

IRISH FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

APPEALS COMMITTEE

In the matter of an appeal by **BANGOR YOUNG MEN FC** ('the Appellant') against a decision made by the **DOWN AREA WINTER FOOTBALL LEAGUE** ('the Respondent')

Appeal Board:

Carley Shields

Rachel Best KC

Stephen Magill

Attendees:

1. The Appellant was represented at the hearing by Chris Reilly (Club Secretary) and Martin Williamson, (Club Manager) ('the Manager').
2. The Respondent was represented by Ian Frazer (Chairman) and Alan Robinson (Acting Secretary).
3. The Board thanked the parties for their helpful written and oral submissions and for their attendance at the hearing.

Background:

4. The appeal concerns the final of the Frank Moore Cup that took place between the Appellant and Willowfield Parish 10th OB ('Willowfield') on 1 May 2024, which the Appellant won 3-2.
5. The Appellant was down to 10 players at the latter stages of the match, in and around 80 minutes, when one of their players was knocked unconscious during a collision. Once the player regained consciousness, the Manager assessed the player and concluded he was concussed. He therefore asked the referee if there was a protocol for concussion substitutes.
6. The referee confirmed in the Respondent's written submissions that the Appellant had already made three substitutions and the Manager asked him if he could make a 'concussion sub'. The referee states that he told the Manager that he was unsure and that he had to check with the fourth official.
7. Following that discussion, the referee decided that the 'concussion sub' was allowed and the fourth substitution proceeded to take place. The referee confirmed that once the substitution was made, a protest came from Willowfield saying that the substitution was not allowed. The referee nevertheless permitted the substitution.
8. In his match report the referee stated '*number 16 came on as a sub for number 5 as a concussion sub in the 80th minute for Bangor who had already used 3 subs the league needs to make a decision on this as this rule I hear doesn't come into effect until next season.*'
9. Willowfield submitted a protest to the Respondent about the fourth substitution made by the Appellant. On 12 May 2024, the Respondent thereafter met to consider a breach by the Appellant of Rule 13.1.6 of the DAWFL Rules. By the Appellant's own admission, it made a

fourth substitution and breached this rule. Pursuant to Rule 4.2.2 of the DAWFL Rules, the Respondent decided that the final should therefore, be replayed.

10. The Appellant submitted an appeal against this decision on 14 May 2024.

Points raised on appeal:

11. The Appellant made the following key points:

- a. The substitution occurred in the 83rd minute of the match;
- b. The Manager asked the referee if a 'concussion sub' could be brought on;
- c. The referee permitted the substitution;
- d. The Manager was thinking primarily of the player's wellbeing at the time; and
- e. The players have since received the trophy and their medals.

12. The Respondent made the following key points:

- a. The referee has made an error in his judgment, but the Respondent nonetheless had to deal with the complaint from Willowfield;
- b. The Appellant accepted that the fourth substitution had been made, therefore the Respondent did not deem a hearing to be necessary;
- c. The Respondent felt that the Appellant had an unfair sporting advantage having had the benefit of the fourth substitution;
- d. The Respondent acknowledged that it was far from ideal to have the match replayed but it is a sanction that can be applied pursuant to Rule 4.2.2 and was of the opinion that the outcome should be decided on the field of play; and
- e. It was the Appellant's responsibility to know the applicable rules.

Conclusion:

13. The Board referred to the relevant provisions of the DAWFL Rules.

14. The Board took the following factors into account when reaching its decision:

- (i) The Appellant accepted that it was in breach of Rule 13.1.6 by fielding a fourth substitution, but it did so with the permission of the referee.
- (ii) The nature of injury. The player was knocked unconscious and was deemed to be concussed.
- (iii) The referee was asked if a 'concussion sub' was permitted and he ultimately allowed it. Presumably, the referee had at the forefront of his mind the health and safety of the player and in that regard the Board is sympathetic as to why he may have permitted this substitution.
- (iv) The fourth substitution was made in good faith and in front of all to see.

- (v) Willowfield protested at the time, but again the referee decided to allow the substitution.
 - (vi) The timing of the substitution.
 - (vii) The content of the match report on Comet.
15. Therefore, in accordance with Article 14(6)(f) of the IFA's Articles of Association the Board has decided to allow the appeal. However, the Board imposes a fine of £200 upon the Appellant to be paid to the Respondent within 14 days, being what it believes the appropriate sanction to be for the breach of Rule 13.1.6 in the circumstances.
16. This is to demonstrate that although the Board has sympathy for the Appellant, it is incumbent on Clubs, in particular, to know the applicable rules. The Board also wishes to make it clear that it is not the responsibility of the referee to ensure that Clubs follow the applicable rules.
17. The Board commends the referee for acknowledging his mistake, in what were difficult circumstances, but the Board emphasises that it is vitally important that referees are equally aware of the applicable rules of the matches in which they referee, given their role in enforcing the laws of the game.

Dated: 29 May 2024

Carley Shields

On behalf of the Appeal Board