Panel Member

Nick Alford – Independent Football Panel Member

Secretary: Marc Medas – Judicial Services Officer

Date: 12 January 2026

Venue: Held remotely via Microsoft Teams

Introduction

1. These are the written reasons of the Regulatory Commission (“the Commission”) that considered charges against Gillingham FC (“Gillingham”) and Colchester United FC (“Colchester”).
2. By letters dated 2 January 2026, The Football Association (“The FA”) charged both Gillingham and Colchester with misconduct for a breach of FA rule E20.1 (“the Charges”).

3. The Charges arose further to a match between the two clubs (“the Clubs”) that was played on 29 December 2025 (“the Match”).
4. The FA designated both cases as Non-Standard Cases as the particular facts of the alleged misconduct were of a serious and/or unusual nature.
5. The FA charges against the Clubs were consolidated by the FA pursuant to Regulation 13 of Disciplinary Regulations 2025/26.

Relevant Rule

6. FA Rule E20 states:

“Conduct of participants at matches

E20 Each Affiliated Association, Competition and Club shall be responsible for ensuring that its Directors, players, officials, employees, servants and representatives, attending any Match do not:

E20.1 behave in a way which is improper, offensive, violent, threatening, abusive, indecent, insulting or provocative;”

The charge against Gillingham

7. The FA charged Gillingham with a breach of FA Rule E20.1 the allegation being that following the completion of the fixture, Gillingham failed to ensure that its players and/or technical area staff did not behave in a way which was improper and/or provocative.
8. With its charge letter, The FA sent to Gillingham the following documents:
 - a. Report of the Match Referee, Mr. M. Russell, dated 30 December 2025; and
 - b. Extract – Essential Information for Clubs 2025/26; and
 - c. Video clip of the incident.
 - d. Disciplinary Proceedings Reply Form

Gillingham’s Response

9. On 7 January 2026 Gillingham returned the Disciplinary Proceedings Reply Form. They admitted the charge and did not request an opportunity to attend a Commission for a personal hearing and elected for the charge to be dealt with at a paper hearing.
10. Gillingham also provided the following evidence:
 - a. A written statement from Joe Comper (Managing Director) dated 7 January 2026.
 - b. A short video clip.
 - c. A written statement from Gareth Ainsworth (Manager) that was undated.
 - d. A written statement from James Russell (Head of Performance) that was undated and unsigned.

- e. A written statement from Deren Ibrahim (Goalkeeper Coach) that was undated and unsigned.

The charge against Colchester

11. The FA charged Colchester with a breach of FA Rule E20.1 the allegation being that following the completion of the fixture, Colchester failed to ensure that its players and/or technical area staff did not behave in a way which was improper and/or provocative.
12. With its charge letter, The FA sent to Colchester the following documents:
 - a. Report of the Match Referee, Mr. M. Russell, dated 30 December 2025; and
 - b. Extract – Essential Information for Clubs 2025/26; and
 - c. Video clip of the incident.
 - d. Disciplinary Proceedings Reply Form

Colchester's Response

13. On 6 January 2026 Colchester returned the Disciplinary Proceedings Reply Form. They admitted the charge and did not request an opportunity to attend a Commission for a personal hearing and elected for the charge to be dealt with at a paper hearing.
14. Colchester also provided a written statement from the club.

The Hearing

15. In advance of the hearing the Commission read the documents referred to above and viewed the video footage provided by The FA as well as that provided by Gillingham.
16. In light of the fact that the Clubs admitted the Charges and neither requested a personal hearing, the Commission treated the Charges as proven and reviewed the evidence and submissions purely in order to determine sanction.

Findings

17. The following findings do not purport to contain references to all the points made during the course of the hearing. The absence of a point, or submission in these written reasons should not imply that the Commission did not take such point into consideration when determining the matter.
18. Based on the evidence and in particular the video footage of the event the Commission was in no doubt that there was a mass confrontation between the Clubs. It was noted that this started almost immediately at the final whistle and it was instigated solely by the coming together of the two managers. There was no evidence to indicate that this event would have taken place but for the behaviour of the two managers.
19. The Commission further noted that the mass confrontation was made up of a considerable number of people from the Clubs and this included players and technical area staff.

