

**IN THE MATTER OF A REGULATORY COMMISSION**

**BETWEEN**

**THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION**

**And**

**RODRIGO HERNÁNDEZ CASCANTE**

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**WRITTEN REASONS OF THE REGULATORY COMMISSION**

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

Stuart Ripley – Independent Football Panel Member

Francis Benali – Independent Football Panel Member

Secretary: Paddy McCormack – Judicial Services Manager

Date: 2 March 2026

Venue: Held remotely via Microsoft Teams

## **Introduction**

1. These are the written reasons of the Regulatory Commission that considered the charge against Rodrigo Hernández Cascante (“RHC”).
2. RHC is a player for Manchester City FC (“MCFC”)
3. MCFC played Tottenham Hotspur FC in a Premier League match on 1 February 2026 (“the Match”)
4. On 2 February 2026 The FA became aware of comments made in a post-match media interview conducted by RHC following the Match.

## **The Charge**

5. By a letter dated 13 February 2026 (“the Charge Letter”), The FA charged RHC with a breach of FA Rule E3.1<sup>1</sup> (“the Charge”). It was alleged that he acted in an improper manner during a media interview after the Match by making comments that implied bias and/or questioned the integrity of a Match Official and/or Match Officials.
6. Together with the Charge Letter, The FA provided the following evidence in support of the Charge.
  - a. Witness statement of an FA Investigator – dated 13 February 2026.
  - b. Video footage of RHC’s post-match interview.
  - c. Article from The Guardian website – dated 2 February 2026
  - d. Article from The Daily Mail website – dated 1 February 2026
  - e. Article from The Manchester Evening News website – dated 2 February 2026
  - f. Request for observations letter to RHC – dated 2 February 2026
  - g. Essential Information For Players 2025-26 – Media Comments Extract
  - h. Response to observations letter from RHC – dated 10 February 2026.

## **The Response**

7. On 23 February 2026 RHC submitted a completed Disciplinary Proceedings Reply Form to The FA, admitting the Charge but not requesting an opportunity to attend a Commission for a personal hearing and agreeing that the Charge be dealt with at a paper hearing on the content of the documents served by both parties.
8. In addition to the Disciplinary Proceedings Reply Form RHC provided the following documents:
  - a. A letter of response from RHC – dated 23 February 2026
  - b. A copy of RHC’s letter of observations to The FA – dated 10 February 2026
  - c. A letter of submissions from MCFC – dated 23 February 2026.

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<sup>1</sup> The Charge Letter states the Charge relates to “FA Rule 3.1”. The Commission took this to be a typographical error and read it to mean FA Rule E3.1. The Commission took the view this had no material impact on the case.

## **The Relevant Rule**

9. 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, abuse, indecent or insulting words of behaviour.”*

## **The Hearing**

10. In advance of the hearing the Commission considered in detail all the documents provided and referred to in paragraphs 6, 7 and 8 above. The Commission watched the video clip provided of the interview given by RHC that ultimately resulted in the Charge, as well as considering The FA’s Response to Reply dated 25 February 2026. In addition, MCFC in their letter of 23 February 2026 helpfully referenced three cases and the Commission had regard to those, along with other relevant cases.

11. The following paragraphs summarise the evidence and submissions provided to 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 determining the case. For the avoidance of doubt, the Commission carefully considered all the material before it.

## **The FA’s Evidence and Submissions**

12. As set out above the Charge brought by The FA was that RHC “acted in an improper manner during a media interview after the Match by making comments that imply bias and/or question the integrity of the Match Official and/or Match Officials, contrary to FA Rule E3.1.” The specific comments made by RHC and highlighted by The FA were:

*“But it’s not today, its two, three games in a row. And I don’t know why honestly. We won too much and the people, they don’t want us to win, but the referee has to be neutral. And for me, honestly, it’s not fair, it’s not fair.”*

