**BKYL DISCIPLINARY CODE 2022/23**



## RULE 1: ADOPTION & ENFORCEMENT

1.1. The Irish Football Association (IFA) Disciplinary Committee (the Committee) approved this adaptation of the IFA Disciplinary Code, adjusted to recognise the role and governance of Youth Football on 20th June 2022. The approved adaptation was incorporated into the constitution and rules of the Northern Ireland Boys’ Football Association (NIBFA) and its member leagues on 21st June 2022.

1.2. This code is effective from 1st July 2022 and applies to all football under the jurisdiction of the Northern Ireland Boys’ Football Association.

1.3 Save where expressly set out to the contrary, words and phrases as defined in the Rules of the Northern Ireland Boys’ Football Association and the IFA Articles of Association shall have the same meaning in this code.

1.4 The following are subject to this code:

1. Northern Ireland Boys’ Football Association, its member leagues and clubs

2. Officials

3. Players

4. Match officials – disciplinary matters will be referred to IFA Disciplinary Committee

5. Anyone with an authorisation from the NIBFA and its member leagues, about a match, competition or other event organised by the NIBFA and its member leagues

1.5 Each person or entity who is or is deemed subject to this code is required to cooperate with a League, NIBFA and or IFA investigation or disciplinary proceedings. Each club is further required to identify to the Association a Club Disciplinary Officer (who may hold another office within the Club, such as Club Secretary) responsible for investigating and taking appropriate action in relation to disciplinary matters and the conduct of its members. The Club Disciplinary Officer will be the principal point of contact between the Disciplinary Panel and the Club in respect of all disciplinary matters. The Club must inform the NIBFA upon affiliation of the name, telephone number and email address of the Club Disciplinary Officer at the commencement of the season. If NIBFA is not notified of a Disciplinary Officer, any communications will be sent via the Club Secretary. Notifications via the Comet system will be sent to the appointed Club Manager. It is the responsibility of the Club Manager to ensure that the Club Disciplinary Officer is made aware of any matters relating to discipline.

1.6 The overriding objective of the Code is to maintain and promote fair play, protect the health and welfare of Players (and others involved in the Game), ensure that acts of indiscipline (on and off the field of play) or breaches of this code are dealt with expeditiously and fairly and that the image and reputation of association football and the Northern Ireland Boys’ Football Association are not adversely affected.

1.7 Disciplinary hearings shall be conducted in a fair and just manner and in accordance with the fundamental principles of natural justice. Procedural and technical considerations shall take second place to the overriding objective of being just and fair to the parties. Proceedings, findings, or decisions of the Disciplinary Panel shall not be invalidated by reason of any procedural defect, irregularity, omission, or technicality unless such defect, irregularity, omission, or technicality raises a material doubt as to the reliability of the proceedings, findings, or decisions.

1.8 In the event that a particular incident takes place for which there is no provision in this Code including (but not limited to) procedure, jurisdiction or sanction then the Disciplinary Panel may take such action that it considers appropriate in the circumstances in accordance with general principles of natural justice and fairness.

1.9 Without prejudice to the overriding objective set out in clause 1.6, the Committee shall have the power: -

1. to sanction serious disciplinary infringements which have escaped a match official’s attention

2. to extend the duration of a match suspension or any other penalty incurred automatically by an expulsion

3. to impose sanctions including:

* A fine
* A suspension
* An interim suspension
* A transfer ban
* Playing a match without spectators
* Playing a match on neutral territory
* Ban on playing in a particular stadium
* Ban from dressing room and/or substitutes’ bench
* Ban on taking part in any football related activity
* Annulment of the result of a match
* Expulsion from a competition
* Defeat by forfeit
* Deduction of points
* Demotion to a lower division where member leagues can facilitate this
* Ban on spectators attending a match
* Ban prohibiting someone from entering the confines of one or several stadiums (“Stadium Ban”)
* Replay of a match
* A reprimand being an official written pronouncement of disapproval sent to the perpetrator of an infringement of the Code

1.10 The Disciplinary Panel may recognise the disciplinary sanctions of any other sporting body. Any person suspended or banned by any other sporting body may be suspended or banned concurrently by the Disciplinary Panel.

1.11 The Disciplinary Panel shall always strive to act consistently; however, they shall not have a doctrine of binding precedent, it is not formally bound by prior decisions of the Panel. Each case will be looked at and determined on its own merits.

1.12 If several offences are carried out by an individual simultaneously, the Panel shall base the fine on what it considers to be the most serious offence committed and depending on the circumstances, may increase the sanction by up to fifty per cent of the maximum sanction specified for that offence. The same applies if a person incurs several time sanctions of a similar nature (two or more match suspensions, two or more stadium bans etc) as the result of one or several offences.

1.13 Any clerical mistakes or accidental omissions in any written decision or correspondence on behalf of the Panel may be corrected by the Panel at any time.

**RULE 2: DEFINITIONS**

2.1. IFA: The Irish Football Association
 NIBFA: Northern Ireland Boys’ Football Association

2.2 Player: A person whose name appears on the match card for the relevant match. This includes a Player/Manager and any player who is also an official.

2.3 Official: A person, with the exception of Players (See Rule 2.2 of the Code) aged **16** years or over who, whether registered with a member Club or not, acts on behalf of a member Club or is in the dressing room or enters the field of play on behalf of a member Club or in the absence of an official referee acts as a match official or assistant or is in a member Club’s technical area or assists in the running of the member Club.

2.4 Match Official: The referee, assistant referees, 4th Official or any other person appointed by NIBFA or a member League in connection the administration of a match.

2.5 Match Official’s Report: A report made individually or collectively by match officials and agreed by them, supplied where practicable, to the Committee and through the referee.

2.6 Designated Holiday: A public holiday or bank holiday in Northern Ireland.

2.7 Disciplinary Officer: A person appointed by a club who shall be responsible for investigating and taking appropriate action in relation to disciplinary matters and the conduct of its members. It is the responsibility of the Club to ensure disciplinary matters are maintained in the event of the Club Disciplinary Officer’s absence by ensuring another individual or individuals deal with any such matters during that period of absence.

2.8 Disciplinary Panel: The panel convened to deal with all football related disciplinary matters.

2.9 Disciplinary Panel Secretary: The official appointed by the Northern Ireland Boys Football Association to service the Disciplinary Committee.

2.10 Disciplinary Department: the members of the NIBFA authorised to deal with certain routine disciplinary matters.

2.11 Appeals Panel: The panel appointed to deal with all appeals.

2.12 Associate Members; Refers to associate members of the Irish Football Association including Northern Ireland Boys’ Football Association their affiliated leagues and clubs.

2.13 Comet System: means the football management system adopted by the IFA for the administration of football in Northern Ireland.

2.14 IFA, NIBFA or League Website/Facebook: means the official Website/Facebook of IFA, NIBFA or League.

2.15 Disciplinary Challenge: means a Mistaken Identity Challenge or a General Disciplinary Challenge.

## RULE 3: GENDER & NUMBER

3.1. Terms within this Disciplinary Code referring to the players, officials or match officials are applicable to both genders. Any term in the singular applies to the plural and vice-versa.

## RULE 4: CULPABILITY

4.1. Unless otherwise specified, infringements are punishable regardless of whether they have been committed deliberately or negligently.

## RULE 5: ACTS AMOUNTING TO ATTEMPT

5.1 Attempts: If, with intent to do an act in breach of this Code, a person or entity who is subject to the provisions of the code, does an act which is more than just preparing to commit a breach, he shall be found to have breached the relevant section of the Code.

5.2 A person or entity who is subject to the provisions of the code, may be in breach of the Code by attempting to commit a breach of the Code (as described at Rule 5.1) even if it would have been impossible to complete the act in breach of the Code.

5.3 A person or entity who is subject to the provisions of the code, found to have attempted to breach the code pursuant to Rule 5.1 will be liable to the same sanction as where the breach of the Code is completed. The Committee may, but is not bound to, reduce the sanction where an attempt is proved. It will determine the extent of the mitigation as it sees fit.

## RULE 6: INVOLVEMENT/BREACH OF LEAGUE RULES

6.1 Any breach of these rules may render the player, official or Club liable to censure, fine or suspension, or a combination of such penalties as it is deemed fit to impose.

6.2 The League and or NIBFA reserves the right to carry out investigations, make appropriate enquiries and invite comments from players, officials, or clubs as it sees fit in relation to any disciplinary matter.

6.3 Players, Officials or Clubs will have the right to be heard before any decision is passed on a
disciplinary matter other than those relating to cautions and dismissals, except in the case of alleged mistaken identity for a player who is cautioned or dismissed in a match.

## RULE 7: FAILURE TO REPLY TO CORRESPONDENCE

7.1 Any failure to reply, within the specified timescale, (without just or reasonable cause) to correspondence sent by the Committee, either by letter, email or via the Comet system in pursuance of its obligations under this Code, will render the person to whom such correspondence is sent to be in breach of this code and render such person liable to such penalties as the Committee shall deem fit to impose.

