

## **RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION**

### **DISCIPLINARY HEARING**

**At:** Epsom Downs Race Course

**On:** Tuesday 15 March 2011

### **JUDGMENT**

**Player:** Richard Haughton

**Club:** London Wasps

**Match:** London Wasps v Sale Sharks

**Venue:** Adams Park

**Match Date:** 6 March 2011

**Panel:** Jeff Blackett (acting as a lone Judicial Officer)

**Secretary:** Liam McTiernan

**Attending:** The Player  
Malcolm Sinclair (London Wasps)

### **Charge and Plea**

1. The Player admitted that he had dangerously tackled an opponent contrary to Law 10(4)(j).

### **The Citing Complaint**

2. The citing report stated: *“Sale wins the ball at a scrum in centre-field, 5m from the Wasps goal line. Sale No.8 picks up at the base and runs to the right supported by Sale No.9 (Will Cliff). As Sale No.8 is tackled he passes the ball to Sale No.9 who is confronted by Wasps No.15 (Richard Haughton). It can be seen that Wasps No.15 stoops low and holds Sale No.9 by his legs to effect the tackle. Wasps No.15 can then be seen to straighten his legs and body and lift Sale No.9 bodily off the ground. The momentum of the tackle causes an up and over movement ending with the body of Sale No.9 being almost vertically upside down. As Sale No.9’s head is downward and his legs are in the air he takes defensive action by positioning his arms towards the ground in an attempt to break his fall. It can be seen from the video that Wasps No.15 still has a grip on the body of Sale No.9 but is not capable of complying with his duty of care to bring the player safely to*

*ground. As balance is finally lost Sale No.9 hits the ground landing on his head/neck/upper back area and Wasps' No.15 body lands in extremely close proximity to Sale No.9's head. Sale No.9 recovers quickly and appears to appeal to the referee against the actions of Wasps No.15 but play is allowed to continue and Wasps carry the ball to the opposite end of the field. No physical injury appeared to have been caused to Sale No.9 at the time."*

3. None of the match officials saw the incident clearly and no action was taken.
4. The DVD footage corroborated the citing report. The Player said that Sale No.9 wrong footed him as he went to tackle, and he thought that he was right next to the goal line. He attempted to tackle Sale No.9 by driving him back to prevent him from scoring, but because he had wrong footed him he executed the tackle clumsily. He realised he had lifted him off his feet and, having let go with his left hand, he tried to hold on to help him down. He then fell back as well and they both landed awkwardly. He accepted that it was dangerous but said it was clumsy rather than malicious and he did try to ameliorate the effects of his tackle. A further viewing of the DVD was consistent with his account.

#### **Submissions on behalf of the Player**

5. Mr Sinclair said that the Player has an excellent record, never having any disciplinary incidents before in a long and distinguished career. An outstanding international 7s player, he recently joined Wasps from Saracens.

#### **Sanction**

6. I undertook an assessment of the seriousness of the Player's conduct on this basis:
  - a) The Player intended to tackle Sale No.9 but not in a dangerous way. His execution was clumsy but because of the upward drive and lift there was a risk that Sale No.9 would tip over. In those circumstances the offending can be classified as reckless.
  - b) The offending was completed because the Player was unable to prevent Sale No.9 from landing head first.
  - c) Sale No.9 was not in a vulnerable position and he was completely uninjured. He jumped to his feet quickly and continued with the game.

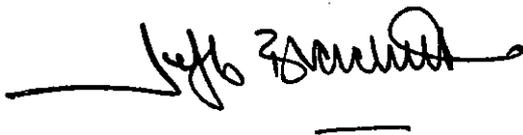
- d) Although Sale No.9 appeared to appeal to the referee, there was no reaction from any other players.
- e) There was no premeditation.
7. In those circumstances I assessed that this offence was properly classified as being at the Low End of the scale of offending. The LOW END entry point for lifting a player off the ground and dropping him into the ground whilst that player's feet are still off the ground such that his head/upper body comes into contact with the ground is 3 weeks suspension. There are no aggravating factors. As far as mitigation is concerned I gave the Player credit for his plea of guilty, his expression of remorse, his excellent character and his good conduct at the hearing. In those circumstances, I reduce the sanction by one week from the entry point.
8. **The Player is therefore suspended from 10 March to 23 March 2011. He may play again on 24 March 2011.**

#### Costs

9. Costs of £500.00 are awarded against the Player/Club.

#### Right of Appeal

10. The Player is reminded of his right of appeal against this decision. Any appeal should be lodged with the RFU Discipline Department by 1000hrs on Thursday 17 March 2011.



**Signed:** *Jeff Blackett*

**Date:** 15 March 2011