

FA NATIONAL SERIOUS CASE PANEL
CONSOLIDATED DISCIPLINARY COMMISSION

CHAIRMAN SITTING ALONE

on behalf of Worcestershire Football Association

NON-PERSONAL HEARING

of

Joe Bruce

Worcester United FC

[Case IDs: 11461770M & 11461768M]

Consolidated with

Joshua Lloyd

Worcester United FC

[Case ID: 11461756M]

&

Worcester United FC

[Case IDs: 11461775M, 11461778M & 11461779M]

THE DECISION AND REASONS OF THE COMMISSION

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Introduction

1. On 07 October 2023, Worcester United FC (“Worcester”, the “Home Club”), played a Herefordshire Football League, Premier Division fixture against Kington Town FC (“Kington” the “away club”) - collectively the “match”.
2. Following the fixture, the Match Referee submitted six Extraordinary Incident Reports regarding alleged misconduct that took place during and after the fixture.
3. Worcestershire Football Association (“Worcestershire FA”) investigated the reported incidents.

The Charges

4. On 09 November 2023, Worcestershire FA charged Joe Bruce;
 - 4.1. **Charge 1;** with misconduct for a breach of FA Rule E3 - Improper Conduct against a Match Official (including threatening and/or abusive language /behaviour);
 - 4.2. It is alleged that Joe Bruce (Worcester United FC - player) used threatening and/or abusive and/or indecent and/or insulting words or behaviour contrary to FA Rule E3.1 and it is further alleged that this constitutes Threatening Behaviour Against a Match Official as defined in FA Regulations.
 - 4.3. This refers to the allegation/s as: *"I then approached Joe Bruce again and he entered the field of play and started walking backwards calling me "a fucking cheat, a fat 4 eyed lazy cunt, a fat Bastard, a fucking wanker" over and over again as we got to the far side of the pitch he said "you gonna fucking have it after the match" this was heard by the Kington bench" or similar.*
 - 4.4. Worcestershire FA advised in the charge letter that the range of sanction for this offence was a suspension of between 56 - 182 days with an entry point, prior to considering any mitigating or aggravating factors of 112

days; a fine of up to £100, with a mandatory minimum fine of £50 and a mandatory education programme to be completed before the time-based suspension is served.

4.5. The relevant section of FA Rule E3 states¹:

“E3.1 A Participant shall at all times act in the best interest of the game and shall not act in any manner which is improper or brings the game into disrepute or use any one, or a combination of, violent conduct, serious foul play, threatening, abusive, indecent or insulting words or behaviour.

[...]”

5. On 09 November 2023, Worcestershire FA also charged Joe Bruce;

5.1. **Charge 2;** with misconduct for a breach of FA Rule E3 – Improper Conduct against a Match Official (including abusive language/behaviour);

5.2. It is alleged that Joe Bruce (Worcester United FC - Coach) used Improper Conduct against a Match Official (including Abusive Language/Behaviour) contrary to FA Rule E3 - it is alleged that the above-named participant received a red card as a non-playing participant due to alleged language/behaviour described as: *"at this point Joe Bruce became very angry as he felt it was the other way and started shouting and swearing at me. I approached him and asked him to stop, he then called me a fat Cunt and a disgrace. I showed him a red card and asked him to leave the dug out BUT he refused, I asked him 4 times and he refused every time becoming more abusive and aggressive"* or similar.

5.3. Worcestershire FA advised in the charge letter that the range of sanction for this offence was a suspension of between 0-6 Matches and a fine up to £70.

5.4. The relevant section of FA Rule E3 states²:

¹ p. 143 of FA Handbook

² p. 143 of FA Handbook

“E3.1 A Participant shall at all times act in the best interest of the game and shall not act in any manner which is improper or brings the game into disrepute or use any one, or a combination of, violent conduct, serious foul play, threatening, abusive, indecent or insulting words or behaviour.

[...]”

