

AN APPEAL BOARD OF THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

IN THE MATTER OF AN APPEAL

BETWEEN:

Red Star UK FC (Appellant)

-and-

Suffolk FA (Respondent)

DECISION OF THE FA APPEAL BOARD 14 April 2025

1. The Appeal Board comprised:

Roger Burden (Chair)
Christine Harrop-Griffiths
Nabila Zulfiqar

Richard Pallot, FA National Secretary, was Secretary to the Appeal Board

2. Representing the Appellant:

Alun Williams

3. Representing the Respondent:

Phillip Barber, the Respondent's Football Services Officer

4. The Appeal was held online via Microsoft Teams

5. These written reasons do not purport to refer to all points made in the course of the Appeal, however, the fact that some points are not mentioned should not imply that they were not considered. The Appeal Board carefully read, listened to, and considered, all the submissions.

Background and First Instance Decision

6. The Referee had reported that, during the game played between the Appellant and Hardwick FC on 16 February 2025, he asked one of the Appellant's players, who he had just sent off, to leave the side of the pitch and the playing area.
A person, watching the game, wearing a coat, then directed foul language towards the Referee and the Referee asked the spectator to also leave. Both refused to do so. The Referee asked for assistance from the Appellant's Club Secretary, who said he had no active role on the pitch and suggested the referee speak to the club Chair. We note the referee considered the secretary denied he was the club secretary. The Referee abandoned the match.

7. The Respondent charged the Appellant under FA Rule E20 – Failed to ensure that its players and officials do not behave in a way which is improper, offensive, violent threatening, abusive, indecent, insulting or provocative.
8. The Appellant denied the charge and requested a personal hearing.
9. The charge was found proven by a Disciplinary Commission. The Appellant was fined £90 and warned as to its future conduct.

The Appeal

10. The Appellant appealed on the ground that the Commission failed to give it a fair hearing.

The Appellant's Written Submissions to the Appeal Board

11. The Appellant said that although it had requested a personal hearing, the hearing was held by zoom and the Appellant's representatives (its Secretary and its Chair) were not given the option to appear in person.
12. The Appellant said that its Secretary had asked the Referee to speak to its female Chair as she was in charge, but, at the hearing, the Referee said that he couldn't recall being asked to speak to her.
13. A Commission member questioned the Secretary as to why he had referred the Referee to the Club Chair, who was a woman. The Appellant suggested that this line of questioning continued for some time whilst the Appellant defended having a woman as Chair of a men's team.
14. The Appellant said that, in the written reasons, the Commission had suggested that the Club Chair did not understand what was going on so was unable to help the Commission, but she had actually said that she had no idea what was going on because she couldn't hear any conversations and she had not seen the Referee show anyone a red card.
15. The Appellant's female Chair was questioned as a witness and, the Appellant suggested, had to spend most of the time answering questions and defending her position as a woman in the role of Club Chair.
16. At one point she was asked, as she was female, if she was capable of breaking up a punch-up on the pitch. She explained that she was good at calming situations and had experience of handling confrontation.
17. The Appellant made its position clear regarding its disgust at the way the Commission treated its female Chair, who has since stepped aside from her duties.
18. The Appellant stated that no woman, whether or not involved in the women's game or the men's game, should have to explain her actions and her capability to run a football club purely because of her sex.

19. The Appellant requested leave to present new evidence but it consisted of the Commission's written reasons, and the Appellant's disagreement with the reasons.

The Respondent's Written Response to the Appeal

20. The Respondent's initial response simply set out the procedure which the Commission had adopted for this case.
21. The Respondent then submitted a more detailed response. This included responses from individual members of the Commission, one of which was from Terry Rackley who said that he dismissed and did not accept Mr Williams' answer that he was only there "to run the line" and when the incident escalated, he stated that he didn't want to get involved and insisted that the Referee speak to the nearby Chairwoman who deals with the running of the Club.
22. Mr Rackley went on to describe the few questions that he put to the Chair of the Club. One was to ask her if it was Club policy to ask the lady Chairperson to intervene when tempers are rising, if there is ill feeling and a possible volatile atmosphere to put yourself in harm's way?
23. He said that he is in the police and that he would challenge anyone regarding sexism etc but the hearing was conducted in a proper, respectful manner.
24. Commission member Darren Haynes said that the Chair of Red Star was a lady and they had treated her the same as any other witness. She said that she was close to the players involved but she did not know what was going on.
25. Two statements from David Porter, the Commission Chair. In the first he summarised the hearing, saying that the Referee's account was credible and that Helen Blizzard did not understand what was going on so was unable to help with further information.

