

IN THE MATTER OF A FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION
INDEPENDENT REGULATORY COMMISSION

BETWEEN:

THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

and

PORTSMOUTH FC

and

SOUTHAMPTON FC

WRITTEN REASONS AND DECISION OF
THE INDEPENDENT REGULATORY COMMISSION FOLLOWING THE
HEARING ON 9 FEBRUARY 2026

Background

1. These are the written reasons and decisions made by an Independent Regulatory Commission which sat by Microsoft Teams video link on 9 February 2026 to consider the consolidated charge against Portsmouth FC (“PFC”) and Southampton FC (“SFC”).
2. The Regulatory Commission members were Mr Michael O’Brien, Chairman and Independent Football Panel Member, Mr Alex Cowdy, Independent Football Panel Member, and Mr Matt Wild, Independent Football Panel Member.
3. Mr Conrad Gibbons, The FA Judicial Services Assistant Manager, acted as Secretary to the Regulatory Commission.
4. By letters dated 27 January 2026, The Football Association (“The FA”) submitted that PFC and SFC were charged respectively with misconduct for breaches of FA Rule E20.1 in respect of the EFL Championship fixture between PFC and SFC on 25 January 2026 (“the Charges”). The Charges were consolidated pursuant to FA Regulations.
5. It was alleged that, in or around the 69th minute of the fixture in question, both teams failed to ensure that its players did not behave in a way which was improper and / or provocative. The FA designated the cases as Non-Standard as the particular facts of the alleged Misconduct are of a serious and/or unusual nature. In the case of SFC the case was also deemed Non-Standard due to a separate proven breach of FA Rule E20 occurring within the previous 12 months.

Rule

6. (i) FA Rule E20 of The FA Regulations 2025/26 (“the Regulations”) states that –

Each Affiliated Association, Competition and Club shall be responsible for ensuring:

“that its directors, players, officials, employees, servants and representatives and do not behave in a way which is improper, offensive, violent, threatening, abusive, indecent, insulting or provocative.”

Evidence

7. The FA and both teams included the following evidence in respect to the Charge:

(i) Email report of the Match Referee, dated 25 January 2026; and

(ii) Video footage of the incident in question from 4 separate angles

8. The Match Referee, Mr L Smith stated in his email report –

‘In the 69th minute of the game following a reckless foul challenge by Flynn Downes for which he was cautioned, a mass confrontation broke out between a large number of

players from both teams which also resulted in a caution for Zak Swanson of Portsmouth FC. My team and I did not witness any further incidents in addition to the two cautions that were issues which required disciplinary action from myself, however I am reporting this matter and the conduct of both teams for your convenience’.

Replies to the Charge

9. PFC and SFC both admitted the Charge by replies each dated 30 January 2026. Both Clubs also included letters setting out the factors that they considered to constitute mitigating circumstances for each Club. The Commission took full note of these submissions.
10. Neither Club requested a personal hearing and each of the cases were dealt with on correspondence only.

Findings

11. 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 of a point, or submission, in these reasons 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 written and video evidence in respect of this case.
12. The Regulatory Commission viewed the video evidence in detail and gave consideration to a number of factors - the incident itself, the number of players involved from both sides, the duration of the incident, the level of aggression involved, and the proximity to and the potential incitement of the crowd.
13. Having carefully reviewed all the evidence the Commission concluded that following a foul tackle from Flynn Downes of SFC on Zak Swanson of PFC, which would likely have been dealt with by the referee issuing a caution, both players reacted aggressively toward one another. Subsequently a number of players, practically every player on the pitch in fact, from both sides ran toward the confrontation. A good deal of pushing, shoving and restraining occurred at this time across two separate melees. The physical contact was relatively brief and no acts of violence took place during the confrontation. The Commission took the view that neither side was more culpable than the other when looking at matters in the round. The main aggravating factors were considered to be the proximity to the crowd and the number of players involved. Given the high profile and volatile nature of the fixture, events might easily have unfolded in an even more unsavoury manner had members of the crowd become involved. This was considered to have been a realistic possibility.

Sanction

14. As both teams accepted the Charge, the Commission considered the appropriate

sanction to impose. The Commission considered previous sanctions imposed on both teams with regard to recent relevant misconduct. There were three breaches by PFC in the previous 5 years. There were five previous breaches by SFC, two of which were within the last 12 months (two at Youth level). The Commission considered SFC's record, and in particular the recency of the last charge, being just one month ago, to be a significant aggravating factor.