## RULE 8: FINES

8.1 Clubs are liable for fines imposed on their players or officials. Subject to the Committee’s discretion pursuant to the overriding objective, the fact that a person has left a club does not cancel out liability, therefore does not negate the responsibility of the club to pay a fine.

8.2 All fines, unless challenged or appealed against, must be paid within 14 days from the date of the letter or email imposing the fine unless a payment plan has been agreed with the club. Failure by a club to pay a fine within the specified timeframe may result in the club being fined an additional £25 and suspended from all affiliated football with immediate effect from the point of notification in the case of a Designated Holiday, the time limit for paying the fine will expire the following day.

8.3 Should a suspension be imposed on a club due to failure by that club to pay a fine, the suspension will remain in effect until the Monday following receipt of payment.

8.4 Disciplinary Reports must be submitted by Match Officials via the Comet System within 24 hours of the commencement of the match taking place. Where an appointed official fails to turn up disciplinary reports should be submitted ***by the agreed official in charge within 24 hours of the match taking place by email to*** ***nibfa.discipline@irishfa.com***

## RULE 9: CAUTION & DISMISSAL FINES

9.1. Each disciplinary report, involving a caution shall incur a fine of £3 for each offence. A dismissal shall incur a fine of £3 for each offence.

9.2. Failure to self-report a dismissal (as per Rule 11.D Section 2 of These Rules) of a player or official to NIBFA within 24 hours of such dismissal will incur a fine of £5 for each offence.

***All dismissals and cautions must be noted on the match card/Comet. In addition, all dismissals must be self-reported 24 hours of the match by, email to*** ***nibfa.discipline@irishfa.com*** ***and include full detail of the offence, name of player/official and if a player, the shirt number, details of the league, age group, competition and the teams playing. The information should also include the date, time, venue.***

9.3. Clubs will be charged periodically throughout the playing season for their accrued cautions and dismissals and payment is due within 14 days of issuing the account.

9.4. No refunds of caution/dismissal fines or part thereof shall be made except where a
 caution/dismissal has been proven to be wrongfully applied. In this regard the decision of NIBFA is final.

**RULE 10: WARNING**

10.1 A warning is a reminder of the substance of a disciplinary rule allied with the threat of a sanction in the event of a further infringement.

**RULE 11: REPRIMAND**

11.1 A reprimand is a pronouncement of disapproval by the Committee. Where the Committee determines to issue a reprimand, it shall be communicated to the person or entity who has breached the Code in writing or, at the option of the Committee, by email.

**RULE 12: RETURN OF AWARDS**

12.1 When a person is required to return an award, the person shall return the benefits which that person has received as part of winning that award.

**RULE 13: CAUTIONS FOR PLAYERS AND OFFICIALS**

13.1 A caution is a warning from the referee to a player or official during a match to sanction minor infringements (See Law 12 of the Laws of the Game).

13.2 A player or official who receives 2 cautions during the same match will incur a dismissal and, consequently, an automatic suspension from the next match. The 2 cautions that incurred the dismissal will not be included in any total as outlined in clauses 13.3, 13.4 or 13.5 of this Code.

13.3 A player or official who accumulates (5) cautions in the same playing season will be suspended for 1 match i.e. the next match following the receipt of the 5th caution.

13.4 A player or official who accumulates (10) cautions in the same playing season will be suspended for 2 matches i.e. the next two matches following receipt of the (10th) caution.

13.5 For every further 5 cautions a player or official accumulates in the same playing season a 3-match suspension.

13.6 In the case of a player manager, all cautions received (either as a player or a manager) will accumulate.

13.7 A player who is cautioned after the final whistle and before he leaves the field of play will be dealt with as a field offence. (See Clause 13.1 of this Code)

13.8 An official who is cautioned after the final whistle and before he leaves the technical area, and its immediate surrounds will be dealt with as a field offence. (See Clause 13.1)

13.9 In respect of an official, if an offence has occurred and the offender cannot be identified, the senior coach who is present in the technical area at the time will receive the caution as the person responsible for the other team officials.

13.10 Cautions received during one season are cancelled at the conclusion of that season and are not carried over to the next season.

13.11 If an abandoned match is to be replayed, any caution issued during that match shall be annulled. If the match is not to be replayed, the cautions received during the match shall stand.

13.12 Cautions issued in a match that is subsequently forfeited shall not be annulled.

## RULE 14: DISMISSALS FOR PLAYERS AND OFFICIALS

14.1 A dismissal is the order given by the referee to someone to leave, at any time before, during or after the game, the field of play and its surroundings, including the technical area and the substitute’s bench as outlined in Law 5 of the Laws of the Game.

14.2 Dismissal takes the form of a red card for players and officials. The red card is regarded as direct if it sanctions serious unsporting behaviour as defined by Law 12 of the Laws of the Game. It is regarded as indirect if it is the result of an accumulation of two yellow cards.

14.3 An official who has been sent off may give instructions to the person replacing him on the substitutes’ bench. The official shall, however, ensure that he does not disturb the spectators or disrupt the flow of play.

14.4 A dismissal for a player or official automatically incurs a suspension from the subsequent match even if imposed in a match that is later abandoned, annulled and/or forfeited. The Panel may extend the duration of the suspension.

**Player sanctions**

14.5 A player who is dismissed from the field of play and its surroundings, including the technical area and the substitutes bench for any offence (other than for receiving a 2nd caution) having previously received a caution in the same match will have the caution upheld.

14.6 A player who is dismissed from the field of play and its surroundings, including the technical area and the substitute’s bench for using offensive, insulting, or abusive language and/or gestures will be suspended for an additional 1 match.

14.7 A player who is dismissed from the field of play and its surroundings, including the technical area and the substitute’s bench for serious foul play or for violent conduct will be suspended for an additional 2 matches.

14.8 A player who is dismissed from the field of play and its surroundings, including the technical area and the substitute’s bench for biting, head-butting or for spitting at an opponent or any other person other than a match official will be suspended for an additional 6 matches.

14.9 A player who is dismissed from the field of play and its surroundings, including the technical area and the substitute’s bench for assaulting (e.g., elbowing, punching, kicking etc) a match official will be suspended for a minimum of 15 matches.

14.10 A player who is dismissed from the field of play and its surroundings, including the technical area and the substitute’s bench for spitting at a match official will be suspended for a minimum of 12 months.

14.11 A player who is dismissed from the field of play and its surroundings after the final whistle and before he leaves the field of play will be dealt with as a field offence. (See 14.1 of Code).

**Official sanctions**

14.12 An official who is dismissed from the technical area and its immediate surrounds for any offence (other than for receiving a 2nd caution) having previously received a caution in the same match will have the caution upheld.

14.13 An official who is dismissed from the technical area and its immediate surrounds for delaying the restart of play by the opposing team (e.g., holding onto the ball, kicking the ball away, obstructing the movement of a player etc) will be suspended for an additional 1 match.

14.14 An official who is dismissed from the technical area and its immediate surrounds for deliberately leaving the technical area to show a) dissent towards or remonstrate with a match official, b) act in a provocative or inflammatory manner or c) enter the opposing technical area in an aggressive or confrontational manner will be suspended for an additional 1 match.

14.15 An official who is dismissed from the technical area and its immediate surrounds for deliberately throwing/ kicking an object onto the field of play will be suspended for an additional 2 matches.

14.16 An official who is dismissed from the technical area and its immediate surrounds for entering the field of play to a) confront a match official (including at half time and full time), b) interfere with play, an opposing player or match official with be suspended for an additional 2 matches.

14.17 An official who is dismissed from the technical area and its immediate surrounds for physical or aggressive behaviour (including spitting or biting) towards an opposing player, substitute, team official, match official, spectator or any other person (e.g. ball boy/girl, security or competition official etc.) will be suspended for an additional 6 matches.

14.18 An official who is dismissed from the technical area and its immediate surrounds for use of offensive, insulting, or abusive language and/ or gestures will be suspended for an additional 1 match.

14.19 An official who is dismissed from the technical area and its immediate surrounds for using unauthorised electronic or communication equipment and/or behaving in an inappropriate manner as the result of using electronic or communication equipment will be suspended for an additional 1 match.

14.20 An official who is dismissed from the technical area and its immediate surrounds for violent conduct will be suspended for an additional 2 matches.

14.21 An official who is dismissed after the final whistle and before he leaves the technical area, and its immediate surrounds will be dealt with as a field offence. (See 14.1 of this Code)

## RULE 15: SUSPENSION

15.1 All suspensions must be served with the team at which the player or official received the suspension and must be served consecutively with any other suspensions that may have been issued. Any automatic suspension pursuant to Rule 14 must be served prior to any other notified suspension. No formal notices will be issued for any automatic 1 match suspension in respect of a dismissal. On request, special dispensation may be given to a player or official if the club (of which his team forms a part) folds during the serving of his suspension or if the team he received his suspension with does not commence their competitive season until after the last day of August in any season. Special dispensation may also be applied in the case of an official who is involved in a coaching capacity in both a men’s and women’s club and who concludes the season with an outstanding suspension. Special dispensation may also be given in exceptional circumstances which shall be at the sole discretion of the Panel. Should the Panel consider any application for dispensation to be of a frivolous nature or merely to release a player or official from suspension to enable them to participate in a match, they shall have power to deal with the player and official and or club as it deems appropriate.

