

Football Association ('FA') Independent Regulatory Commission (the 'Commission') In the Matter of an E1.1 Charge of Misconduct Brought by The FA against Leif Davis ('LD') of Ipswich Town FC ('ITFC').

Regulatory Commission Decision

1. These are the written reasons for a decision made by an Independent Regulatory Commission which sat on 12 March 2026.
2. The Commission members were Mr. Udo Onwere (Chairman), Mr. Stephen Bennett and Mr. Clarke Carlisle, all of whom are Independent Football Panel Members.
3. Ms. Veronika Christmas, Judicial Services Administrator at The FA, acted as Secretary to the Regulatory Commission.
4. The following is a summary of the principal submissions provided to the Commission. 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 the Commission did not take such point, or submission, into consideration when the members determined the matter. For the avoidance of doubt, the Commission has carefully considered all the evidence and materials furnished with regard to this case.

Relevant FA Rules, Regulations and Guidance.

5. FA Rule E1.1 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."*

Background to the Charge

6. On 7 March 2026, ITFC played Leicester City FC (LCFC) in an EFL Championship Fixture.
7. In or around the 27th minute of the match an incident occurred between LD and his opponent Caleb Okoli (CO) of LCFC where the ball comes into the area from a LCFC corner kick. Neither the Referee, Mr John Busby, nor any of his assistants witnessed the incident and, as such, it was regarded as a 'Not Seen Incident', under Fast Track 1 of the FA Regulations, where an incident on the field of play which falls within Law 12 of the FA Regulations which was not seen by the officials but was caught on video.
8. The Referee e-mailed the FA on 10 March 2026 asking that the incident be reviewed, he wrote, inter alia, *"Ipswich Town no. 3 (Davis) & Leicester City no. 5 (Okoli) at the far post compete in an aerial challenge. In challenging for the ball Ipswich Town no.3 can be seen to grab the hair of Leicester City no.5... This was not witnessed on the day by any match official."*
9. Having reviewed the available footage the FA proceeded to investigate the allegation that LD had acted in a violent manner towards CO by pulling his hair when challenging from the incoming ball from a corner.
10. The FA sought the retrospective opinions of three former referees as to how they would have dealt with the actions of LD had they witnessed the incident.
11. All three of the former referees (Mr. E. Wolstenholme, Mr M. Mullarkey and Mr. A. Wiley) stated that they would have dismissed LD for violent conduct had the Referee witnessed the incident in question.

12. Consequently, on 10 March 2026, the FA charged LD with Misconduct for a breach of FA Rule E1.1 in respect to the above-described incident. The FA alleged that in/or around the 27th minute of the fixture, as evidenced by the video clip, LD's behaviour constituted 'Violent Conduct' (the Charge).

13. The FA relied on the following written evidence:

- i. Email correspondence from Match Official, Mr. J. Busby dated 10 March 2026;*
- ii. Email correspondence between Mr R Marsh, The Football Association and PGMOL Senior Referee Coach, Mr. A Wiley, dated 10 March 2026;*
- iii. Email correspondence between Mr R Marsh, The Football Association and PGMOL Senior Referee Coach, Mr. E Wolstenholme dated 10 March 2026;*
- iv. Email correspondence between Mr R Marsh, The Football Association and PGMOL Senior Referee Coach, Mr. M. Mullarkey dated 10 March 2026;*
- v. Video clips of the incident.*

14. By a 4-page letter dated 11 March ITFC replied from its General Counsel, Laura McCallum in which she stated, inter alia, that "the charge was admitted" and "the standard punishment of a 3-match suspension was clearly excessive pursuant to Fast Track 5 of the Regulations", providing submissions on this point.

15. LD replied to the Charge on 11 March 2026. He admitted the Charge and outlined some mitigatory points as well as reiterating the position of ITFC that the standard punishment of a 3-match suspension was clearly excessive.

