RFU

DISCIPLINARY HEARING

At: Holiday Inn, Bloomsbury

On: Monday 14 April 2008

JUDGMENT.

Player: Lee Best Club: London Welsh RFC

Match: Sedgley Park v London Welsh

Venue: Sedgley Park **Date of match:** 29th March 2008

Panel: Jeff Blackett (Chairman), Jeremy Summers and Peter Budge

Secretary: Liam McTiernan

Attending: The Player.

Martin Johns – London Welsh Director of Rugby

Introduction

1. The Player was sent from the field of play for striking an opponent contrary to Law 10(4)(a). He accepted that his actions merited the award of a red card and did not dispute any of the referee's report.

The Facts

2. The Referee's report stated:

"The Sedgley Park player chased a box kick which he attempted to catch in the air. The London Welsh full back did the same. Both players were fully committed to the ball. The Sedgley player won the jump as he collected the ball in the air he knocked it on whilst landing. The ball went forward and I whistled and signalled for a scrum to London Welsh as the ball also went into touch. At this point the London Welsh player pushed the Sedley Park player in an unnecessary manner and his gesture was returned. At this point I saw the London Welsh full back punch the Sedgley Park player in the face. This caused a general flare up where many players from either team became involved. I sent off the London Welsh full back for punching."

3. The panel viewed the video of the incident which corroborated the Referee's report. After the players came into contact, the Player threw his opponent to the ground. That caused a confrontation in which it appeared that blows were exchanged. They were all ineffective and neither player was hurt but the Referee saw one punch

from the Player for which he correctly awarded a red card. The incident caused a mass confrontation between several players from both sides which consisted mainly of pushing and grappling with each other.

4. The Player apologised for being sent off and acknowledged that he had acted inappropriately and deserved to be sent from the field of play. He said that he had received a bang to the head earlier on in the game and thought this may have caused him to react more angrily than he might normally. He said, without making any excuses, that there was an exchange of blows in the incident but it was his that caught the attention of the Referee. London Welsh convened a disciplinary hearing the day after the game and suspended the Player for two weeks, the suspension commencing on 30 March 2008.

Mitigation

5. The Player is 29 years old and has been playing first class and professional rugby for 12 years. He has represented Richmond, Bristol, Bath and Worcester and is currently on loan from Worcester with London Welsh. He has never been sent off nor cited and has only one Yellow Card recorded against his name for a technical offence. He and his opponent had shaken hands after the game and he is genuinely contrite.

Sanction

- 6. The panel undertook an assessment of the seriousness of the player's conduct. This was a very minor incident which exploded into a mass brawl, that being the only aggravating feature of the offending. Although the punch was deliberate it was part of a minor altercation between two players. It did not hurt or cause any injury and was clearly at the LOWER END of seriousness.
- 7. The LOWER END entry point for striking is 2 weeks suspension. The panel concluded that there were no aggravating features and there were significant mitigating factors. First he acknowledged culpability at an early stage and did not seek to shift any blame to his opponent. The Player has an exceptionally good character and disciplinary record and his conduct prior to and at the hearing was exemplary and his remorse was genuine. There is no doubt that the Player deserved full credit for these matters. In all the circumstances, therefore, the panel concluded that the appropriate sanction was suspension for one week. The Player is, therefore, suspended for one week from 30 March (the date when suspended by his club) to 6 April 2008. He has already served that suspension and may play again with immediate effect.
- 8. The panel commended London Welsh for its swift action in suspending the Player the day following the incident.

Costs

9. Costs of £200.00 are awarded against the Player/club.

Right of Appeal

10. The Player is reminded of his right of appeal against this decision.

Signed: Jeff Blackett Date: 14 April 2008

Chairman