IN THE MATTER OF A REGULATORY COMMISSION DECISION
BETWEEN

THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

and

ALVARO ARBELOA

WRITTEN REASONS FOR THE DECISION OF THE COMMISSION

Introduction

1. The regulatory commission (**"the Commission"**) was appointed to consider the disciplinary case taken by the Football Association (**"the FA"**) against Alvaro Arbeloa (**"AA"**). AA is employed by Fulham FC as the manager. He was, at the relevant time, a participant under The FA's Disciplinary Regulations. There is a single charge of misconduct by AA, namely an alleged breach of FA Rule E3 on 20 September 2026.

2. The members of the Commission were Ruth Kirby KC (chair), Faye White and Ken Brown. No objection was raised to the composition of the Commission.

3. The Secretary of the Commission was Conrad Gibbons to whom we are grateful for all his efficiency and assistance.

4. AA admitted the charge and requested a paper hearing to deal with sanction. The hearing was dealt with by way of MS Teams on 8 October 2026. The Commission read submissions on behalf of each of the parties.

5. The Commission had before it a bundle which included:

   a. the charge letter dated 28 September 2026;
   b. a statement from the FA integrity investigator with exhibits;
   c. a response on behalf of AA submitted by Fulham FC by letter dated 24 September 2026; and

d. a further response from AA submitted by Fulham FC on his behalf dated 1 October 2026 which includes submissions on sanction and mitigation; and
e. a response from the FA to AA's submissions on sanction dated 5 October 2026.

6. The FA's allegation against AA is set out in the 28 September 2026 charge letter and relates to an interview given by AA to Sky Sports News following a match between Fulham FC and Manchester United on 20 September 2026.

7. AA was charged with misconduct contrary to FA Rule E3. Rule E3 provides:

"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 communication of, violent conduct, serious foul play, threatening, abusive, indecent or insulting words or behaviour"

8. Also of relevance is that the FA Essential Information for all Managers, Owners and Directors provides guidance to senior Participants which includes specific guidance on media comments and social media. Under the heading "what happens if I make comments about the match officials in my pre or post-match press conference?" The answer is "Managers should be aware that The FA sets standards in relation to public comments made by Participants. This means that the following types of public comments by Managers, Players or Club Officials may lead to disciplinary charges". The types of comments about match officials that might lead to disciplinary action are set out and include:

a. Implication of bias: any comment which implies or alleges bias on the part of a Match Official; and

b. questioning integrity: any comment that questions the integrity of a Match Official.

9. The specific charge against AA is:
It is alleged that during a media interview following [the fixture on 20 September 2026], you acted in an improper manner by implying bias and/or questioning the integrity of a Match Official(s) contrary to FA Rule E3.1:

The specific comments made were set out in the charge as being:

"Yes, I think all fouls for them. And you can see before they score, the foul against Maguire; it's a guy that is 100 kilos, so, yeah. Every decision was for them, and I knew, I knew after the game against Man City that they don't let Manchester United lose here. And, yeah, I think we deserved a little bit more"

10. By letter dated 1 October 2026, sent on behalf of AA and signed by him, he admitted the charge. AA requested a paper hearing.

The facts surrounding the charge

11. As manager of Fulham FC, AA was at all relevant times a Participant. Following the game with Manchester United, he participated in an interview with Sky Sports where the above words were spoken. A number of digital news articles referred to AA's comments.

DISCUSSION

12. We considered the facts of the case as set out above and the written material supplied by both parties. We also had the benefit of written submissions on sanction filed on behalf of each of the parties. We also watched the interview exhibited to the FA integrity investigator's statement and read the Yahoo and Independent news articles.

13. We noted the adverse effect on the integrity of football of Participants, particularly senior Participants such as AA, suggesting that match officials are biased. The effect of a manager saying this on live television is particularly unhelpful and damaging to the integrity of the game.

14. We considered relevant previous cases to which we were referred to by both parties including The FA v Klopp, The FA v Tuchel, The FA v Marco Silva, The FA v Igor Tudor and Wilfried Zaha v The FA.

15. On behalf of AA and having admitted the charge, Fulham FC set out their suggested mitigating factors and suggested that the appropriate sanction was advice only to AA and no financial penalty or playing sanction but, if there were a financial penalty, it should be limited to £5,000 and should, in any event, be suspended. The mitigating factors alluded to by Fulham were:

a. AA's previously good disciplinary record thus far with the FA;
b. AA's early admission and co-operation with the FA investigation;
c. AA's early remorse very soon after the offence and since (and the fact that he did not repeat the offence in the post-match press conference);
d. AA's imperfect command of English; and

e. A lack of malice on AA's part in his post-match interview comments.