15.2 A player who receives cautions for more than one team within his club (i.e., 1st team, 2nd team, youth team, etc.) will have his cautions aggregated and must serve any suspension he may receive from the accumulation of cautions with the most senior team he has played for within the Club when he received a caution.

15.3 Suspensions shall cover all domestic league and cup matches until such time as the team at which the player or official received the suspension has completed the required number of matches to enable the suspension to be served. A suspension (or part thereof) which has been imposed on a player or official will not be considered to have been served by a match that is abandoned, cancelled, or forfeited. Unless the cause of the abandonment, cancellation or forfeiture of the match has been determined prior to the player or official’s next game and it is found that the team to which the player or official belongs is not responsible for the facts that led to abandonment, cancellation or forfeit of the match. A suspension from playing in a domestic league or cup match shall preclude the person so suspended from being present in or at the field of play and the areas immediately surrounding the same. The Panel shall have the power to determine where those areas are.

15.4 If a suspension is combined with a fine, the suspension may, at the discretion of the Panel, be prolonged until the fine has been paid in full.

15.5 Clubs shall be wholly responsible for ensuring that suspensions are served. It is each club’s responsibility to ensure the eligibility of their players for any match.

15.6 Any period of suspension arising from the accumulation of cautions or additional suspensions in respect of a dismissal will commence from the date of communication from the Disciplinary Department/ Comet System.

15.7 Any period of suspension arising from the acceptance of a sanction offer made via a Disciplinary Charge to a player, official, club or league will commence on the Monday following the date of the Disciplinary Charge letter (such date will be confirmed in said letter) sent to the player, official, club or league concerned in writing, by email or via the Comet system. If a sanction offer is not accepted, a Disciplinary Challenge may be submitted as outlined in Article 35.3.

15.8 Suspensions imposed by the Panel following a Disciplinary Hearing will be imposed from the Monday after the date of the Disciplinary Hearing. Suspensions imposed by the Panel in circumstances when no Disciplinary Hearing has taken place will be imposed from the Monday after the date on which the decision was made by the Panel. Details of the suspension will be communicated in writing, by email or via the Comet system.

15.9 During a standard suspension, a player or official is not permitted to enter the dressing room area, the player’s tunnel, the technical area, the substitute’s bench, the area immediately surrounding the field of play or the playing surface at any match played under the jurisdiction of NIBFA or the IFA until the expiry of the suspension. The terms of the suspension apply from one hour prior to the scheduled time of kick-off of a match and until 5 minutes following the referee having signalled the end of the match.

15.10 During a touchline suspension, an official is not permitted to enter the technical area, the substitute’s bench, the area immediately surrounding the field of play or the playing surface at any match under the jurisdiction of the NIBFA or the IFA until the expiry of the suspension. The terms of the suspension apply from one hour prior to the scheduled time of kick-off of a match and until 5 minutes following the referee having signalled the end of the match. A touchline suspension may only be imposed on individuals deemed as officials by the Panel.

15.11 On request, an official who is suspended for a cup final in which his club are involved following his 1st or 2nd sanction in the current playing season may be permitted to lead his club onto the pitch prior to the match and to return to the pitch for the post-match presentation.

15.12 A player who is not eligible to participate in a particular match due to the competition rules may not use that match to serve the suspension or part thereof.

15.13 Any period of suspension which remains outstanding at the end of the playing season must be served at the commencement of the next playing season.

15.14 A player, official, match official, club or league serving any suspension is suspended from all affiliated football including all levels of Senior football.

15.15 No sanction prescribed in this Code shall prevent the Panel from determining that a person may be referred to the IFA and subsequently banned from taking part in any kind of affiliated football-related activity, as determined by the IFA Disciplinary Committee, where it is deemed reasonable and proportionate to do so.

15.16 A team or club suspended from recruiting players in any season or part thereof may **not** use

age eligible players from a team within the club in an age group above, or players from an age group below, in any match, in any competition, that have been signed after the date of the implementation of the sanction until the conclusion of the sanction. They may however draw on players from an age group below only that are already registered to the club.

15.17 In the event of a suspension being imposed (except for any 1 match automatic suspension in respect of a dismissal) the player’s or official’s Club will be advised of the details of the suspension. Suspensions will be published regularly on the League WhatsApp group, which Clubs are obliged to check for their information. It is each club’s responsibility to ensure the eligibility of their players for any match.

**RULE 16: INTERIM SUSPENSION & PARTIAL SUSPENSION**

**Interim**

16.1 The Committee shall have the power by way of unanimous vote, to issue an Interim Suspension against any person against whom an allegation of misconduct has been made and is being investigated or against someone who has been convicted of a criminal offence. The imposition of an interim suspension order shall be notified to any such person in writing, signed by the Disciplinary Panel Chairman, Vice- Chairman or Disciplinary Department. Details of the suspension will be communicated in writing, by email or via the Comet system.

16.2 Following the imposition of a suspension, the person suspended shall have the right of appeal within 14 days of notification of the decision to the Panel at a hearing to be convened as soon as is reasonably practicable. The procedure for the disciplinary hearing shall be determined by the Chairman of the Panel.

16.3 The interim suspension shall automatically cease:

16.4 When the matter has been dealt with at a disciplinary hearing; or

16.5 When the allegation is withdrawn, and no further disciplinary action is taken; or

16.6 After 120 days from its issue, unless the Panel determines that it is in the interests of the NIBFA or the IFA that it should be extended for a further period or periods of not more than 120 days.

**Partial**

16.7 The Panel in imposing a match suspension, a ban on access to dressing rooms and/or the substitutes bench, a ban on taking part in any affiliated football-related activity, the obligation to play a match without spectators, the obligation to play a match on neutral ground, or a ban on playing in a certain stadium, may examine whether it is possible to suspend the implementation of the sanction partially. The imposition of a partial suspension order shall be notified to any such person in writing, signed by the Disciplinary Panel Chairman, Vice- Chairman or Disciplinary Department. Details of the suspension will be communicated in writing, by email or via Comet system.

16.8 Partial suspension is permissible only if the duration of the sanction does not exceed six matches or six months and if the relevant circumstances allow it, the previous record of the person sanctioned.

16.9 The Committee shall decide which part of the sanction may be suspended. In any case, half of the sanction is definite.

16.10 By suspending implementation of the sanction, the Panel, at their own discretion, subjects the person sanctioned to a probationary period of anything from six months to two years.

16.11 If the person benefiting from a suspended sanction commits another infringement during the probationary period, the suspension is automatically revoked, and the sanction applied; it is added to the sanction pronounced for the new infringement.

**RULE 17: DISCIPLINARY CHARGE**

17.1 The Panel may charge a player, official, club and/or league and/or refer the matter to The IFA Disciplinary Committee who may also charge a player, official, match official club and/or league pursuant to Article 17 of the IFA Articles of Association or with any matter deemed to be in breach of the spirit of this Code.

 *Article 17 of the IFA Articles of Association:
General Discipline*

1. *Where any person or body has breached or caused or contributed to the breach of any of the Articles of Association of the Irish Football Association that brings the game of Association Football into disrepute, that person or body shall be liable to expulsion, suspension, fine and/or other such penalty or sanction as the IFA Board think fit.*
2. *The IFA Board may delegate these powers to the IFA Disciplinary Committee.*
3. *The IFA Board or the IFA Disciplinary Committee acting on behalf of the Board, shall be the sole judge (and shall be unfettered in its judgement) as to what brings the game of Association Football into disrepute and what constitutes loyalty, integrity, and sportsmanship*.

17.2 A charge may be accompanied by a sanction offer that would apply to the offence which is detailed in each Rule. Any sanction offer will be determined based on the facts and circumstances of the incident. Where the Panel is satisfied that the particular facts and circumstances of the incident necessitate a hearing, no sanction offer will be made in the charge letter.

17.3 A charge under this Rule should be issued within 21 days from the time the incident is reported to the Secretary of the Disciplinary Panel or as may be extended by the Panel in its absolute discretion. The charge will be accompanied by all relevant evidence, documents, and written submissions (including where appropriate the match official’s report) that are available to the Disciplinary Panel at the time that the charge is issued. In any event the player, official, club and/ or league should be notified within 21 days of the incident being reported to the Secretary of the Panel of the nature of any incident under investigation.

17.4 Where a charge is issued the player, official, club and/or league who is charged may accept or deny the charge.

17.5 Where a player, official, club and/ or league accepts the charge, and a sanction has been offered the relevant party may accept the sanction; in those circumstances a hearing will not be required. Where the player, official, club and/or league club rejects the sanction they should make representations as to the sanction in writing or at an oral hearing at the discretion of the committee if it is deemed that written submissions would not suffice.

