RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION

DISCIPLINARY HEARING

At: Holiday Inn, Taunton

On: Thursday 25 November 2010

JUDGMENT.

Player: Thomas Rawlings Club: Launceston RFC

Match: Launceston RFC v Coventry RFC

Venue: Launceston **Date of Match:** 6th November 2010

Panel: Christopher Quinlan (Chairman), Mike Curling and John Doubleday

Secretariat: Bruce Reece-Russel, RFU Disciplinary Manager

Attending: The Player

Timothy Fox, Chairman Launceston RFC

1. The Player was sent off in the 40^{th} minute of the second half for striking an opponent contrary to law 10(4)(a). He denied the charge.

The Facts

2. The referee's report stated:

Launceston where attacking from a tap penalty. They passed the from right to left into centre field where a tackle was made by a Coventry player on the 22 metre line. From this tackle situation Coventry turned over the ball and another tackle took place and lead to a ruck. Mr Rawling joined this ruck coming into contact with a Coventry player. At this point the Coventry player drove Mr Rawlings out of the Ruck. I then saw Mr Rawlings strike the Coventry player in the head several times. This lead to a large number of other players getting involved and a brawl followed. There was no obvious injury to the player he struck. After breaking the players up and discussion with both of my AR's I informed Mr Rawlings that I was issuing him with a red card for striking another player in the head.

After the game both Mr Rawlings and Simon Owens (4th official and representative from Launceston RFC) apologized to me for the incident.

3. He was asked questions by way of a telephone conference call and maintained his account.

- 4. The Player denied striking any player. He admitted grasping the shirt front (in the region of the throat) of the player who drove him out of the ruck. He said the opposing player was doing likewise and they 'wrestled'. He denied throwing any punches.
- 5. He took us through DVD footage of the incident. The footage provided a sideon view of the incident, taken from the far touchline. It showed the start of the incident and what developed into a brawl involving a number of players from both sides. The catalyst for the Player being driven from the ruck appears to have been his somewhat 'enthusiastic' use of a boot.
- 6. He told us he had played the game for many years and has never before received a yellow or red card for foul play. He was captain that day, is a school teacher and felt ashamed at having been sent off. He apologised for the incident; it was not an admission of guilt.

Decision

- 7. The referee was confronted with a dynamic and fast-developing situation. A large mêlée developed in front of him. We can well understand how in such circumstances, identification errors might occur.
- 8. We understand that match footage can have its own limitations. It provides a contemporaneous view of events but the picture may be incomplete. We have reminded ourselves that camera angles and foreshortening can create a misleading impression. We must accord it such weight as we consider appropriate (RFU Disciplinary Regulation 19.7.2.7).
- 9. However, we are confident that the footage is consistent with the Player's account. At the time he is alleged to have thrown punches, we can see none being thrown *by him*. There was at least one punch thrown but it was not by

him; it was another Launceston player. We are not satisfied to the requisite standard that the Player committed the alleged act of foul play.

10. Accordingly we find that the red card was erroneously awarded and pursuant to RFU Disciplinary Regulation 19.8.1.3 we direct that the red card be removed from his record.

Christopher Quinlan (Chairman)

26 November 2010