6. In consolidation on 09 November 2023, Worcestershire FA charged Joshua Lloyd;
 - 6.1. with misconduct for a breach of FA Rule E3 – Improper Conduct against a Match Official - (including threatening and/or abusive language/behaviour);
 - 6.2. It is alleged that Joshua Lloyd (Worcester United FC - player) used threatening and/or abusive and/or indecent and/or insulting words or behaviour contrary to FA Rule E3.1 and it is further alleged that this constitutes Threatening Behaviour Against a Match Official as defined in FA Regulations.
 - 6.3. This refers to the allegation/s as: *"he then turned very violent towards me, he came nose to nose with me, he was red in the face and spitting when he was shouting at me and told me he was going to "smash me up" he said you fucking having it Ref" and/or "I went into the changing room to get changed and was aware of some noise, I opened the door to Referee room to see Josh Lloyd the player I sent off putting a 6 a side goal, some chairs and a long net against my door to barricade me in, I shouted for assistance otherwise I would call the police, another player came in and removed the items. At this point I felt for my safety so I gathered all my belongings and went and stood outside the Kington Dressing and changed in the open air as I felt this was a safe option for me" or similar.*
 - 6.4. Worcestershire FA advised in the charge letter that the range of sanction for this offence was a suspension of between 56 - 182 days with an entry point, prior to considering any mitigating or aggravating factors of 112 days; a fine of up to £100, with a mandatory minimum fine of £50 and a mandatory education programme to be completed before the time-based suspension is served.

6.5. The relevant section of FA Rule E3 states³:

“E3.1 A Participant shall at all times act in the best interest of the game and shall not act in any manner which is improper or brings the game into disrepute or use any one, or a combination of, violent conduct, serious foul play, threatening, abusive, indecent or insulting words or behaviour.

[...]”

7. In consolidation on 09 November 2023 Worcestershire FA charged Worcester United FC;

7.1. with three separate charges for misconduct for a breach of FA Rule E21 – Failed to ensure spectators and/or its supporters (and anyone purporting to be its supporters or followers) conduct themselves in an orderly fashion whilst attending any Match;

7.2. Case **11461775M Charge 1**; It is alleged that Worcester United FC - failed to ensure that spectators and/or its supporters (and anyone purporting to be its supporters or followers) conducted themselves in an orderly fashion and refrained from improper, offensive, violent, threatening, abusive, indecent, insulting or provocative words and/or behaviour contrary to FA Rule E21.1.

7.3. It is further alleged that the words and/or behaviour made reference to Physical Contact or Attempted Physical Contact against a Match Official - this is described as: *"At 84 minutes I was hit by an object, a conker was thrown from a Worcester supporter and it hit me on the back of the head, at this point a Kington player came over a said that there were a number of objects being thrown and I was the target. I requested this be stopped but was unable to identify the person throwing, in total I collected 7 conkers thrown at me"* or similar

7.4. Case **11461778M Charge 2**; It is alleged that Worcester United FC - failed to ensure that spectators and/or its supporters (and anyone purporting to be its supporters or followers) conducted themselves in an orderly fashion

³ p. 143 of FA Handbook

and refrained from improper, offensive, violent, threatening, abusive, indecent, insulting or provocative words and/or behaviour contrary to FA Rule E21.1.

7.5. It is alleged that the words and/or behaviour took place and described as: *"I started to walk to the dressing room and the video man from Worcester started following me calling me a disgrace and fucking fat bastard, the fattest referee he's seen among other thing, this continued from him until I left site"* or similar.

7.6. Case **11461779M Charge 3**; It is alleged that Worcester United FC - failed to ensure that spectators and/or its supporters (and anyone purporting to be its supporters or followers) conducted themselves in an orderly fashion and refrained from improper, offensive, violent, threatening, abusive, indecent, insulting or provocative words and/or behaviour contrary to FA Rule E21.1.

7.7. It is further alleged that the words and/or behaviour made reference to Threatening and/or Abusive Behaviour against a Match Official, this is described as: *"I was also approached by 3 other Worcester supporters who were abusive towards me and told me I need to clear off if I knew what was good for me"* or similar.