20. As set out above Gillingham made submissions in mitigation and these were considered by the Commission. Whilst the Commission noted the allegation that they had been provoked by statements made by Colchester staff during the match the Commission have firstly seen no evidence of this and secondly do not believe that this amounts to a justification for the events that subsequently took place.
21. The Commission also noted the submissions made about individual players by Gillingham. However, the Commission were of the view that there appeared to be no attempt from the players involved to try and remove themselves from the situation and the footage demonstrates the players continuing to remain involved.
22. Further, the Commission did not agree with the submissions by Gillingham that at the end of the fixture the “first team staff went into their office and played no further part in proceedings.” What is clear from the footage is that members of the Gillingham staff remain on the pitch after the final whistle. In particular the manager, Gareth Ainsworth, having instigated the mass confrontation along with the Colchester manager, can be seen remaining on the pitch and continuing the confrontation with the Colchester manager on two separate occasions.
23. Similarly, the Commission did not agree with the submissions of Colchester that the “incident was contained swiftly.” The video evidence clearly shows that this was not the case. The confrontation contained a very considerable number of players and staff and even when it looked to have ended after two minutes a further confrontation took place towards the middle of the pitch.
24. The Commission were of the view that there were significant failings on the part of the Clubs which stemmed from the actions of the managers and included significant number of players and staff from the Clubs for a prolonged period. Those failings were violent, threatening and provocative and clearly in breach of Rule E20.1.
25. The Commission considered the 5 second video clip provided by Gillingham however they were of the view that this simply went to underline the seriousness of the behaviour by both sides.

Sanction against Gillingham

26. Before the Commission deliberated on the appropriate sanction, it noted that Gillingham had two previous sanctions imposed on them for a breach of Rule E20. The first of those was in a match against Shrewsbury Town FC on 28 August 2021 where they were fined £5,000. The second involved a match against Crawley Town on 19 August 2023 when Gillingham were fined £3,000.
27. As set out above, the Commission do not accept the submissions that were made by Gillingham that the event was provoked by the verbal comments made during the game. There is no justification that such comments should provoke such a mass confrontation. Further the Commission do not accept Gillingham’s submission that the first team staff left the field of play at the end of the game. As set out above the Gillingham manager remained on the pitch and continued to be involved in confrontations after the final whistle had gone.

28. The Commission considered the FA sanction guidelines which were also provided to the Clubs. The guidelines make clear that for clubs in EFL League Two who are in breach of Rule E20 in cases that have been classified as non-standard the entry point is £5,000 with the maximum fine being £10,000. Albeit that the maximum fine shall double and then treble (and so on) for successive breaches within a 12 month period.

29. The Commission considered that this was a serious case and that it should be dealt with at the upper end of the sanction guidelines. In particular the Commission took into account the following aggravating factors:

- a. The mass confrontation was instigated by the actions of the two managers. Given their roles and responsibilities this is a significantly aggravating factor.
- b. The sheer number of players and staff who were involved in the mass confrontation.
- c. The fact that the mass confrontation took place after the final whistle had been blown and the game was over.
- d. The length of time the mass confrontation continued for.
- e. The repeated confrontation between the managers.
- f. The fact that Gillingham had been fined for two similar previous breaches

30. The Commission were of the view that there were limited mitigating factors. It did though acknowledge the fact that Gillingham admitted the charge and provided a response to it. However, they were of the view that both Clubs were equally to blame for the events that took place and the significant failure to control their players and staff. The Commission were also of the view that given the serious nature of the mass confrontation and in particular the nature of its inception the high level of sanction should act as a deterrent.

31. As a result, the Commission came to the decision to impose a fine of £9,000.

32. Whilst the high level of the sanction was imposed based on the findings set out above the Commission were also hopeful that the prospect of further sanctions for similar breaches would act as a deterrent to any such future behaviour and Gillingham would take all necessary steps to ensure such breaches did not happen.

Sanction against Colchester

33. Before the Commission deliberated on the appropriate sanction, it noted that Colchester had one previous sanction imposed on them for a breach of Rule E20. That related to a match against Sutton United on 4 January 2022 where they were fined £1,500.

34. As set out above the Commission considered this to be a serious incident. They considered the submissions made by Colchester and in particular their submissions on mitigation. However, they were of the view that the Clubs were equally to blame for the events that took place.

35. The Commission considered the FA sanction guidelines which were also provided to the Clubs. That guidelines make clear that for clubs in EFL League Two who are in breach of Rule E20 in cases that have been classified as non-standard the entry point is

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- c. The fact that the mass confrontation took place after the final whistle had been blown and the game was over.
- d. The length of time the mass confrontation continued.
- e. The repeated confrontation between the managers.
- f. The fact that Colchester had been fined for a similar previous breach

37. The Commission were of the view that there were limited mitigating factors. It did though acknowledge the fact that Colchester admitted the charge and provided a response to it. It also acknowledged the steps that Colchester have taken to contact the FA to obtain further education sessions for its staff. However, it was of the view that both Clubs were equally to blame for the events that took place and the significant failure to control their players and staff.

38. As a result, the Commission came to the decision to impose a fine of £9,000.

39. Whilst the high level of the sanction was imposed based on the findings set out above the Commission were also hopeful that the prospect of further sanctions for similar breaches would act as a deterrent to any such future behaviour and Colchester would take all necessary steps, in addition to those already taken, to ensure such breaches did not happen.

Appeal

40. This decision is subject to the relevant Appeal Regulations.

John Finlay

David Unsworth

Nick Alford

13 January 2026