17.6 Where a player, official, club and/or league notifies the panel that they deny the charge the relevant party is required to submit a Disciplinary Challenge as directed in Rule 35 of this Code.

17.7 In any circumstances where a sanction has been proposed by the Panel at the point of charge and within the relevant period the player, official, club and/or league notifies the Panel that they do not accept the sanction offer, the Panel shall not be bound by the proposed sanction. However, at the point of charge the Panel must have advised clubs of all potential charges being brought against them.

17.8 At all times the Panel shall have the discretion to require the player, official, club and/or league who is the subject of a charge to attend a hearing.

17.9 In determining the appropriate sanction in any case, including at a hearing, the Panel will consider the circumstances of the infringement, the conduct of the player, official and/or club within the previous 3 seasons and any other matter which appears to the Panel to be relevant pursuant to the overriding objective.

17.10 For the purpose of determining the appropriate charge and sanction at the point of charge the facts contained in the Match Official’s reports will be presumed to be accurate.

17.11 Infringements committed during a match may no longer be prosecuted after a lapse of two years. As a rule, other infringements may not be prosecuted after a lapse of ten years.

17.13 Prosecution for corruption is not subject to a limitation period.

**RULE 18: MISCONDUCT BY PLAYERS or OFFICIALS
(Outside Law 12 of the Laws of the Game)**

18.1 Any player or official who is dismissed will automatically incur a suspension from the subsequent match even if imposed in a match that is later abandoned, annulled and/or forfeited. Any automatic suspension will be in addition to suspensions imposed via Rule 18.

18.2 Where a player or official is found to be guilty of any of the charges specified in clauses 18.3 to 18.9 (inclusive) it is recommended that such player or official will be sanctioned in the terms set out in Article 18.3 to Article 18.9 (inclusive) and where a player or official is found to be guilty of any of the charges specified in clauses 18.10 to 18.19 (inclusive) such player or official will be sanctioned in the terms set out in clauses 18.10 to 18.19 (inclusive).

18.3 A player who is reported for the 1st occasion for misconduct will be sanctioned with a minimum 1 match standard suspension and a £25 fine imposed on the player’s club.

18.4 A player who is reported for the 2nd occasion in the playing season for misconduct will be sanctioned with a minimum 2 match standard suspension and a £50 fine imposed on the player’s club.

18.5 A player who is reported for a 3rd or subsequent occasion in the playing season for misconduct will be sanctioned with a minimum 4 match standard suspension and a £100 fine imposed on the player’s club.

18.6 If part of the report relates to cautions or dismissals of players or officials, that part will be dealt with in accordance with Rules 13 and 14 of this Disciplinary Code.

18.7 An official who is reported for the 1st occasion in the playing season for misconduct will be sanctioned with a minimum 1 match touchline suspension and a £25 fine imposed on the official’s club.

18.8 An official who is reported for the 2nd occasion in the playing season for misconduct will be sanctioned with a minimum 2 match touchline suspension and a £50 fine imposed on the official’s club.

18.9 An official who is reported for a 3rd or subsequent occasion in the playing season for misconduct will be sanctioned with a minimum 4 match standard suspension and a £100 fine imposed on the official’s club.

18.10 A player or official who is reported for unsporting conduct towards an opponent or any other person other than a match official will be sanctioned with a minimum 1 match standard suspension and a £25 fine imposed on their club.

18.11 A player or official who is reported for deliberately receiving a yellow or red card (to be suspended for an upcoming match and to ultimately have a clean record) will be sanctioned with a minimum 1 match standard suspension and £25 imposed on their club.

18.12 A player or official who acts with obvious intent to cause a match official to make an incorrect decision or supporting his error of judgement and thereby causing him to make an incorrect decision will be sanctioned with a minimum 2 match standard suspension and £25 imposed on their club.

18.13 A player or official who is reported for assault (elbowing, punching, and kicking etc.) or battery of an opponent or any other person other than a match official will be sanctioned with a minimum 3 match standard suspension and a £100 fine imposed on their club.

18.14 A player or official who is reported for biting, head-butting, or spitting at an opponent or any other person other than a match official will be sanctioned with a minimum 6 match standard suspension and a £100 fine imposed on their club.

18.15 A player or official who is reported for unsporting conduct towards a match official will be sanctioned with a minimum 4 match standard suspension and a £50 fine imposed on their club.

18.16 A player or official who is reported for assaulting (elbowing, punching, kicking etc.) a match official will be sanctioned with a minimum 15 match standard suspension and a £100 fine imposed on their club.

18.17 An official who is reported for biting, head-butting, or spitting at a match official will be sanctioned with a minimum 12-month standard suspension and a £100 fine imposed on their club.

18.18 The sanctions described in clauses 18.13, 18.14 and 18.15 may also apply in cases of misconduct against officials of affiliated leagues and clubs.

18.19 A match official who is reported for assaulting any person shall have the matter referred to and dealt with by an IFA Disciplinary Committee.

18.20 A match official who is reported for misconduct or reported for unsporting conduct towards a player, official or any other person shall have the matter referred to and dealt with by an IFA Disciplinary Committee.

**RULE 19: MEDIA & SOCIAL MEDIA COMMENTS/CONTENT**

19.1 A reprimand, suspension or fine may be issued to leagues, clubs, players, and officials in the case of inappropriate comments or content in the media or social media. Any case involving a match official will be dealt with by the IFA Disciplinary Committee.

19.2 If a player or official makes comments or posts content in the media or social media in which (a) they imply bias, question integrity and/or bring the game into disrepute or
(b) are abusive, offensive and/or insulting and such comments are football related,
they will be sanctioned with a minimum 1 match suspension and a minimum fine of £100 which will be imposed on their club.

19.3 If a match official makes comments or posts content in the media or social media the matter will be referred to and dealt with by an IFA Disciplinary Committee.

19.4 The Panel may issue a sanction in the case of repeat offences by players or officials, in the case of match officials further refer the matter to an IFA Disciplinary Committee.

**RULE 20: INCITING HATRED AND VIOLENCE**

20.1 A player or official who publicly incites others to hatred or violence will be sanctioned with a suspension for no less than six months and with a minimum fine of £100 Player & £200 Official which will be imposed on their club.

20.2 In serious cases, when the infringement is committed using the mass media (such as the press, radio or television) or if it takes place on a match day in or around a stadium, the minimum fine will be £250 which will be imposed on their club. A suspension for no less than six months will also be imposed.

**RULE 21: PROVOKING THE GENERAL PUBLIC**

21.1 A player or official who provokes the public during a match will be sanctioned with a minimum suspension of two matches and with a minimum fine of £100 Player & £200 Official which will be imposed on their club.

**RULE 22: INELIGIBILITY THROUGH SUSPENSION**

22.1 If any player participates in a match whilst being suspended or if any player breaches the terms of his suspension his club will be sanctioned with a minimum fine of £200. Additionally, the Club will forfeit the match.

22.2 A match suspension is regarded as no longer pending if a match is retroactively forfeited because a player took part in a match despite being ineligible. This also applies to the match suspension imposed on the player who took part in the match despite being ineligible.

22.3 If any official who participates in a match whilst being suspended or if the official breaches the terms of his suspension his club will be sanctioned with a minimum fine of £250

22.4 The timeframe for payment of a fine may be extended if a club can produce to the Panel evidence of severe financial hardship. A payment plan may be agreed with the Panel as referred to at 8.2

**RULE 23: ABANDONMENT**
23.1 If a club is found to have caused the abandonment of a match it will be sanctioned with a minimum fine of £200. The competition organiser will decide on the outcome of the match following the outcome of any disciplinary inquiry into the abandonment.

**RULE 24: BRAWL**

24.1 A brawl is defined as three or more people who participate in serious Violent Conduct. Anyone who participates in a brawl will be sanctioned with a suspension of at least six matches.

24.2 Anyone who tried merely to prevent a fight, shield others, or separate those involved in a brawl is not subject to punishment.

## RULE 25: UNIDENTIFIED AGRESSORS

25.1 If, in the case of violence by players, officials or supporters it is not possible to identify the perpetrator(s), The Panel may penalise the Club to which the aggressors are deemed to belong.

# **RULE 26: TEAM MISCONDUCT**

26.1 Disciplinary measures may be imposed on clubs where a team fails to conduct itself properly. A fine may be imposed where several players or officials from the same team threaten or harass match officials or other persons. Further sanctions may be imposed in the case of serious offences

# **RULE 27: DISCRIMINATION**

27.1 Anyone who offends the dignity of a person or group of persons through contemptuous, discriminatory or denigratory words or actions concerning race, colour, language, religion, or origin shall be suspended for at least five matches. Furthermore, a stadium ban and a fine shall be imposed. Where the perpetrator is a player a minimum fine of £100 will be imposed on their club. Clubs may also be required to engage with appropriate training to address the matter at hand.