7.8. Each separate charge carries a sanction of a fine up to £300.

7.9. The relevant section of FA Rule E21 states⁴:

"E21 A Club must ensure that spectators and/or its supporters (and anyone purporting to be its supporters or followers) conduct themselves in an orderly fashion whilst attending any Match and do not:

E21.1 "use words or otherwise behave in a way which is improper, offensive, violent, threatening, abusive, indecent, insulting or provocative;

E21.2 throw missiles or other potentially harmful or dangerous objects at or on to the pitch; E21.3 encroach on to the pitch or commit any form of pitch incursion;

⁴ p. 148 of FA Handbook

E21.4 conduct themselves in a manner prohibited by paragraph E21.1 in circumstances where that conduct is discriminatory in that it includes a reference, whether express or implied, to one or more of ethnic origin, colour, race, nationality, religion or belief, gender, gender reassignment, sexual orientation or disability” [...].”

8. Worcestershire FA included within each charge letter the evidence that they intended to rely on in each case.
9. The response for each individual case was due by 23 November 2023

The Reply

10. The responses are as follows;
 - 10.1. For Case **11461770M** E3 **Charge 1** for Joe Bruce for threatening behaviour towards a Match Official, a response was received on 24 November 2023, accepting the charge and requesting it be dealt with by correspondence.
 - 10.2. For Case **11461768M** E3 **Charge 2** for Joe Bruce abusive language/behaviour towards a Match Official, a response was received on 24 November 2023, accepting the charge and requesting it be dealt with by correspondence.
 - 10.3. For Case **11461756M** the E3 charge for Joshua Lloyd for threatening behaviour towards a Match Official, a response was received on 24 November 2023, denying the charge and requesting it be dealt with by correspondence.
 - 10.4. For Case **11461775M** the aggravated E21 **Charge 1** for Worcester United FC, a response was received on 24 November 2023, denying the charge and requesting it be dealt with by correspondence.
 - 10.5. For Case **11461778M** the E21 **Charge 2** for Worcester United FC, a response was received on 24 November 2023, accepting the charge and requesting it be dealt with by correspondence.

- 10.6. For Case **11461779M** the E21 **Charge 3** for threatening behaviour towards the Match Official for Worcester United FC, a response was received on 24 November 2023, accepting the charge and requesting it be dealt with by correspondence.
11. During the investigation, evidence was submitted from:
 - 11.1. Reports and further information from the Match Official;
 - 11.2. Statements from Kington FC;
 - 11.3. Statements from Worcester United FC.

The Commission

12. The Football Association ("The FA") appointed me, Steve Francis, as a Chair member of the National Serious Case Panel, to this Discipline Commission as the Chair Sitting Alone to adjudicate in these cases.

The Hearing and Evidence

13. The case bundle was sent via e-mail to the appointed Chair 24 November 2023 to be completed within 3 working days.
14. I adjudicated this case on 24-27 November 2023 as a consolidated correspondence hearing.
15. The following is a summary of the principal submissions provided. It does not purport to contain reference to all the points made. However, the absence in these reasons of any particular point, or submission, should not imply that we did not take such point, or submission, into consideration when we determined the matter. For the avoidance of doubt, we have carefully considered all the evidence and materials furnished with regard to this case. Where possible names have been removed from the evidence presented in the case bundle.
16. The case bundle begins with the Extraordinary Incident Reports from the Match Official, all are dated 08 October 2023. There is an overarching report that covers

the whole event followed by a series of more focussed reports. The main report notes the following allegations;

- 16.1. The Referee notes in his 10 years of Officiating they have never *“felt for my safety like Saturday. I was threatened with violence by Joshua Lloyd player from Worcester. Also violence from Joe Bruce Worcester, both counts were to assault me after the game. I was hit by a missile thrown by a Worcester supporter”*. At the end of the fixture when they were *“verbally abused by the Worcester Cameraman and told to leave as soon as i could. I was confronted by 3 people, 1 player and 2 supporters from Worcester and verbally abused and the circled me to intimidate me as i walked back to the changing room”*.
- 16.2. He also notes having *“items placed against my changing room door to cause me panic and stress and made me feel very isolated and threatened to the point i had to ask for help and threaten to call the police. I was forced to change outside in the open air outside of the away team dressing room as Kington made me feel safe and gave me refuge until i could leave site. I have video evidence of the Worcester assistant coach behavior's and a short statement from a Kington Supporter”*.
17. The first report focussing on the charges raised is regarding the allegations against Joe Bruce and states the following;
 - 17.1. The report is labelled as Incident 3 when, following a throw-in decision *“Joe Bruce became very angry as he felt it was the other way and started shouting and swearing at me. I approached him and asked him to stop, he then called me a fat Cunt and a disgrace. I showed him a red card and asked him to leave the dug out BUT he refused, I asked him 4 times and he refused every time becoming more abusive and aggressive”*.
 - 17.2. The Referee asked for assistance from another individual from Worcester United but they walked away. He then approached Joe Bruce again *“he entered the field of play and started walking backwards calling me “a fucking cheat, a fat 4 eyed lazy cunt, a fat Bastard, a fucking wanker over and over again as we got to the far side of the pitch he said “you gonna fucking have it after the*

