### **RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION**

## **DISCIPLINARY HEARING**

**At:** Holiday Inn, Bloomsbury

On: Tuesday 19 December 2007

## JUDGMENT.

Player: Brad Mockford Club: London Irish RFC

**Match:** London Wasps A v London Irish A

**Venue:** Wasps **Date of match:** 11<sup>th</sup> December 2007

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

**Secretary:** Liam McTiernan

**Attending:** The Player.

Neil Hatley

### **Charge and Plea**

The Player pleaded guilty to striking an opponent contrary to Law 10(4)(a).

#### **The Facts**

The Player was ordered off (Red Card) in the 15<sup>th</sup> minute of the second half of the 'A' match between London Wasps and London Irish. The referee's report read: "...a ruck/maul formed approximately on the Wasps ten metre line. As the ball was being moved away from the ruck/maul, I saw a London Irish player who was on his knees, bent over a London Wasps player who was on the ground. I then saw the same London Irish player (No 5) strike the London Wasp player in the face with his fist at least twice. I saw the fist make contact with the face of the London Wasp player. I blew my whistle and issued the player a red card. The London Wasps player did not require medical treatment."

The video of the incident clearly supported the Referee's report which was not disputed by the Player. The view of the incident showed two punches, although the second one appeared to be more of a push away than a full blown punch.

The Player said that he had been pulled back by a London Wasps player who put his arm across the top of his body. He has only just returned from injury and has also suffered a serious neck injury in the past. He reacted instinctively. He was immediately contrite and apologised to the victim player straight after the match.

#### **Mitigation**

Mr Hatley said that this match was particularly ill tempered with a lot of niggle. The referee has temporarily suspended a player from each side earlier in the game and had warned both captains that any further incidents would lead to more severe action. Following that warning he had sent off a Wasps player (Hoadley). The Player was reacted instinctively and was genuinely sorry for his lack of self control.

Mr Hatley said that London Irish had convened a disciplinary hearing two days after the incident and had suspended the Player for two weeks. As a result he had not been selected for London Irish in the Heineken Cup match the following weekend – and given the number of injuries in the club he would have played in that game. This would have been his first appearance in the 1<sup>st</sup> XV and his suspension was a bitter blow to a young academy player trying to break into senior rugby. Aged 24, he will not be able to play in the academy side next season so he has to impress the Club management if he is to obtain a full time contract next season.

#### **Sanction**

The panel undertook an assessment of the seriousness of the player's conduct. It decided that the offending was deliberate as the Player had admitted that he intended to strike the opposition player. It also assessed that the use of a fist in this way is serious because of the potential for injury. However the panel accepted that this was an ill tempered game with a significant amount of poor discipline from both teams and the Player's reaction was set against that context. Neither of the two strikes were very hard because there was absolutely no effect on the victim. There was no reaction from other players and no effect on the Game, apart from London Irish having to play on with only fourteen men. Although deliberate offending often pushes the assessment of seriousness towards the mid range or top end, in this case the other factors described persuaded the panel to assess this to be the least serious type of offending and categorised it as being at the LOWER END of seriousness.

The LOWER END entry point for striking is 2 weeks suspension. The panel considered whether there were any aggravating factors. Although the Player was suspended for 3 weeks for striking an opponent with his fist in April 2007 he could not be described as a persistent offender within the meaning of the Regulations. Nevertheless this is the second similar offence in a relatively short time and the Player must be careful in future – he promised the panel that he had learned his lesson. The panel concluded that there were no aggravating features. The panel then considered mitigating factors. First he acknowledged culpability at an early stage but he cannot claim to have a good record because he was suspended for stamping in 2006. His conduct prior to and at the hearing was exemplary and his remorse was genuine. In all the circumstances the panel concluded that there was insufficient mitigation to reduce the sanction from the entry point. He is, therefore, suspended for two weeks from 13 December to 26 December 2007. He may play again on 27 December 2007.

The panel commended London Irish for its swift action in suspending the Player as soon as the matter was brought to their attention.

# **Costs**

Costs of £250.00 are awarded against the Player/club.

# **Right of Appeal**

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

Signed: Jeff Blackett Date: 19 December 2007

Chairman