27.2 Anyone who offends the dignity of a person or group of persons through contemptuous, discriminatory or denigratory words or actions concerning disability, gender or sexual orientation shall be suspended for a minimum of five matches. Furthermore, a stadium ban and a fine shall be imposed. Where the perpetrator is a player a minimum fine of £100 will be imposed on their club. Clubs may also be required to engage with appropriate training to address the matter at hand.

27.3 In determining whether the dignity of a person or group of persons has been offended, the Panel will be entitled to draw reasonable inferences there is no requirement to identify an individual who was offended at the time the comment was made or published. In finding a matter to be proved, it will open to the Panel to conclude that by their very nature, the comments made offend the dignity of a person or group of persons. If an individual is identified as a direct addressee of potential discriminatory behaviour, he or she may be invited by the panel to make an oral or written victim impact statement.

27.4 Where several persons (officials and/ or player) from the same Club or association simultaneously breach clauses 27.1 or 27.2 or there are other aggravating circumstances, the team concerned may be deducted three points for a first offence and six points for a second offence; a further offence may result in relegation to a lower division where a member league can accommodate this. In the case of matches in which no points are awarded, the team may be disqualified from the competition.

27.5 Where supporters of a team breach clause 27.1 or clause 27.2 at a match, a minimum fine of £200 shall be imposed on their club, regardless of the question of culpable conduct or culpable oversight unless the club proves to the Panel that exceptional circumstances exist in which case the fine may be reduced. In determining the appropriate sanction, the Panel will be entitled to consider actions taken by the club to prevent such behaviour occurring in addition to previous occurrences of such behaviour which have at any time come to the attention of the Panel. Nothing contained in this paragraph shall interfere with the Committee’s power to impose any of the sanctions outlined in paragraph 1.9 of this Code.

27.6 The Panel will be guided by the terms of Rule 33 of this Code in determining whether supporters have acted in a manner in contravention of this Rule.

27.7 The offences and fines referred to in these clauses are not exhaustive and the Panel is empowered to levy additional sanctions after considering the seriousness of the offences. Without prejudice to the generality of this, these additional sanctions could include an order to play a match behind closed doors, playing a match with a limited number of spectators, the forfeit of a match, a point’s deduction, or disqualification from the competition.

27.8 Unless there are exceptional circumstances, if a match is abandoned by the referee because of racist and/or discriminatory conduct, the match shall be declared forfeited.

# **RULE 28: THREATS**

28.1 A player or official who intimidates a match official with serious threats will be sanctioned with a minimum suspension for a player 6 matches, an official 10 matches and with a minimum fine of £100 for a player and £150 for an official, to be imposed on their club.

# **RULE 29: COERCION or UNDUE INFLUENCE**

29.1 A player or official who uses violence or threats to pressurise a match official into taking certain action or to hinder him in any other way from acting freely will be sanctioned with a minimum suspension for 4 matches and with a minimum fine of £100 for a player or £150 for an official which will be imposed on their club.

29.2 A player or official who unduly seeks to influence or pressurise a match official to review match footage before submitting a Disciplinary Challenge pursuant to Article 35 will be sanctioned with a minimum suspension of four matches and a minimum fine of £100 for a player or £150 for an official which will be imposed on their club.

**RULE 30: FORGERY and FALSIFICATION**

30.1 Anyone who, in football-related activities, forges a document, falsifies an authentic document, or uses a forged or falsified document may be sanctioned with a fine as determined by the Disciplinary Panel.

30.2 If the perpetrator is a player, that player in addition to any other sanction imposed by the Panel, may be suspended for at least six matches.

30.3 If the perpetrator is an official, a player’s agent or an intermediary, that official, player’s agent or intermediary may in addition to any other sanction imposed by the panel be subject to a ban on taking part in any football- related activity for a period of at least 12 months.

30.4 If the perpetrator is an association or a club, that association or club may in addition to any other sanction imposed by the Panel, be subject to an expulsion from a competition or a fine

30.5 A club may be held liable for an infringement as defined in at 30.1 committed by one of its officials and/or players. In such a case, an expulsion from a competition and/or a transfer ban may be pronounced in addition to a fine for the club concerned.

# **RULE 31: LIABILITY FOR SPECTATOR CONDUCT – (IFA Article 33)**

31.1 The home club is liable for any improper conduct among spectators, regardless of the question of culpable conduct or culpable oversight and depending on the circumstances, may be fined. Further sanctions outlined in Article 1.9 of this code may be imposed in the case of serious disturbances.

31.2 The visiting club is liable for improper conduct among its own group of spectators, regardless of the question of culpable conduct or culpable oversight and depending on the circumstances, may be fined. Further sanctions outlined in Article 1.9 of this Code may be imposed. Spectators occupying the away sector of a ground are regarded as the visiting club’s supporters, unless proven by the club to the contrary.

31.3 Improper conduct includes, but is not limited to, violence towards persons or objects, letting off incendiary devices or causing explosions, throwing missiles, the use of laser pens**,** displaying insulting slogans in any form, uttering insulting word(s) or sound(s), using offensive gestures, or invading the pitch.

31.4 The liability described in clauses 31.1 and 31.2 also includes matches played on neutral grounds, especially during the semi-final or final of a competition. Should a semi-final or final of a competition be played at the stadium of one of the competing clubs, the club playing at their own stadium will be considered the home club.

31.5 The Panel may determine that repeated infringements of rules 31.1 and 31.2 will attract further sanctions.

**RULE 32: DISCIPLINARY CHALLENGES – (IFA Article 35)**

## Mistaken Identity Challenge

In the case of a purported mistaken identity where a player or official is cautioned or dismissed in a match or reported as being cautioned or dismissed in a match, a player, official or club may submit a Mistaken Identity Challenge. The Mistaken Identity Challenge must be in the prescribed form and submitted via the Comet system or Email within four days and followed up in writing on Club Headed Paper within seven days after the date of communication from the Disciplinary Department/ Comet System.

In the case where the deadline for submission of the Mistaken Identity Challenge expires on a Designated Holiday the period specified above will be extended to the day immediately following the said Designated Holiday. Where a Mistaken Identity Challenge is submitted in these circumstances the Panel will deal with each Mistaken Identity Challenge as it considers appropriate in the circumstances. In any event the club should make available to the Panel evidence that a mistaken identity has been established. At any hearing, the Panel will require the attendance of both the player reported as having been cautioned or dismissed by a match official and the player, the club allege ought to have been cautioned or dismissed.

The player whom it is said ought to have been cautioned or dismissed should be on notice that the Panel may, if proven that mistaken identity has occurred, act in relation to that player at the hearing and therefore be provided with all relevant documentation in the possession of the club.

Where a player, official or club wish to submit a Mistaken Identity Challenge a deposit of £100 must accompany the written submission being made by the club no later than seven days after the date of communication from the Disciplinary Department/ Comet System. This sum shall be returnable only where a Mistaken Identity Challenge is either successful or not heard. The Panel reserves the right to retain the deposit where the club is found to have caused the mistaken identity.

**32.2 General Disciplinary Challenge**

(a) A player, official, or club may submit a General Disciplinary Challenge in the case of any Disciplinary Charge having been issued against him or it by the pursuant to Rule 17 of this Code. The General Disciplinary Challenge must be made in the prescribed form and submitted via the Comet system or Email on Club Headed Paper within four days after the date the Disciplinary Charge has been issued by the Disciplinary Department/Comet System to the person or club concerned. In the case where the deadline for submission of the General Disciplinary Challenge expires on a Designated Holiday the time specified above will be extended to the day immediately following the said Designated Holiday.

(b) A deposit of £100 must accompany the written submission being made by the club on Club Headed Paper no later than seven days after the date the Disciplinary Charge has been issued where the Disciplinary Charge or sanction is challenged. This sum shall be returnable only where the General Disciplinary Challenge is either successful or not heard.

(c) In lodging a General Disciplinary Challenge, the player, official, or club must state fully in writing the grounds for the challenge and provide the Committee with copies of all evidence, documents, and written submissions which the player, official and or club intends to rely on along with the reply to the Disciplinary Charge within the timeframe required. Additional evidence may also be considered by the Panel provided that such evidence is submitted as soon as reasonably practicable.

## 32.3 Provisions in relation to all Disciplinary Challenges

(a) On receipt of a Disciplinary Challenge and providing that the player, official or club have received written notification from the Panel that the Disciplinary Challenge is in order, any sanction (including for the avoidance of doubt any automatic suspension) offered or issued will be suspended pending the determination of the Disciplinary Challenge.

(b) Any suspensions that may be the subject of a Disciplinary Challenge shall not be suspended until the Disciplinary Challenge has been lodged as directed and in accordance with this Rule (including the payment of the appropriate deposit) and the player, official or club concerned have received written notification from the Panel that the Disciplinary Challenge is in order. When a player or official facing a suspension participates at a match without such written notification from the Panel, the Panel will issue the appropriate charge against the player, or official or for participating in a match whilst being ineligible.

