#### **RUGBY FOOTBALL UNION**

### **DISCIPLINARY HEARING**

**At:** Holiday Inn, Brighouse, West Yorkshire

**On:** Tuesday, 1<sup>st</sup> February 2011

# **JUDGMENT**

**Player: JAMES RULE** 

**Club:** Hull Ionians RFC

**Match:** Rugby v Hull Ionians

Venue: Rugby

Match Date: 22<sup>nd</sup> January 2011

**Panel:** Antony Davies (Chairman), Clif Barker and Austin Newman.

**Secretary:** Liam McTiernan (RFU Disciplinary Department)

**Attending:** James Rule ("the Player")

Stephen Townend (Director of Rugby, Hull Ionians RFC)

#### **Decision**

1. The Panel found the Player guilty of the offence of striking an opponent and determined that the Player should be suspended for a period of three weeks from 28<sup>th</sup> January 2011 to 18<sup>th</sup> February 2011, inclusive. He may play again on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2011.

### **Preliminaries**

- 2. There was no objection to the composition of the Panel, nor was there any other preliminary matter.
- 3. The Panel convened to consider the charge alleging that the Player had been guilty of striking an opponent with his fist during the 25<sup>th</sup> minute of the first half of the above match, contrary to Law 10(4)(a). He had been dismissed from the field of play (red card) by the Match Referee, Trevor Fisher.
- 4. The Player pleaded guilty to the charge.

#### **The Facts**

5. The Referee's sending off report recorded as follows:

"As a result of an offence in the line out, a penalty was awarded to Hull Ionians. A fracas occurred involving a majority of players from both teams on the pitch. My attention was directed to an incident involving a number of players, including James Rule. I saw Mr. Rule punch a player in the area of the head a number of times with a clenched fist. Mr. Rule was pulled away. Mr. Rule then returned and grabbed the same Rugby Lions' player with his left arm and punched a number of times with a clenched fist in the area of the head.

The Player who was punched did not to my knowledge receive any medical attention and continued to take part in the game. After the match, Mr. Rule came to the Officials' room and offered a full and unreserved apology for his actions".

6. The Panel viewed a DVD of the incident. A Hull Ionians line out jumper is taken out in the air illegally and dangerously. A mass brawl then breaks out. It is unseemly and ugly. Many players on both sides must consider themselves extremely fortunate not to have had action taken against them. The Player and the opponent with whom he was involved, both receive a red card.

### The Player's Case

- 7. The Player accepted the written report of the Match Official. He said he did not throw the first punch, but subsequently became involved in a mass brawl which involved ten to twelve players from each side in a number of different groups. Many of the players from both sides threw and received punches. He was closest to the touchline side of the incident and therefore nearest the Assistant Referee who gave the red card recommendation to the Referee. None of the players involved in the melee were injured or required any medical attention. He had apologised to the Referee, his players and coaching staff after the game.
- 8. He is a former professional rugby player, having played some fourteen years as a professional or semi-professional. Due to injury, his career is nearing its end. He has been Captain for three seasons. He very much regretted the incident and his part in it. He has had one previous sending off, but that was some six years ago. He had been suspended by his Club's Disciplinary Committee (who are to be commended for their prompt and proportionate reaction to the Player's sending off) for a period of three weeks, with which he had not argued.

#### **Entry Point**

9. The Player did not start the brawl but became embroiled in it. He and his opponent were the only two protagonists to be sent off. There were no injuries and no-one required treatment. The Player punched the opponent a number of times with a clenched fist and having been pulled away by a team mate, he voluntarily returned to the melee and punched the same opponent a number of times with a clenched fist in the area of the head. Mass brawls of this nature are a blight on the game and in the circumstances the Panel characterised the offending as at the mid-range of the scale of seriousness.

# **Sanction**

- 10. The mid-range entry point for striking is five weeks' suspension. There are no aggravating features. The Player is entitled to a reduction of two weeks to reflect the presence and timing of his admission of culpability, his conduct prior to and at the hearing and his remorse, together with his previous good record.
- 11. The Player is suspended for three weeks from 28<sup>th</sup> January 2011 to 18<sup>th</sup> February 2011. He may play again on 19<sup>th</sup> February 2011.

#### **Costs**

12. Costs of £200.00 are ordered to be paid by the Player/his Club.

## **Right of Appeal**

13. The Player was advised of his right of appeal as set out in Disciplinary Regulation 19.10.

Antony Davies,

Chairman

14<sup>th</sup> February 2011