match" this was heard by the Kington bench. I asked the Kington bench to support me with a report of what they heard at this point. I eventually got the game restarted and settled down".

18. The report that contains the allegations of the behaviour of Joshua Lloyd adds the following allegations;

18.1. They were approached by the individual *"from the other end of the pitch shouting ref you're a Fucking Cheat, you a Fucking joke, are you blind, at this point I showed him a yellow sinbin. My reason for this was it was heat of the moment and I hoped it would cool the situation".*

18.2. This did not have the desired effect as he then turned towards him *"in an aggressive manner calling me a fucking idiot, a wanker, a cunt. I stood where I was a at this point issued a straight red card, he then turned very violent towards me, he came nose to nose with me, he was red in the face and spitting when he was shouting at me and told me has was going to "smash me up" he said you fucking having it Ref. I did respond by saying "go on then but you will be in more trouble" I was unable to back away as at this point as I was surrounded and Kington players were trying to get him away".*

18.3. The report continues noting the Worcester *"bench, Subs and supporters were all very angry and aggressive and abusive then from this point on. The game continued but all I was getting was abuse and foul and abusive comments from Worcester supporters from then on".*

18.4. The report then notes what is called incident 6 where the Referee had entered the changing rooms and was aware of some noise *"I opened the door to Referee room to see Josh Lloyd the player I sent off putting a 6 a side goal, some chairs and a long net against my door to barricade me in, I shouted for assistance otherwise I would call the police, another player came in an removed the items. At this point I felt for my safety so I gathered all my belongings and went and stood outside the Kington Dressing and changed in the open air as I felt this was a safe option for me".*

19. The reports focussing on the actions that have led to the E21 charges against the club provides the following details;
- 19.1. For **Charge 1**; Titled incident 4 it was near the end of the fixture *“At 84 minutes I was hit by an object, a conker was thrown from a Worcester supporter and it hit me on the back of the head, at this point a Kington player came over a said that there were a number of objects being thrown and I was the target. I requested this be stopped but was unable to identify the person throwing, in total I collected 7 conkers thrown at me”*.
- 19.2. For **Charge 2** and **Charge 3**; This is titled Incident 5 and notes at full-time the Worcester players did not come over to shake hands *“I started to walk to the dressing room and the video man from Worcester started following me calling me a disgrace and fucking fat bastard, the fattest referee he’s seen among other thing, this continued from him until I left site. I was also approached by 3 other Worcester supporters who were abusive towards me and told me I need to clear off if I knew what was good for me”*.
20. Worcestershire FA then contact the Referee on 09 October 2023 with a total of 9 questions for the Referee seeking further clarification. On the same date the Match Official provides the following;
- 20.1. The first question regarding Joe Bruce *“was Worcester assistant manager and was with [redacted] the manager on the sideline, there was no real technical area as the subs, coaching staff and supporters were all congregated together along the left hand sideline. When he was shown the red card he was in this area, i asked him to leave 4 times and he point blank refused, i called Joe Grange over and asked him to help me BUT at this point Joe Bruce walked across the field of play protesting and verbally abusing me and Threatening me”*.
- 20.2. As to the details of Joshua Lloyd *“was a player (striker) for Worcester. I issued him a yellow sinbin for dissent, he then verbally abused me and threatened me so i cancelled the sinbin and issued a straight red card, he was escorted off eventually by his own team mates”*.