(c) Disciplinary Challenges must meet the requirements of this Rule to be considered by the Panel.

(d) No Disciplinary Challenges will be heard against cautions or dismissals except in the case of a Mistaken Identity Challenge (cautions and dismissals).

(e) If the Disciplinary Challenge is unsuccessful, the player, official and or his club may be held liable in all, or in part of the expenses of the Disciplinary Challenge procedure. Should the Panel consider any Disciplinary Challenge to be of a frivolous nature or merely to release a player or official or match official from suspension to enable them to participate or officiate in a match it shall have the power to deal with the player or the official and/or club as it deems appropriate.

(f) In the case that a sanction has been issued, a Disciplinary Challenge may be withdrawn by a player, official or club prior to any hearing provided the suspension timeframe (detailed in Rule 15.7 of this Code) has not passed. Should a player, official or a club wish to withdraw a Disciplinary Challenge they must notify the Disciplinary Panel Secretary of such withdrawal in writing. Upon receipt of such notification, the Disciplinary Challenge will be deemed to be abandoned and the sanction offer against which the player, official or club had challenged will be imposed from the following Monday, subject to the overriding objective. The player or official’s club may be held liable in all or in part for the expenses of the Disciplinary Challenge procedure.

(g) All Disciplinary Challenges must be submitted with the relevant disciplinary authority of the NIBFA Affiliated League which issued the sanction or charge in question.

(h) The Disciplinary Committee reserves the right to deal with any issues that arise outside of the referee’s attention.

**RULE 33: HEARINGS – (IFA Article 36)**

31.1.1 The Disciplinary Panel shall have the power to conduct a hearing in the following circumstances:
When a player, official, match official or club lodges a Disciplinary Challenge (ie. A Mistaken Identity Challenge or a General Disciplinary Challenge)
When the Panel otherwise deems appropriate to do so pursuant to the over-riding objective.

33.2 The Panel shall have the power to direct the attendance of any player, official, or representatives of any club to attend at a hearing convened pursuant to this Rule. The Panel shall notify any person directed to attend of the date, time, and place of the hearing if their attendance is required. It shall be the duty of the persons whose attendance is directed to inform the Panel immediately of any difficulty in attending a hearing. The Panel will be guided by the requirement to have the matters dealt with in accordance with the overriding objective. In the event of a person or club whose attendance has been directed does not attend, the Panel will be entitled to draw any inference it deems appropriate by their failure to attend when reasonable notice has been provided and/or to issue a charge against that person or club pursuant to Rule 33.11.

33.3 Should a referee fail to attend a hearing without just or reasonable cause, the Panel has the discretion to report the Individual to the referee’s committee to take whatever action they feel appropriate in the circumstances.

33.4 The Panel shall have the power to direct that any person required to attend, produce documentation or items which in the opinion of the Panel would assist them in their determination of any issue at the hearing. In the case of a match official, it will be incumbent upon the match official to provide a full and comprehensive match report, in every case which requires a hearing, no later than seven days before the hearing.

The Panel will be entitled to draw any inference it deems appropriate by the failure of any person or club to produce any such documentation or item, or if the documentation or item is materially incomplete, when reasonable notice to produce the same has been provided, or when in the opinion of the Panel it would have been obvious to the relevant party that such material should have been produced to assist the Panel with its deliberations. Furthermore, the Panel may issue a charge against that person or club pursuant to Rule 32.2 (c) arising from a player, official, or club’s failure to produce any documentation or item when reasonable notice to do so has been provided and in the case of a match official’s failure to produce documentation to refer the matter on to the IFA Disciplinary Committee

33.5 It shall be the duty of anybody or anyone facing any complaint to notify the Panel no less than 48 hours before a hearing of the attendance of any person (including representatives) attending the hearing together with the details of any witness they may wish to call. A club is responsible for ensuring that its players or officials attend a hearing. Failure to notify the Disciplinary Panel will entitle the Panel to exclude any person from the hearing.

33.6 The Panel shall be entitled to deal with any hearing if a person or club, including those who are the subject of any charge fails to attend the hearing, if satisfied that it is pursuant to the overriding objective to do so.

33.7 In advance of the hearing, any person or club appearing before the Disciplinary Panel to answer any charge must be given copies of any documentation relevant to the facts of the charge which is already in the possession of the Panel and upon which the Panel may rely. Where documentation is received for the first time during any hearing, the Panel will determine, following enquiry of any person or club answering a charge, whether in the interests of fairness time should be afforded to any party to consider such documentation.

33.8 If before a hearing it becomes apparent to the Panel that the case will involve specialist (including medical) evidence, or has elements which are unusual or difficult, the Panel may direct that such evidence be served in such a manner that the hearing of the case may be properly and fairly conducted.

33.9 The Panel shall be entitled to rely upon audio or video footage, including but not limited to television evidence when considering any case before it. The Panel should, where practicable, identify to any person or club charged of the existence of such footage it intends to rely upon and where the material is not publicly available invite the person or club charged to attend a viewing in advance of any hearing to be afforded an opportunity to inspect this material. The existence of such material having been identified, it will be incumbent upon the person or club charged to decide through the Secretary to the Panel to inspect the material. Where a person or club who is the subject of a charge intends to rely on such material, it will be the responsibility of that person or club to provide copies of the footage which the Panel can view no later than 48 hours in advance of the hearing.

33.10 The Panel shall be entitled to rely upon any evidence or material which it deems capable of being relevant to the issues before the Panel giving such weight as it deems fit to the evidence, dependent upon its source and its content. It will be for the Panel to determine what evidence it hears and considers.

33.11 Where it appears to the Panel that a player, official, or club has acted in a manner intended to frustrate the process of conducting an effective hearing, the Panel shall have the power to charge that person or club pursuant to Rule 34.13 and in the case of a match official refer the matter to the IFA Disciplinary Committee.

33.12 If the circumstances so require, the Panel may arrange for a hearing to be conducted by video conference or any other similar method.

**RULE 34: PROCEDURES FOR THE CONDUCTING OF HEARINGS – (IFA Article 37)**

## Principles

34.1 Hearings before the Disciplinary Panel are disciplinary proceedings; the Panel is not a court of law. The Panel shall endeavour, where possible, to abide by the provisions under this Rule; however, it shall retain an overriding discretion to act in accordance with the overriding objective.

34.2 The burden of proof regarding disciplinary infringements rests on the Affiliated Member League. It is for the Affiliated Member League through the process set out in this Code to present evidence to the Panel and establish a case against a person or club charged. Where it appears to the Panel that the Affiliated Member League has failed to discharge that burden, the Panel shall be entitled to discontinue charge proceedings. In cases of mistaken identity pursuant to Rule 33.1, whilst the burden of proof is on the Affiliated Member League, the Panel will be entitled to assume that the relevant match official’s identification was correct and best placed to act as they did until such time as evidence is produced by the person or club challenging the decision to displace that assumption.

34.3 The standard of proof in all disciplinary cases is on the balance of probabilities. For the avoidance of doubt, there is no sliding scale.

34.4 The NIBFA Disciplinary Panel will be drawn from a reserve of members of the affiliated leagues. The quorum for the Panel is 3 members, one of whom shall have a legal background. The Panel shall have the power to appoint Sub-Committees as they see fit to deal with all disciplinary matters including hearings. Each Sub-Committee shall comprise of no fewer than 3 members, one of whom should be from a legal background.

34.5 During the course of any hearing, all submissions and questioning must be directed through the appointed Chairman of the Panel. During any hearing, the Chairman of the Panel shall, in his discretion, direct the parties on how proceedings are to be conducted.

34.6 Where a hearing is convened, all members of the Panel must avoid a situation in which they or any Club that they represent or are associated with has, or may have, a direct or indirect interest that conflicts, or possibly may conflict, with the interests of the Panel or the overriding objective. No member of the Panel shall be entitled to vote on any matter directly related to or involving the Club that they so represent or are associated with. Members of the Panel must declare any such conflict of interest to the Panel as soon as they become aware of it. It shall be incumbent upon any person or club appearing at a hearing before the Panel to identify at the outset of proceedings whether they believe any such conflict of interest arises. If required, the Chairman of the Panel will determine whether a conflict of interest has arisen and take what steps are necessary to ensure that a fair hearing results pursuant to the overriding objective.

34.7 Any person or club charged in proceedings and appearing before the Panel who is of the opinion that they have not been given reasonable notice of the charges or the evidence to be relied upon during any hearing shall be entitled to invite the Panel to consider whether an adjournment should be granted. The Panel will determine whether any adjournment is required pursuant to the overriding objective.

34.8 Where notice has been given of a hearing to any person or club charged pursuant to Rule 17 the Panel shall have the power to proceed to a hearing in the absence of the person or club charged if they fail to attend at the date and time notified without providing a reasonable excuse. Where the Panel find that the attendance of any person or club charged or required to attend is necessary to properly determine any issue before them, the Panel shall have the power to suspend any such person or club until such time as they appear before the Panel, in which event every reasonable attempt will be made to agree with the person the date for a further hearing.