16. The Hearing took place on Thursday 12 March 2026 by way of Microsoft Teams.

Decision of the Commission

17. The Commission viewed the footage of the incident on many occasions. It was very clear from the footage that in order to gain an advantage over his opponent, LD pulled his opponent's hair. The Commission concluded that the pull on the opponent's hair was made with considerable force. The Commission also noted that there has been a growing prevalence of this type of hair pulling offence in recent seasons and the applicable punishment has consistently been a 3-match suspension for a red card offence of violent conduct. This incident fell squarely into that category and, if anything, it was at the more egregious end of the spectrum relating to this type of challenge. The Commission were very careful in considering the context of this challenge and the actions of LD at the time of the alleged incident and the surrounding points raised by ITFC.

18. Indeed, the Commission carefully considered the surrounding points raised by ITFC (outlined in Paragraphs 13.2 and 13.3 of Fast Track 5 of the Fast Track Regulations) and, in summary, considered ITFC's position (where they stated that the circumstances of the challenge were truly exceptional and that the standard 3-match suspension was clearly excessive) as follows:

- *'the level of force used'* – the level of force used was not considered to be negligible. In fact, the force used was aggressive enough to force CO's head to jolt backward and was an invasive act upon CO's personal space
- *'the prevalence of the type of incident in question in football generally'* – as already outlined the Commission recognised several recent incidents of this nature that have occurred. Examples include Michael Keane (Everton v Wolves), Alfie May (Huddersfield Town v Luton) and Jack Diamond (Stockport County v Huddersfield Town).
- *'the wider interests of football in applying consistent punishments for dismissal offences'* – the Commission understood that each of

the three examples given above resulted in the standard punishment of a 3-match suspension. The Commission agreed that LD's challenge was of a similar nature (if not slightly more forceful) to the aforementioned incidents and, as such, required a consistent approach to the level of punishment for the wider interests of football.

- ITFC also put forward submissions that suggested the truly exceptional nature of this incident was shown through the Referee's retrospective analysis of the match. ITFC stated that it was not appropriate to 're-referee' a match after it had concluded (ie. by watching the match footage afterwards) and that seeking to take retrospective action against LD was unnecessary. The Commission did not agree with this point and were inclined to follow the established approach adopted by the FA to retrospectively review 'not seen' incidents of violent conduct. This incident was characterised as violent conduct and so it was entirely necessary to review the incident retrospectively. The Commission were also persuaded by the views of the three former top level officials (outlined in paragraph 11 above) who were unanimous in their decision. The Commission also noted LD's good disciplinary record, however, it did not find that the submissions made by ITFC provided sufficient evidence that the standard 3-match suspension should be disapplied.

19. Turning to the personal statement provided by LD, the Commission did not find his mitigatory explanation to be persuasive. LD stated "*I remember raising my left arm to propel me upwards and to put myself in a good position to compete with Okoli in the aerial challenge as he is much taller than me. At no point did I intend to be reckless with my challenge or negligent in any way. However, I recall making contact with Okoli's shoulder and the back of his head with my outstretched arm. I remember that I headed the ball clear and away from our box. Having reviewed the footage sent by The FA, I accept that I did pull Okoli's hair, however, it was never my intention to pull his hair and I don't know why I did that. I want to*

make it clear that the contact I made with the back of Okoli's head was completely accidental, and as set out above, I wish to apologise for my actions. Given the speed, physicality, and close-quarters nature of defending the box during a corner, making some form of contact is common and often unavoidable. On this occasion, because of how quickly the moment unfolded, I unintentionally caught the back of his head. I want to stress again that it was never my intention to pull Okoli's hair and I sincerely regret that this happened."

Whilst the Commission were appreciative of LD's explanation, it did not find that this statement provided them with compelling evidence that the standard 3-match suspension should be disapplied.

20. Therefore, the Commission, having regard to all the submissions and regulations, concluded that the standard punishment was applicable and there was nothing in this incident that could be regarded as being truly exceptional which would render a 3-match suspension as clearly excessive.

21. This decision is not subject to appeal in accordance with the Rules and Regulations of the FA, specifically paragraphs 30 and 31 of the Fast Track 1 Regulations.

Udo Onwere (Chair)

Regulatory Commission Chair

19 March 2026