- 20.3. Of who had allegedly thrown the conkers *"1 did not see anything being thrown as i had my back to the Worcester sideline at the time of the incident. The linesman told me after the game it was a short gentleman stood to his right but could not give me any more detail than that. a number of Kington players commented to me what was happening as there were 2 near misses"*. When asked if any of the conkers had caused injury *"One conker hit me on the back of the head, i collected 7 in total but there may have been more these are just ones I was aware of. I had a lump on the back of me head for a while but cleared up later in the day"*.
- 20.4. He then describes the *"video man"* from Worcester as *"about 6ft tall shoulder length hair in a light /grey top and was stood on a chair on the sidelines with the video equipment throughout the game"*. When further asked how he identifies the individual as a member of Worcester *"I know he was part of Worcester as i was a linesman at Gloucester v Worcester on Wednesday evening and he was opposite me videoing the game that evening. He was also sat with the Worcester players and managers for the pre match and line up discussion before the game on Saturday and went into the changing room when i left."*.
- 20.5. The County FA then ask who the 3 individuals that approached were and ask how he felt at the time *"one of the 3 people who approached me was a player who came of the field due to injury and had got changed, he was stood with 2 other men, they called me a Fucking Joke, a Fat wanker, they offered to pay £80 to fuck off and never come back, one man with a black top and a beard told me to fuck off if i knew what was good for me and called me a fat 4 eyed tosser. Once i left the dressing room to seek safety they went in with the Worcester players"*.
- 20.6. The Referee is also asked if he feels the actions of Joshua Lloyd were a deliberate attempt to barricade him in *"i was told by a Worcester player to go and get changed and he would keep the dressing room clear, i went in and there was already a player sat have a drink. I went into my room to start getting changed and was aware of some banging, i opened my door to see Josh Lloyd*

putting these items in front of my door, i told him to move it when the player who was looking after me he the commotion and came in and told Josh Lloyd not to be stupid and make things worse, i asked him to move the items otherwise i was going to call the police. The lad sat having a drink apologized for the poor behavior's of his team. I feel this was a deliberate act to frighten me".

- 20.7. The County FA note the comment regarding having video evidence and request this to be sent over *"After the game on my way to the car park i was approached by a young lady who was a partner of a Kington Player, she asked if i was OK as what had gone on was appalling and no referee should have to deal with that sort of situation. She said that she had captured some of the sending off of the Assistant manager on video and told me she would send it too me so i gave her my email address"*. This had not been received so has contacted the chair of Kington FC to assist and this arrived shortly after although the Referee does note he is unsure how to get this to Worcestershire FA.
21. The next entry is the statement from Kington FC, this provides the following regarding the fixture as follows;
- 21.1. They had taken a 1-0 lead at which point *"the referee started to receive a lot of abuse due to an alleged handball, to which a player was sin binned. But the next thing I see, the player is shown a straight red card. The player did take his time in leaving the pitch as he was arguing with the referee from the moment, he got sin binned. I don't know what was said as I couldn't hear it but could see the player was irate"*. A further Worcester player was sin-binned before the game restarted.
- 21.2. There is reference to an incident with the Worcester coach who, having kicked the ball back onto the field of play *"receives a red card. The coach then refused to leave as the referee had asked him to. This carried on for about a minute until the coach was convinced to leave by what I believe was his partner. The coach carried on directing language towards the referee as he left"*.

- 21.3. At the end of the game he went to the Referee to return their flag, they shook his hand, told him he had officiated correctly. As he was about to walk away *"I could see the Worcester United cameraman enter the field of play and shouted at the referee "how do they let fat out of shape people referee" The cameraman then left the referee alone"*. He again spoke to the Referee later on *"the referee who had spoken about getting hit with a conker. After he said this, it brought my memory back to the game where the player was sent off was talking to a fan about a conker. I can't fully say if either of them threw it, but a discussion was being had"*. He also provides the locations of each incident he has mentioned within the statement.
22. An e-mail was sent to Worcestershire FA on 26 October 2023 in response to a request from the County FA for clarification on 5 separate questions, this also contains two statements. This adds the following;
- 22.1. The first question is regarding the identity of the camera operator which is done however, they do not have an FA Number. When asked about the role of Joe Bruce *"he helps out the management team by setting up goal nets, helping coaches setting up warm ups and so on. He has no official role within our management team"*.
- 22.2. In response to questions regarding the actions of Joshua Lloyd the request their observations of the allegations which is provided. The County FA also ask if any other individual present would like to submit a statement; the only one is from a team official and this is also included within the response.
23. The first statement within the e-mail is from Josh Lloyd and provides the following observations;
- 23.1. The statement notes a *"questionable"* handball decision that led to them conceding a goal when *"Myself and our captain approached the ref and asked why he didn't give hand ball to no avail. I then went on to say that it's a recorded game and we will happily show him the recording after. I received a yellow card and sin bin, I then asked how I could possibly be given a yellow/sin bin for my*

comment of which had no malice. Please may I express how at this time I was pretty calm”.