34.9 Any player, official, club or league charged will be entitled to be represented at a hearing by a nominee or representative providing notice of the attendance of such persons (including the name, contact details and profession of such a person) has been given to the Panel no later than 48 hours before the hearing. If such notice has not been given, it shall be at the discretion of the Panel to refuse such a person entry to the hearing.

34.10 The player, official and/or representatives of the club or league charged shall be admitted to the hearing, together with the relevant match official(s) or other such person who submitted a report or evidence in relation to the charge(s) before the Panel, including evidence relied upon by the person or club charged. It shall be at the discretion of the Panel to refuse any such person entry to the hearing where there has been inadequate notice as directed in this Code.

34.11 The Panel shall have the power to require the attendance at the hearing of any witness who can give relevant evidence on the issues before the Panel. In any case where a witness required by the Panel to attend the hearing refuses or fails to attend, the Panel shall be entitled to take account of any written evidence available from that witness and determine what weight can be attributed to that evidence in the absence of their attendance.

34.12 Persons or clubs charged shall be entitled at a hearing to call relevant evidence from any person. Clubs must give notice in writing or by email to the Panel of the name and contact details of any such witness together with details of the nature of any such evidence, including a written account of that person’s evidence no later than 48 hours before any hearing. The Panel shall determine whether such evidence is relevant for the purpose of any hearing and direct whether such evidence may be relied upon pursuant to the overriding objective.

**Contempt of the Disciplinary Code**

34.13 Where it appears to the Panel that, during any charge procedure, hearing, or in the aftermath of any such procedure or hearing, any party has sought to deliberately mislead the Panel or endeavoured by any means to frustrate the due process of proceedings pursuant to this Code, the Panel shall be entitled to charge any such persons with being in Contempt of the Disciplinary Code. In such circumstances, the Panel will determine whether to deal with such matters summarily as they arise or whether to adjourn pursuant to the overriding objective. The Panel shall have the power to sanction any party found to have been in breach of these provisions by way of suspension or fine.

**Proceedings at Hearings**

34.14 At the commencement of a hearing, the Chairman shall confirm the identities of the persons admitted to the hearing and introduce the Panel members.

34.15 Before hearing evidence, the Panel shall satisfy itself that the player, official and/or club is aware of the reasons for their presence at the hearing and the nature of the allegations made against them.

34.16 The Panel (only) shall have the power to appoint a Case Presenter to assist the Panel at a hearing when it is deemed appropriate to do so. Such a person must be legally qualified and shall be appointed by the Chairman of the Panel. The case presenter shall have the role of outlining the case, presenting the evidence defined at paragraph 34.18 to the Committee and, at the discretion of the Chairman of the Panel, challenging, the evidence as defined at paragraph 34.19. The Case Presenter will be excluded from any aspect of a hearing which does not involve the presentation of evidence, submissions on the facts or the Panel determination. In cases where a Case Presenter is appointed, supplementary questions from the Panel shall only be asked by the Chairman of the Panel. As a person appointed by the Panel, the Case Presenter shall be treated by all parties involved in the hearing with the same degree of respect to be afforded any member of the Panel. The Chairman may disengage or direct the Case Presenter as appropriate pursuant to the overriding objective. Any person charged in relation to a case where a Case Presenter is to be used shall be notified of this no later than seven days before the Hearing.

**Sanction Only Hearings**

34.17 Where in advance of a hearing, the person or club charged has indicated that they accept the charge(s) alleged but wish to make representations in respect of the appropriate sanction, the person or club charged or the representative (but not both) may, at the discretion of the Panel be invited to attend a hearing to make relevant representations to the Panel; the Panel shall be guided by Rule 34.23 in terms of the receipt of such representations. Where the person or club charged wishes to call evidence in these circumstances, the Panel will be guided by the principles set out at Rules 34.18 - 34.23. All deliberations and decisions of the Panel shall be guided by Rules 34.24 - 34.30 of this Code. The Panel has the right to hold a hearing in any circumstance that it feels necessary, regardless of whether the person or club charged wishes to make representations in terms of sanction. Parties are encouraged to attend in order that the matter may be dealt with in accordance with the principles overriding objective set out in clause 1.6.

**Charge & Sanction Hearings**

34.18 The Panel shall first hear and/or consider the evidence available to the Panel including (but not limited to) the evidence upon which a charge has been issued. The player, official, club or league charged, or their representative (but not both) shall be given the opportunity through the Chairman to challenge any such evidence. The Chairman of the Panel shall have discretion to restrict questioning pursuant to the overriding objective.

34.19 The Panel shall then hear and/or consider any relevant evidence called on behalf of the player, official, club or league charged. The Panel and/or any person appointed by the Panel for the purpose of presenting a charge to the Panel shall be entitled, through the Chairman of the Panel to challenge any such evidence.

34.20 The Panel may draw such inferences as it considers appropriate from the failure of any person concerned with any charge to give evidence in accordance with this Code or to answer a question put to them during a hearing. Nothing in this article should be regarded as conflicting with the presumption of innocence in favour of the person or club charged and the burden of proof upon the Affiliated Member League to prove a charge is made out.

34.21 The Panel shall be entitled to consider any relevant disciplinary record of any person or Club as part of the evidence in the case. However, the Panel must not come to any finding of fact which is founded singularly or significantly on any previous adverse disciplinary finding. Previous disciplinary findings must not be used to bolster the evidence against a person or club charged when the other evidence is weak or tenuous.

34.22 The Panel shall be entitled to receive and consider all relevant evidence including (but not limited to) oral evidence, written statements, television, and radio evidence, extracts from social media and other internet- based material. Where a witness purports to give relevant evidence, that person should attend to give live oral evidence. Any statement or letter submitted in the name of any person will be deemed to be from the purported author of such material unless proven to the contrary and can be used against that person by the Panel for any other relevant purpose including separate disciplinary proceedings. Where evidence is not first-hand, such evidence will be given such weight as the Panel deems fit.

34.23 At the discretion of the Chairman, following the conclusion of the evidence at a hearing, the player, official, club or league and/or their representative(s) (but not both) shall be given the opportunity to supplement any written submission to the Committee and make limited representations on the evidence before the Panel and in respect of the sanction which would be imposed were the charge to be proved. The Chairman of the Panel shall have a discretion to restrict any representations including placing a time limit upon them.

**Deliberations**

34.24 Having heard the evidence and any submissions, the Chairman shall invite all persons other than the members of the Panel to retire whilst the Panel considers its decision in private.

34.25 When coming to their determination, the Panel shall do so only on the evidence which has been called, referred to or presented before the Panel at the hearing. At the Chairman’s discretion, following retirement the Panel may recall the parties to deal with any issue concerning their deliberations.

34.26 The Panel shall come to its determination in respect of the charge and any sanction based on a straightforward majority. Where required, the Panel shall have a casting vote.

## Decisions

34.27 Following their deliberations, the person or club charged and/or their representatives shall be invited to return before the Panel for the delivery of the Panel Committee’s determination. The Disciplinary Panel pass their decisions entirely independently; in particular, they shall not receive instructions from any other body. The person or club charged shall be informed of the Panel determination, that is to say:

* + What charge(s), if any, have been proved
	+ What charge(s), if any, have not been proved
	+ If proved, what core findings of fact the Panel have reached in coming to their determination on the charge
	+ What sanction has been imposed in respect of any charge proved
	+ What factors have been considered in determining any sanction imposed

34.28 Any person or club against whom, following a hearing, a charge has been proved, shall be notified by the Panel that confirmation of the decision will be given in writing by email to the email address previously provided during the charging procedure. They shall be reminded of their right of appeal both at the conclusion of the hearing and subsequently in writing and must comply with the following conditions pertaining to an appeal.

(a) Disciplinary appeals shall be heard by a disciplinary appeals panel. Each disciplinary appeal panel will be appointed by NIBFA.

(b) Clubs in default of their financial obligations to a League more than 28 days from when they fall due shall forfeit the right to submit a disciplinary appeal.

(c) A player, official or Club shall have no right of appeal against cautions or dismissals except in the case of alleged mistaken identity for a player who is cautioned or dismissed in a match.

(d) Subject to the conditions at (b) & (c), a Club may submit a Disciplinary Appeal to the Disciplinary Appeals Panel in the case of any penalty issued by NIBFA on behalf of any affiliated member league or club.

 (e) Any Disciplinary Appeal on behalf of a player official or Club as per conditions at (d) must be lodged by that Club’s Registered Secretary and will only be accepted for consideration by the Disciplinary Appeals Panel if lodged by that official or Club’s Registered Secretary on official Club headed paper.

