

the side of Crockett's head. Crockett fell to the floor as a number of Bath and Saracens players joined an erupting fracas between both sides. The Player also started to fall forward but was held up by one of his own players. The fracas broke up after about 15 seconds and the Player was bleeding profusely from a gash above his eye (which subsequently required 5 sutures). Crockett, who had been trapped on the ground during the fracas stood up but then crumbled back onto the floor. He received attention from a physiotherapist and continued to play without any adverse effects. Having consulted with the assistant referee, the referee issued a yellow card to the Player who was in the process of leaving the field with a blood injury.

4. There were two other angles, however, which showed that the Player did not strike Crockett with any force. The point of contact was the upper arm with the area at the top of the neck and side of the head, with the rest of his arm angled downwards across Crockett's chest. His fist did not come into contact with Crockett at all. The action was more one of forcibly pulling Crockett out of the way, rather than striking with a fist, and Crockett fell over because of the momentum of the Player coming into contact rather than from the force of a punch. One angle showed that Marshall had also fallen to the floor and, while in close proximity to Crockett he used his left arm to push himself back upwards while his right arm cocked back and punched forward. It appears from this angle that Marshall punched Crockett on the forehead with some force and Crockett's hand immediately went up to the point of contact. It was this blow which caused Crockett to fall over again rather than anything done to him by the Player.

5. The Player said that he approached the breakdown because he had seen Marshall trampling on an opposition player and Crockett approaching in a manner which suggested he was going to strike Marshall. He therefore went towards the breakdown to protect Marshall by pulling Crockett away. He accepts that in doing so he struck Crockett although without any force. After the fracas erupted he felt a strong punch just above the eye from one of the four or so Bath players who were involved and this blow caused a split from which poured a lot of blood.

Submission as to the citing complaint

6. Mr Tulley submitted that the Player admitted the offence on the basis that his upper arm did strike the side of Crockett's head. The Player should not have got involved, but left matters to the referee and he acknowledges that he acted inappropriate. He also accepted that it was entirely appropriate that he should be temporarily suspended for taking action which effectively caused the ensuing fracas. However, Mr Tulley submitted that the yellow card was sufficient sanction in this case.

Decision

7. RFU Disciplinary Regulations Appendix 7 paragraph 10 state that where an offence has been detected by Match Officials, and the player is not sent off, a citing complaint shall only be upheld if the disciplinary panel is satisfied that the referee was wrong in not awarding a red card. The disciplinary panel therefore considered whether the referee was wrong in this case in not awarding a red card.

8. The referee was well positioned to observe what occurred at the beginning of the fracas. Several offences had been committed in the lead up to the incident and the referee blew his whistle to stop play and award a penalty. At that stage Crockett pushed Marshall and the Player struck Crockett. The referee was well placed to see that contact was light and that there was no punch. After that a number of players from each side joined the fracas and it was difficult to establish exactly what happened, although clearly after the fracas calmed down it was obvious that the Player had been punched hard above the eye because he was the only person with visible signs of injury. In that context the referee clearly decided to suspend the Player temporarily as he could be identified as the person who had effectively caused the eruption. Given the fact that the strike was fairly innocuous, it was not malicious and it caused no injury the panel could not determine that the referee was wrong in not awarding a red card. In fact the panel went further and decided that in their opinion the referee's decision was absolutely correct. **Accordingly the citing complaint is dismissed, the Player is free to play with immediate effect and there is no order for costs.** The Yellow Card will remain on the Player's record

9. The panel also noted that Justin Marshall was fortunate not to have been cited for striking an opponent and that the Bath player who punched the Player was fortunate that he could not be identified and cited.

Signed: **Jeff Blackett**
Chairman

Date: **24 March 2009**