

**RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION**  
**LV CUP**

**DISCIPLINARY HEARING**

**At:** Office of the Judge Advocate General, 81 Chancery Lane, London

**On:** Wednesday 25 November 2009

**JUDGMENT.**

**Coach:** Richard Cockerill                      **Club:** Leicester Tigers

**Match:** Leicester Tigers v Newport Dragons

**Venue:** Welford Road                      **Date of match:** 14<sup>th</sup> November 2009

**Panel:** HHJ Jeff Blackett (Chairman), Michael White, Philip Evans

**Secretary:** Bruce Reece-Russel

**Attending:** The Coach.  
Simon Cohen – Team Manager, Leicester Tigers  
Peter Wheeler – CEO Leicester Tigers

1. Mr Cockerill was reported for two counts of verbal abuse of match officials during the half time interval of the LV Cup match, Leicester v Newport on 14 November 2009. He admitted both charges.

**The Facts**

2. The match referee on the day was Tim Wigglesworth and he was assisted by Rob Debney (reserve referee) and Robin Goodliffe (assistant referee). The complaints from these two officials were:

Rob Debney. After 36 minutes, Richard Cockerill came storming in the Technical area to disagree with one of the [referee's] decisions and then to roundly slag him and the rest of the ERU. Examples include: "this bloke is f\*\*\*ing s\*\*t", "you are all a bunch of useless c\*\*\*s, what the f\*\*k do you do all week" and "I'm going to slag this c\*\*t off to every f\*\*\*ing newspaper going, you watch me."

Robin Goodliffe. I had to leave the dressing room towards the end of the half time period to look for the Radio Tech as he was needed to reconnect Tim's radio for the second half. I was met by Richard Cockerill who, in front of the Leicester replacement players called me a t\*\*t for allowing a Dragons try just before half time. I asked him who he was talking to and he said "You, all three of you are t\*\*ts." He then walked away. As we left the pitch at the end of the

game, Cockerill said (referring to Tim), “He’s the worst we’ve had this season. It’s a mickey mouse competition with mickey mouse refereeing.” I walked away and off the pitch.

3. Mr Cockerill did not deny either of these reports and confirmed that he made the statements alleged. He said that there were two scrums at the end of the first half where the referee had made two wrong decisions such that Leicester were denied a point scoring opportunity from the first and Newport scored from the second. At the second the Leicester scrum half was illegally pulled back by the Newport scrum half. He was very frustrated and wished to convey a message about refereeing the scrum to the match officials. Unfortunately there is no facility in the LV Cup (as there is in the Guinness Premiership and Heineken Cup) to pass written cards to match officials at half time, so he decided to give an oral report. He went to the technical zone to talk to Rob Debney and allowed his frustration to get the better of him. He was not aggressive or threatening, but he accepts that he was offensive. He then went into the dressing room to talk to the players and when he came out he met Robin Goodliffe by chance. He spoke to him about what had occurred and Mr Goodliffe told him that he had seen the pull back and had informed the referee by radio but no action was taken. Mr Cockerill, still frustrated, then made the statements complained of.

### **Mitigation**

4. Mr Cohen said that he did not seek to justify Mr Cockerill’s behaviour in any way but wished to set the matter into context by way of mitigation. The club has a good relationship generally with match officials and Rob Debney in particular often uses their facilities with their encouragement and blessing. Indeed the club’s view is that Mr Debney and Mr Goodliffe’s officiating on this particular date was good. The club produces a written feedback report on the referee after each game for the referee department and then has an open and robust discussion about it. On this occasion there was agreement that the two scrums just before half time had not been refereed well.

5. Mr Cockerill is responsible for this good relationship with the referees and has maintained good working relations with them. He has an excellent disciplinary record – having never been cited or sent from the field of play during his playing career and never committed any misconduct since becoming a coach five years ago. However, he is very passionate about the game at all levels – he also trains mini and midi teams on Sundays - but on this occasion he allowed his emotions to get the better of him. However, he did not seek out the referee and the second encounter was a chance meeting.

6. Mr Cohen also stated that Mr Cockerill admitted these offences at the earliest opportunity, he has personally apologised to both match officials and he made a public apology in the local press on the day of the hearing. He has a very responsible position in the club and has imbued the players with a strong sense of discipline. This incident was entirely out of character. Mr Wheeler said that the club takes disciplinary matters very seriously and acknowledged that this sort of offending could

damage their image. He also reiterated the fact that Mr Cockerill had an impeccable disciplinary record.

7. Mr Cockerill apologised to the panel and acknowledged that he had acted entirely inappropriately. He made no excuses and said that his behaviour was unacceptable. He said that he was severely embarrassed by his failure to maintain control, more so because he insisted that his players maintain high standards of discipline. He said that both match officials accepted his apology with good grace and he accepts that it was entirely appropriate for them to complain.

### Sanction

8. The panel undertook an assessment of the seriousness of Mr Cockerill's conduct. Although he did not commit these offences on the field of play, the panel was guided by the sanctioning table for foul play as the incidents were so closely connected in time and place with the match. Rather than deal with the two incidents separately, the panel decided to apply one sanction to reflect the totality of the offending. In assessing the seriousness the panel took account of the following factors:

- a. He spoke and used the language alleged deliberately, but he acted spontaneously when feeling very frustrated;
- b. He did not seek out the referee to abuse him, and his intention on the first occasion was to bring his frustration to the attention of the match officials;
- c. Had he used more temperate language and not been so overtly critical there would have been no complaint;
- d. He was not physically aggressive or threatening

In those circumstances the panel decided that this was at the lower end of the scale of seriousness.

9. The LE entry point for verbal abuse of a match official is 6 weeks suspension. The panel considered that there should be one sanction but it should reflect the aggravating feature that the first abusive incident was followed by another a few minutes later. The panel noted that all of the normal mitigating features listed in RFU Regulation 8.2.8 were present – he had an exceptional record, is genuinely contrite and unlikely to make this sort of mistake again. Although the panel had sympathy for Mr Cockerill as an individual, and it acknowledged that he had done everything possible to make amends, a sanction must reflect the Game's view that any form of abuse of match officials by players and coaches is unacceptable. Mr Cockerill is in a position of authority in his club, is a role model for aspiring players and coaches and is a highly respected figure in the game in England. The panel wishes to send out a strong message that this sort of behaviour will not be tolerated. **In those circumstances the panel decided that Mr Cockerill should be suspended from match day coaching as described in paragraph 10 below for four weeks from 25 November – 22 December 2009 and fined £2000.**

10. The terms of the suspension are that Mr Cockerill must have:

- No direct or indirect contact with his team on match days;
- No direct or indirect contact with any match official on match days; and
- No involvement with mini or midi rugby for the duration of the suspension.

#### **Costs**

11. Standard costs of £250.00 are awarded.

#### **Right of Appeal**

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

Signed: ***Jeff Blackett***  
***Chairman***

Date: **25 November 2009**