In the second statement he said that he asked the Secretary if he had a fair hearing and he replied "yes". Mr Porter said that he had no idea what the Appellant was talking about with regard to the treatment of witnesses.

Papers of First Instance

26. These papers included the Referee's report. In addition, the Referee said that he knew that Mr Williams was the Club Secretary and asked him for help in removing the two people that had been sent from the playing area. The Referee said that Mr Williams denied being the Secretary but the Referee told Mr Williams that it was Mr Williams that was down as the home contact.
27. The Referee said that when he was walking back to the changing rooms, the player wearing the red shirt was walking back with the Red Star captain and the Referee asked the player to stop talking to him and to leave him alone or he would contact the Police for harassment. Both the player and the captain said "go on then".

28. There is a note from Alun Williams in which he said that the Referee was wholly responsible for the abandonment of the match.
29. Helen Blizzard, the Appellant's Club Chair, said that she first became aware of an issue when a player walked off the pitch and put his jacket on. She then saw the Referee talking to one of the subs. She heard the sub say that the Referee needed to send him off. Ms Blizzard said that she had no idea what was going on and had no idea why the game was abandoned.

The Commission's Written Reasons

30. The reasons stated that the Referee's account was credible.
31. The Club Chair did not understand what was going on so was unable to help with much further information about what happened.
32. The Club Secretary had refused to admit that he was the Secretary. He also denied knowing that a player sent off had to leave the pitch, but under questioning he admitted that he did know it.
33. The Commission was unanimous in finding the case proven.

The Appellant's Oral Submissions

34. Mr Williams said that he was happy to rely on his written submissions, particularly regarding the unfair treatment of the Club's female Chair.
35. He said that there was confusion regarding the player leaving the pitch as the changing rooms were locked and his player stood next to another pitch but the Referee was not happy with that.
36. He told us that if the Referee had asked the Club Chair to deal with the matter, she would have resolved it. He said that the Referee did not deny being asked to speak to the Chair but that he had simply told the Commission that he could not recall being asked.

The Respondent's Oral Submissions

37. Mr Barber said that he had been Secretary to the Commission and had made some notes at the time. He said that there were some very experienced members on the Commission.
38. He confirmed that the Referee had been asked if he recalled being asked by Mr Williams to refer to the Club Chair and that the Referee had replied "no".
39. He accepted that the question to the Club Chair regarding her ability to try to sort out a confrontation was an inappropriate one to ask her.
40. Mr Barber confirmed that the Club Chair had not said that she didn't understand what was going on. This was not correctly phrased in the written decision.

Final Submissions

41. Mr Barber told us that he was content with what had been said and had no need to make a final submission.
42. Mr Williams stressed that the Commission had spent at least 5 minutes asking why a lady was there and suggesting that she wouldn't be able to resolve any confrontations between players.
43. The Club Chair had made it clear that, as a woman, she felt that she would be better at it than a male.
44. The Club had asked the Respondent for a video or transcript of the hearing, as it felt that it would support its case, but neither was available.

The Appeal Board's Deliberations and Decisions

45. We noted that the Referee had not denied being asked to refer the dispute to the Club Chair. The Commission had not challenged this despite the fact Mr Williams had said that he did ask the Referee to refer to the Chair and, as she explained to the Commission, with her status and experience, she could quite probably have resolved the matter.
46. The Club Chair had said that she had no idea what was really going on and explained the reasons why. As she was close to the events, her evidence was likely to be helpful but the Commission chose not to ask her to help them, and, incorrectly, stated that she did not understand what was going on.
47. We noted that, although Mr Rackley had dismissed, and did not accept, Mr Willimas evidence regarding the fact that it was the Chairwoman that dealt with the running of the Club, Mr Rackley then went on to put a number of questions to the female Chair regarding her competence to intervene when tempers were rising.
48. We agreed that the question regarding the female Chair's ability to help resolve a confrontation between players, was inappropriate and not one that would have been asked of a male.
49. We were concerned that the Commission's attitude and questioning towards the Club's female Chair appeared to show bias. This leads to a perception of a lack of impartiality, putting into question the fairness of the proceedings.
50. The Appeal Board allowed the Appeal on the grounds that the Commission failed to give the Appellant a fair hearing.
51. In order to give effect to this decision, the Appeal Board, in accordance with Regulation 21 of the Non-Fast Track Appeal Regulations, order the following
 - The Commission's decision is overturned. The sanction is removed, and the decision of the first instance Commission is expunged.

The Appeal Board's decision is final and binding on all parties.

Roger Burden (Chair)
Christine Harrop-Griffiths
Nabila Zulfiqar

17 April 2026