13. In their submissions The FA made clear that they routinely provide guidance to Participants through the ‘Essential Information for Players’ document ahead off the start of each season. The relevant version of that document for the current season contains the following guidance for players in relation to media comments:

*“All media comments and postings on social media sites such as X, Facebook, TikTok, Twitch, Snapchat and Instagram may be subject to FA’s Disciplinary Jurisdiction.*

*DO NOT:*

- *Imply bias or attack the integrity of the Match Officials (including the VAR Officials)”*

14. The FA’s submission was that players are put on notice as to the type of media comments which can lead to a disciplinary charge and, given the clear guidance and his experience

as a player, RHC ought to have been aware that the comments he made were not permissible under The FA Rules.

15. Further, The FA submitted that the remarks by RHC went beyond criticism of the individual decisions and instead conveyed an implication that the match officials were not acting neutrally and a suggestion that decisions were influenced by external or improper considerations, rather than honest error or mistake.

### **RHC's Evidence and Submissions**

16. As set out above, in addition to admitting the Charge, RHC provided two letters from himself as well as a letter from MCFC.
17. By his letter of 10 February 2026 RHC responded to the request for observations made by the FA Investigator in his letter of 2 February 2026.
18. In the letter of 10 February 2026 RHC started by making clear his appreciation for the role that referees play in the game and the difficult job that they have and he highlighted the fact that in the post-match interview he made clear the respect he has for their job.
19. RHC goes on to submit that "it is therefore deeply unfortunate that my words have been misunderstood and misinterpreted by some media organisations." He went on to provide his view on what he said in the post-match interview:

*To be clear, this is what I meant by these sentiments:*

***"But it's not today, it's two, three games in a row. And I don't know why honestly."***

*We have experienced some other occasions in our recent matches where I believe decisions have been incorrect. For example, the bad foul by Diogo Dalot on Doku in our match at Manchester United which should have been a red card, and Semenyo's disallowed goal at Newcastle in the Carabao Cup. I don't have an explanation as to why the mistakes have happened.*

***"We won too much and the people, they don't want us to win, but the referee has to be neutral."***

*There are, of course, more people who don't support Man City than do. Naturally, supporters of other clubs who have witnessed our success in recent years will not want to see that success continue. That thought process doesn't apply to referees, who are professionally neutral in performing their roles. I did not say that referees are not neutral (as the media articles you have sent to me wrongly suggest). I meant that this can be ruled out as an explanation as to why referee mistakes have happened recently.*

***"And for me, honestly, it's not fair, it's not fair."***

*It doesn't feel fair when the ultimate result of a match is influenced by an incorrect decision rather than just the performance of the team.*

20. In his second letter of 23 February 2026 RHC confirmed that he admitted the Charge and stated:

*I would like to apologise again for the comments I made during my post-match interview following the fixture against Tottenham Hotspur on 1 February 2026. I fully accept that my words, as expressed, were inappropriate and fell below the standard expected of me as a professional player.*

21. He goes on to state:

*I wish to make clear that I did not intend to imply bias or question the integrity of the match officials. I have always had, and continue to have, great respect for referees and the difficult job they undertake in a fast-moving and highly pressured environment. My comments were made in a moment of frustration after a disappointing result. Upon reflection, I recognise that the words I used were poorly chosen and capable of being interpreted in a way that I did not intend.*

22. In their letter of 23 February 2026 MCFC wrote in support of RHC and provided submissions on mitigation and in relation to sanction. Their submissions on mitigation can be summarised as follows:

- a. RHC admitted the Charge promptly and at the first opportunity.
- b. RHC has co-operated fully with The FA's investigation throughout.
- c. RHC has requested a paper determination to avoid the need for a hearing.
- d. RHC has apologised for his comments.
- e. RHC has accepted that his words were "poorly chosen"
- f. RHC has understood the need for greater care in post-match interviews.
- g. The comments were brief and spontaneous in nature and came immediately at the end of the match.
- h. There was no malice or intent to cause offence.
- i. English is not RHC's first language.
- j. RHC did not intend to imply bias or impugn the integrity of the match officials.
- k. RHC has a clean disciplinary record in respect of misconduct matters.