PFC History:

23 August 2022 – Portsmouth v Newport County, EFL Cup

Charge: E20.1 – Surrounding a Match Official; Case Type: Standard

Outcome: £2,500 fine

26 December 2023 – Portsmouth v Bristol Rovers, EFL League One

Charge: E20.1 - Mass Confrontation; Case Type: Standard

Outcome: £2,500 fine

28 September 2024 – Portsmouth v Sheffield United, EFL Championship

Charge: E20.1 – Mass Confrontation; Case Type: Non-Standard

Outcome: £6,000 fine

SFC History

3 October 2023 – Southampton FC v Stoke City FC, EFL Championship

Charge: E20.1 – Mass Confrontation; Case Type: Non-Standard

Outcome: Fine £8,000

7 August 2024 – Southampton FC v SS Lazio

Charge: E20.1 – Mass Confrontation; Case Type: Non-Standard

Outcome: Fine £20,000

31 August 2024 – Southampton U18 v Aston Villa U18

Charge: E20.1 – Mass Confrontation; Case Type: Non-Standard

Outcome: Fine £5,000

25 February 2025 – Southampton U18 v Watford U18 (FA Youth Cup)

Charge: E20.1 – Mass Confrontation; Case Type: Non-Standard

Outcome: Fine £10,000

20 December 2025 – Southampton FC v Coventry City FC, EFL Championship

Charge: E20.1 – Mass Confrontation; Case Type: Non-Standard

Outcome: Fine £22,500

FA Sanction Guidelines for Non-Standard E20.1 breaches

15. The Commission was furnished with a copy of the sanction guidelines for season 2025/26 in respect of Non-Standard breaches of FA Rule E20.1 relative to mass confrontations. This consists of a clear and concise table indicating the maximum fine applicable to clubs in each league as well as a stated 'Entry Point' when considering the level of fine.
16. These guidelines were disseminated to clubs by way of an 'Essential Information for Clubs' booklet at the start of the 2025/26 season. Accordingly, all clubs are put on notice as to the level of fine to expect in respect of breaches of FA Rule E20 arising from mass confrontations in the season ahead.
17. An 'Entry Point' was introduced to the guidance for season 2025/26 in respect of Non-Standard breaches. The FA's Participant Behaviour Working Group supported an 'Entry Point' of 50% of the maximum fine and this approach to sanction for such matters was approved by the Football Regulatory Authority. The guidelines also make clear that any subsequent Non-Standard breaches within a 12-month period will see the 'Entry Point' and maximum fines double, treble and so on and so forth for each consecutive breach.
18. Accordingly, for a first Non-Standard breach, a Championship Club may face a maximum fine of £50,000 with a stated 'Entry Point' for sanction of £25,000. The 'Entry Point' has been introduced to provide guidance on an appropriate starting point for sanction in Non-Standard matters where a wide sanction range is available.
19. Moreover, for a second Non-Standard breach within 12 months, the levels of fine double. Therefore, a Championship Club may face a maximum fine of £100,000 for a second breach with a stated entry point for sanction of £50,000.
20. In order to ensure consistency of sanction, the guidelines can reasonably be expected to be applied. Indeed, given the inclusion of the sanction guidelines in the 'Essential Information for Clubs' booklet, clubs ought to anticipate fines being imposed that accord with the table contained therein.
21. The Commission noted that the maximum fine applicable in PFC's case is £50,000 with

an expected entry point of £25,000. For SFC, with the breach being the second (at first team level) in a period of 12 months, the maximum fine applicable is £100,000 with an expected entry point of £50,000.

22. The Commission noted that The FA had provided submissions on sanction and took full note of this document. The Commission agreed with The FA's assessment that a 1/3 reduction for an admission to the charge was not appropriate in circumstances in which the charge was so seemingly clear cut.

Conclusion

23. The Commission, having carefully considered the Regulations, the mitigating and aggravating factors, the submissions of the FA and the submissions of the Clubs, imposed the following sanctions:

PFC will be fined the sum of £25,000 (The Commission initially determined a fine of £30,000 but agreed to reduce this based on the acceptance of the charge).

SFC will be fined the sum of £50,000 (The Commission initially determined a fine of £60,000 but agreed to reduce this based on the acceptance of the charge).

Appeal

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

Mr Michael O'Brien, Chairman and Independent Panel Member

Mr Alex Cowdy, Independent Football Panel Member

Mr Matt Wild, Independent Football Panel Member

11 February 2026