16. On behalf of the FA, all of the above factors are accepted as being present and, for the most part, accepted in principle as being mitigation. However, overall, the FA submits that the weight to be attributed to those factors is limited. They emphasise that the short time that AA has been involved in the Premier League means that there is limited weight to be applied to his good disciplinary record; and that, given the strength of the evidence against him, he had little option on the evidence but to admit the charge. Although they accept that AA did show remorse and did not repeat the comments at the Press Conference following the game, they do not accept that not repeating the allegations amounts to mitigation on the basis that he would have faced further charges, had he repeated his behaviour. The FA submits that what AA was saying, regardless of the fact that English is not his first language, was clear – hence the headlines on which the FA relied in support of its charge. The FA submits that a financial penalty would be appropriate and says there is no clear and compelling reason on which to base a suspension of that penalty.

17. We considered the points in mitigation raised by, and on behalf of, AA. We acknowledged that English was not his first language but considered that his command of English was good enough for all to understand what he meant when he spoke about the match officials. There was no doubt in what he said as to what he was saying about those officials and about their motivation. He linked the decisions in the game that had just finished to the decision that had gone against Manchester United when playing Manchester City. Everyone watching the interview would have understood the meaning of what AA was saying when he said "I knew after the game against Man City that they don't let Manchester United lose here". We felt that those words suggested, not only that there was bias on the part of the match officials throughout the game on repeated occasions, but also that there may even have been an element of pre-meditation by them and/or others to try to make up for an error in a different match.

18. We accepted the point made that AA was new to the Premier League and that he lacked familiarity with the different rules that apply here on adverse commentary about match officials by Participants compared with rules in other leagues - like La Liga - where AA previously coached. However, we were of the view that it was for AA, entering a new League and a Premier League club, the onus was on him to ensure that he was familiar with the main rules which bind managers in this league.

19. It was clear to us that AA did regret what he had said very soon after he said it. The Sky Sports news article records that, at the Press Conference, AA "appeared to row back on his comments a little bit – but still said that he 'was not really happy'… 'My English is not so good', he said.

'Maybe I explain myself so bad and I prefer not to say anything about the referees because you never know". He did not answer direct questions about the refereeing at that stage which we felt confirmed his remorse about what he had said immediately after the game. His remorse was also evident in the letter in response to the first FA letter sent to him and in his response to the charge.

20. We were impressed with AA's early admission, though we accept the point that the evidence was objectively compelling and very clear as to what AA had said and what he meant by what he said.

21. We noted that AA was likely to have been distressed by being charged with a disciplinary charge so early in his career in English football.

22. We agreed that the integrity of the game is adversely affected by Participants speaking out in this way in the media. We agreed that sanctions needed to take this into account.

23. We did not consider that the Klopp case was particularly similar to this case on its facts or helpful to us in terms of the sanction. We considered that the facts of this case were quite different and we reminded ourselves that the decision we had to make about the sanction depended on all of the facts of this case. We were of the view that the comments made by AA were inappropriate and sufficiently serious to warrant a financial penalty. The comments were harmful to football. We did not feel that advice alone marked the seriousness of AA's behaviour. Nor did we feel that, as a first offence, there was cause to impose a sporting sanction.

CONCLUSION AND SANCTION

24. We considered that AA should be warned about his future conduct and encouraged to avoid repeating this kind of behaviour in future. In his position as a Premier League manager, he will be seen by large numbers of people and he needs to be careful and to think about his duties under the rules and his responsibility to football before commenting to journalists on match officials' performance.

25. We considered that a starting point for sanction was a financial penalty commensurate with the need to mark the seriousness of the behaviour but taking account of the mitigation set out above. We considered that the appropriate penalty was £25,000. This took account of each of the mitigating factors set out in our discussion.

26. We did consider whether there was any clear and compelling reason to suspend the financial penalty. We could not identify any such reason.

27. We therefore imposed the following sanction:
    (a) A warning as to future conduct; and
    (b) A fine of £25,000.

Ruth Kirby KC (Chair)
Faye White
Ken Brown

9 October 2026