23. MCFC then make submissions in relation to sanction.

### **The Commission's Decision**

24. In light of RHC admitting the Charge, it fell to the Commission to consider the appropriate sanction to be applied.
25. The FA's written submissions on sanction invite the Commission to impose a financial penalty commensurate with RHC's relevant income.
26. In their submissions on sanction, MCFC state that their primary position is that a formal written warning would represent a proportionate and sufficient outcome in light of the mitigating factors that they set out. However, they go on to state that if the Commission was minded to impose a financial penalty, it should be assessed at the lower end of the applicable range.

27. MCFC also made reference to three previous cases concerning media comments said to imply bias or question the integrity of match officials. Those cases were:
- i. The FA v Frank Lampard (Everton FC), 30 May 2022
  - ii. The FA v Marco Silva (Fulham FC), 29 January 2024
  - iii. The FA v Chris Wilder (Sheffield United FC), 20 February 2024
28. MCFC's submission, in citing each of those cases, was that the Regulatory Commission has consistently imposed financial penalties rather than sporting sanctions, absent significant aggravating factors.

### **Aggravating Factors**

29. The Commission considered that there were limited aggravating factors in this case but they were pertinent. In particular, the Commission considered the following:
- i. RHC has been provided with guidance from The FA about comments in the media and so would have been fully aware of his responsibilities when conducting media interviews.
  - ii. RHC would have received media training and would have been made aware of the expectations of him during media interviews.
  - iii. RHC has a very high profile within the game generally and a senior role within MCFC. In the post-match interview he refers to himself as "one of the captains". As such he has a greater responsibility to ensure that he does not make comments which can be viewed as questioning the integrity of the match officials.
  - iv. Whilst RHC sought to explain his sentiments when making the post-match comments, in his letter of 10 February 2026 the Commission were of the view that however the comments were considered, the interview can be seen as implying bias on the part of the match officials.

### **Mitigation**

30. The Commission were in agreement that there were a number of mitigating factors in this case and felt that the following mitigation should be taken into consideration:
- i. RHC admitted the Charge at the earliest opportunity.
  - ii. RHC has apologised for the comments that he made and has accepted that his words were inappropriate.
  - iii. RHC has engaged with The FA throughout and has consciously sought to have the matter dealt with expeditiously without an in-person hearing.
  - iv. English is not RHC's first language.

- v. The comments were made immediately after the Match and were not repeated in other media interviews.
- vi. RHC has no previous disciplinary record in relation to misconduct charges generally and comments to the media in particular.

### **Sanction**

- 31. When considering sanction, the Commission were unanimous in their view that the threshold had not been met for a playing sanction to be imposed, and it was pertinent to note that The FA did not invite the Commission to consider such a sanction.
- 32. The Commission felt that the appropriate sanction should be a financial penalty, having regard to all the circumstances, including the nature of the comments, the high-profile nature of the interview and the position taken by Regulatory Commissions in similar cases.
- 33. Having considered all the circumstances, including RHC's declared income, which was provided in confidence, the Commission felt that the aggravating factors set out above increased the financial penalty to £120,000.
- 34. The Commission then took into account the mitigating factors, which have been set out above. The Commission acknowledged the submission made by The FA that in this case the maximum discount of one third would not be appropriate however, the Commission did not agree with that submission.
- 35. In this case RHC did admit the Charge at the earliest opportunity and in full. In light of the mitigating factors set out above, the Commission were of the view that a discount of one third should be applied. As a result, the Commission concluded that RHC should be issued with a fine of £80,000.
- 36. The Commission also determined that RHC should be issued with a formal written warning.
- 37. This decision is subject to the relevant Appeal Regulations.

**John Finlay (Chair)**

**Stuart Ripley**

**Francis Benali**

5 March 2026