

## DISCIPLINARY HEARING JUDGMENT

Alleged Offender: Petra Druskovic

Position: Player and Team Manager, Croatia 7's Team

Competition: Women's 7's Conference, Belgrade 8<sup>th</sup> June 2024

Charge: Misconduct

Hearing: Remote

PANEL –

Chairperson: Martin Picton (ENG)

Wing: Michiel van Dijk (NED)

Wing: Donal Courtney (IRL)

PRESENT –

Petra Druskovic

Danny Rumble (representing Ms Druskovic)

David Baird-Smith (Rugby Europe)

CIRCUMSTANCES –

The complaint was initiated by Atomi Andreaa-Maria (referee) whose report covered behaviour on the part of Ms Druskovic both during the matches and also afterwards. Ms Druskovic's involvement was principally as a coach but she did also play for some of the time when there was an unanticipated need. The Panel had evidence from more than one source that Ms Druskovic's behaviour during the games, both as a coach and when playing, was challenging particularly when she disagreed with decisions made by the officials. Philippe Marguin (Referee Manager) highlighted a number of incidents in the Bronze Final, which was refereed by Ms Andreaa-Maria and in which Ms Druskovic participated, that were in his view 'borderline' on the part of Ms Druskovic. Ms Druskovic did not accept that her behaviour had crossed the line of legitimate questing of decisions in her role as player/coach in that match.

Mr Rumble submitted on her behalf that given the absence of a warning being administered or Ms Druskovic being shown a yellow card for her conduct it would not be right to take account of her behaviour as amounting to 'misconduct' even when assessed in conjunction with events once the game was concluded. We saw force in that argument although concluded it was legitimate to take account of what occurred in the game when assessing what conclusions we should reach in respect of a post-match discussion involving Ms Druskovic and Ms Andreaa-Maria.

The focus of the misconduct complaint related to an approach made to Ms Andreaa-Maria by Ms Druskovic at the end of the tournament. Ms Andreaa-Maria related what occurred in these terms:

“After the tournament was done, and the games were over. I was at behind the building where the team tents were, with referee Roni Kipnis waiting to go to the banquet, she came to us, telling me, “we must be friends and drink a beer” I told her “ I will be honest, I do not like how you treated me because you are also a referee, I’ll talk with you, but I will not be your friend.” She was then visibly nervous, kept calling me arrogant, told me that I do “not respect when people are giving me an advice” and I “must listen to her, because she is a trophy referee, and other referees came to her and apologized for mistakes, but she (Maria) did not come because she is arrogant.” I told her I understand her point, but, she cannot mistreat me on the field and come to me like nothing happened, I have explained I talked with my PRs and they told me where I was wrong on the field and agreed with my decisions and calls. She told me, she went to the PRs to complain about me, and they told Petra, that I am only new and I need to grow, and only came from U18. We had to go to the banquet, Roni tried to diffuse the situation, but she kept telling us where we made mistakes. She said most Romanian referees are arrogant, I told her we need to go, said goodbye, and Petra then told me “there is a reason she is in the trophy, she (maria) is not good enough, arrogant, and will never go up or develop.”

#### PETRA DRUSKOVIC’S ACCOUNT –

Ms Druskovic, who raised no objection to the constitution of the panel, disputed the charge and relied upon a statement that she had provided in advance. She agreed that there was a discussion between herself and Ms Andreaa-Maria and that in the course of that she suggested they should discuss the events occurring in the match over a drink. She disputed having made the remarks related by Ms Andreaa-Maria that suggested errors on the part of the referee in particular and Romanian referees in general. She also disputed making a comment referencing in a negative way the difference as between ‘Trophy’ and ‘Conference’ referees. Ms Druskovic did accept having made a comment to that effect but said it was to someone else and had been made the day before the Bronze Final. She suggested that Ms Andreaa-Maria may have overheard her say that and conflated elements of their conversation in the aftermath of the game with something Ms Druskovic had said on a different occasion.

#### DISCUSSION AND DISPOSAL –

The Panel concluded that Ms Druskovic’s decision to speak to Ms Andreaa-Maria after the game was a considered one and not with a view to rapprochement. We were satisfied to the requisite standard that Ms Druskovic was intent on making a point about the quality of the refereeing and not by way of a compliment. We were also satisfied that she did draw a comparison as between her level in the hierarchy of refereeing in contradistinction to that of Ms Andreaa-Maria. We did not find the suggestion that Ms Andreaa-Maria may have heard Ms Druskovic make such a remark in a different context on an earlier occasion in any way credible.

We were satisfied that the manner of Ms Druskovic’s approach, the purpose of it and the words that she used amounted to misconduct. Complaints as to the conduct of officials can be communicated through official channels but are never appropriately dealt with by the use of derogatory and intemperate language. Ms Druskovic had allowed her emotions and passion for the game get the

better of her and she should have respected the position of Ms Andreaa-Maria as an official and accorded to her a proper degree of respect and civility.

We considered it appropriate to have regard to the sanction table relevant to a 9.28 offence – “A Player must not disrespect the authority of a Match Official”. We considered that the conduct would merit a low-end entry point given that this was a relatively short exchange, albeit it was brought to an end consequent on the intervention of another official. It should never have taken place. For a player that would merit a 2 match/week suspension. As Ms Druskovic disputed the charge we did not consider there was any basis to reduce the suspension period.

Ms Druskovic had indicated her future rugby commitments ahead of this hearing. An immediate suspension would prevent Ms Druskovic from delivering an ACTIVATE training course in Split (scheduled to take place the day following the hearing). It would also prevent her hosting an end of season touch rugby tournament or, if we did not consider that a ‘meaningful’ professional fixture, then the next event she would miss would be an U18 and U16 7s training camp. We considered it appropriate to reflect upon whom an immediate suspension would impact more – Ms Druskovic or the young people who stood to benefit from her input as a significant figure in Croatian rugby? We concluded that the better course was to suspend the sanction for 12 months. We considered it important that the disposal reflect the serious nature of Ms Druskovic’s behaviour. The fact that the conduct merited a period of suspension sends out a message to others as to the need to respect match officials and to exercise self-control. It should also act as a significant deterrent to Ms Druskovic should her emotions be engaged going forwards, as well as underlining to her (and others) that whatever role she may have within the sport on occasions when a player or a coach she must engage with officials in a wholly professional and appropriately respectful manner.

We considered that the capacity to combine other requirements with a suspended sanction enabled the Panel to achieve an educative impact. There are two facets of the additional requirements:

- (i) Ms Druskovic must deliver a talk on the importance of affording rugby officials an appropriate level of respect to those attending the ACTIVATE event;
- (ii) Ms Druskovic to deliver a similar presentation to the participants at the U18 and U16 training camp.

It was explained to Ms Druskovic that should there be any further discipline offence during the period of suspension then she should expect the two week/match suspension to be enforced whatever pending commitments she has as coach/educator/player. Others should also be aware that for conduct of this nature an immediate period of suspension may well result whatever the consequences. Misconduct towards officials is taken very seriously and sadly it appears to feature far too frequently. Without people prepared to officiate the sport would not survive and people who contribute to the game by so doing are entitled to proper respect and will be supported when players, coaches and other fail to afford that to them.

Martin Picton – Chair

21<sup>st</sup> June 2024