**RULE 35: FAILURE TO RESPECT DECISIONS (IFA Article 38)**

35.1 Anyone who fails to comply with a decision passed issued through the NIBFA Disciplinary process, (subsequent appeal decision) or IFA: will be fined for failing to comply with a decision will be granted a final deadline by the body issuing the final sanction in which to pay the amount due or to comply with the decision (Only for clubs:) will be warned and notified that, in the case of default or failure to comply with a decision within the period stipulated, points will be deducted or relegation to a lower division ordered where a member league can facilitate this. A transfer ban may also be pronounced.

35.2 If a club disregards the final time limit, NIBFA shall be request member leagues to implement the sanctions threatened.

35.3 If points are deducted, they shall be proportionate to the amount owed.

35.4 A ban on any football-related activity may also be imposed against natural persons.

**RULE 36: MISCONDUCT WHICH HAS COME TO THE ATTENTION OF THE COMMITTEE OTHER THAN BY MEANS OF A MATCH OFFICIAL’S REPORT - (IFA Article 39)**

36.1 A club submitting a complaint of misconduct about any player, official, match official or club must submit their complaint in writing dispatched by email on club headed paper to secretary of the league and *nibfa.**discipline@irishfa.com* within 14 days from the alleged misconduct coming to their attention. NIBFA will send a copy of the complaint to the club or person who is the subject of the complaint.

36.2 A deposit of £100 shall be lodged in accordance with 36.1 of this code, which shall be returnable only where it is determined that there is a case to answer.

36.3 In lodging a complaint the club must state fully in writing outlining their complaint and include copies of all evidence, documents, and written submissions which the Club intends to rely on to substantiate their complaint within the specified timeframe.

36.4 NIBFA, a Member League, or Committee members of same or department within the IFA submitting such a complaint of misconduct will not be required to adhere to the procedure detailed in 36.2 of this Code. However, such a claim must be submitted in writing with a full explanation of the claim within 14 days of the alleged misconduct coming to their attention. A copy of the complaint will be sent to the club or person who is the subject of the complaint.

36.5 A Match Official submitting such a complaint of misconduct will be required to adhere to the procedure detailed in Articles 36.1 and 36.2 of this Code. Such a claim must be submitted in writing with a full explanation of the claim within 14 days of the alleged misconduct coming to their attention. A copy will of the complaint will be sent to the club or person who is the subject of the complaint.

36.6 The Disciplinary Panel reserves the right to deal with cases of serious misconduct that arise outside of the referee’s attention.

36.7 All complaints of misconduct from a club will require full co-operation from the claimant.

# **RULE 37: MISCELLANEOUS OFFENCES - (IFA Article 40)**

37.1 Where a match official’s report indicates that an offence has occurred which is not specified in this Disciplinary Code the Committee reserves the right to impose sanctions within the IFA Disciplinary Code.

## RULE 38: DISCIPLINARY APPEALS PROCEDURE – (IFA Article 41)

38.1 A Disciplinary Appeal must be made in writing on official Club headed paper and sent by Special Delivery Post within five days of the date on which notification of the decision or penalty being appealed against was sent.

38.2 Disciplinary Appeals must be addressed to the ‘Disciplinary Appeals Panel’ and sent:
‘c/o BKYL LEAGUE SECRETARY, 38 TATTENABUDDAGH LANE,
FIVEMILETOWN, CO TYRONE. BT75 0NW’, as per 38.1.

38.3. The Disciplinary Appeal being lodged must include the following payment and documentation:

1. A payment in the sum of £50 for a player or £100 in the case of an official or Club, which is refundable in the case of a successful appeal
2. A copy of the decision or penalty being appealed against
3. Confirmation of the date upon which notification of such decision or penalty was received by the appellant
4. All additional documentation, submissions, and details of evidence upon which the appellant intends to rely at the Disciplinary Appeal Hearing
	* 1. It will be at the discretion of the Disciplinary Appeals Panel as to whether any further documentation or evidence, not so lodged as per clause 38.3, shall be considered at the Disciplinary Appeal Hearing.
		2. All Disciplinary Appeal Hearings shall commence within a reasonable period from receipt of the Disciplinary Appeal. The NIBFA Disciplinary Secretary or his agent shall inform all parties to the Disciplinary Appeal of the venue, date, and time of the Disciplinary Appeal Hearing.
		3. The Disciplinary Appeals Panel can issue directions to the parties in respect of the hearing prior to proceedings commencing.
		4. All parties involved in the Disciplinary Appeal must, at least three days before the hearing, confirm in writing, by post, fax or email to the name and relationship to the party, of all persons who will be attending the Disciplinary Appeal Hearing on their behalf, or at their request. The Disciplinary Appeals Panel shall have discretion to permit the attendance of any persons not confirmed within the stated deadlines.
		5. Any party involved in the Disciplinary Appeal, which fails to attend a Disciplinary Appeal Hearing if requested to do so may be subject to disciplinary action. The case may be heard in their absence.
		6. In cases of urgency, The Disciplinary Appeals Panel may amend the time limits indicated above to facilitate an expedited Disciplinary Appeals process.
		7. Upon receipt of a Disciplinary Appeal, the decision or penalty being appealed shall be set aside pending the outcome of the Disciplinary Appeal Hearing.
		8. Should the Disciplinary Appeals Panel consider a Disciplinary Appeal to be of a frivolous nature or merely to release a player or official from suspension to enable them to participate in a match, they shall have the power to penalise the player, official and or Club as it deems appropriate.

## RULE 39: EVIDENCE

39.1 The Disciplinary Appeals Panel will have absolute discretion regarding evidence.
39.2. The following are admissible:
39.2.1 Reports from Match Officials,
39.2.2 Reports from Match Monitors and referee observers,
39.2.3 Declarations from the parties and witnesses, material evidence, expert opinions, and unedited audio or video recordings.
39.3 The Disciplinary Appeals Panel shall hear evidence from all witnesses it considers relevant to the case. It is a matter for the Disciplinary Appeals Panel to deem if a witness is relevant to the case in hand. The Disciplinary Appeals Panel may refuse to hear a witness or to take evidence that is not considered relevant or which would otherwise unnecessarily delay the proceedings.
39.4 The Disciplinary Appeals Panel shall make decisions based on the rules and the evidence before them.
39.5 The Disciplinary Appeals Panel may request a party or any other body to submit information or documentation.
39.6 Facts contained in Match Officials’ or Match Monitors reports are presumed to be accurate.
39.7 Evidence of the inaccuracy of the contents of Match Officials’ or Match Monitors reports may be submitted for consideration by the Disciplinary Appeals Panel.

## RULE 40: PROCEDURES FOR THE CONDUCT OF DISCIPLINARY HEARINGS

40.1 A member of the Disciplinary Appeals Panel is obliged to retire from the consideration of any case if it involves their Club.

40.2 The Appellant player, official or Club may be represented by a club official who shall be admitted to the hearing.

40.3 At the commencement of the Disciplinary Appeal Hearing, the Chairman of the Appeals Panel shall confirm the identities of the persons admitted to the hearing and introduce the Disciplinary Appeals Panel members. The Appellant player, official or Club will be required to give good reason for any objection to the composition of the Disciplinary Appeals Panel.

40.4 The Appellant player, official or Club and/or their representative shall be given the opportunity to comment upon and supplement his written submission to the Appeals Panel.

40.5 At any time, the Chairman, and through him, members of the Disciplinary Appeals Panel may ask questions of any of the parties. The Disciplinary Appeals Panel may draw such inferences as it considers appropriate from the failure of the person charged to give evidence or answer a question put to him.

40.6 Evidence from any witness called by the Appellant player, official, Club may be heard at the discretion of the panel.

## RULE 41: NOTIFICATION OF DECISION RELATING TO DISCIPLINARY APPEAL HEARING

41.1 The Disciplinary Appeals Panel may issue an oral decision after the hearing and shall provide written notification of its decision to the Appellant player, official or Club within a reasonable period from the date of the Disciplinary Appeal Hearing.

41.2 Decisions and other documents intended for players or officials will be addressed to the listed Secretary of the Club concerned.

41.3 Decisions shall be formally communicated by way of ordinary letter post, fax and/or electronic mail.

## RULE 42: FORM & CONTENT OF THE DECISION RELATING TO DISCIPLINARY APPEAL HEARING 42.1. The decision shall be in writing and contain:

1. The composition of the Disciplinary Appeals Panel
2. The names of the parties
3. The terms of the decision, including the date of coming into force
4. Notice of the channels for appeal

**RULE 43: APPEAL TO IFA**43.1. Disciplinary Appeals Panel decisions may be appealed to the Irish Football Association Appeals Committee in accordance with the Article 14 of the IFA Articles of Association.

# **RULE 44: NIBFA DISCIPLINARY CODES**

44.1 The procedures described within the code may be adapted to suit the Northern Ireland Boys Football Association and its affiliated Youth Leagues noting that some powers can be administered by the NIBFA only. However, the fines & sanctions detailed in this code must be adopted for the purpose of harmonising disciplinary sanctions.

44.2 Northern Ireland Boys’ Football Association and its affiliated Youth Leagues shall be entitled to choose their means of communication when notifying suspensions or charges.