- 23.2. At this point he alleges the Referee “took it upon himself to storm up in to my face and show me a red card with no explanation as to why. At this point I must admit I lost my cool and so did he and a few heated words were exchanged before I left the field of play. When the game ended, I approached the ref in a respectable manor and asked if he could please allow me to understand why I received the red card. His reply was that he doesn’t have to explain himself to me and in other words go away”.
24. The e-mail states they had requested feedback from those present and this could be done privately and in confidence, the only response was from a team official who provided the following;
- 24.1. The statement in full reads “The only thing i would say is that the ref showed a clear and obvious lack of control over the game. He was extremely confrontational throughout and was provoking players by making decisions without explanation throughout. This doesn't justify the action from the player involved, but it could have been avoided throughout proactive and transparent refereeing”.
25. The final inclusion is a response from the club dated 24 November 2023 after being contacted by Worcestershire FA the previous day over the lack of any responses to the charges. This e-mailed response contains the pleas from those charged and additional statements, this provides the following information;
- 25.1. The first response is to case **11461779M** which is listed as E21 **Charge 3** against the club within this document and notes they accept the charge adding “We are unable to remember who the fans that approached the referee were. Please note they did not approach aggressively and just made passing comments about him ruining the game”.
- 25.2. For case **11461778M** which is listed as E21 **Charge 2** against the club they also accept this charge and provide a statement from the individual. Within this the feel compelled to provide their account. At the end of the

game, they were heading back to the changing room when they *“calmly inquired about the referee's presence and his choice to officiate. While acknowledging our shared physique, I emphasized that my role as a cameraman, not a football referee, was a conscious decision. As we were both using the same changing rooms and heading in the same direction, it was inevitable that our paths crossed”*. The statement continues noting on the day in question they did not enter the changing rooms, they waited for the players to get changed and there was no team talk; this was attributed to the *“team's disappointment in the poor result and questionable decisions during the game. Unaware of any alleged incidents inside the changing room, I remained outside”*.

25.3. When the Referee left to go to their vehicle *“I casually made a parting comment in a lighthearted manner, expressing my views on his officiating skills. At no point did I perceive my remarks as abusive. While acknowledging guilt in approaching the referee, a regrettable action for which I sincerely apologize, I firmly assert that my comments should not be categorized as abuse. It is crucial to distinguish between inappropriate approachment and the gravity of genuine abuse”*. The author would also like to note the standard of Refereeing they are encountering is not up to the standard of the league where players are compensated for their skills. They add *“the disparity becomes evident when confronted with referees who struggle to keep up with the fast-paced and competitive nature of our matches. My intention is not to undermine the importance of refereeing but to emphasize the necessity for officials who can effectively manage the unique demands of high-level football”*. This statement concludes *“while acknowledging my lapse in judgment, I vehemently deny engaging in any abusive behavior and urge a fair assessment of the incident in light of these clarifications”*.

25.4. The next response is to case **11461775M** which is listed as **E21 Charge 1** against the club, this alleges conkers were thrown at the match official. This charged is denied *“We are unable to identify anyone throwing objects at the referee and we are unaware of this happening”*.

- 25.5. There are then responses to both charges for Joe Bruce, for case **11461770M E3 Charge 1** for threatening behaviour towards the Match Official he would like to stress *“that a number of game changing poor decisions led to his outburst but understands that this was not acceptable. He also believes the standard of the referee on this day was not fit for the standard of the game”*. For the second E3 charge case **11461768M Charge 2** for abusive language/behaviour towards the Match Official Joe Bruce also notes this to be unacceptable *“the frustration built up inside of him led to him walking across the pitch rather than around the pitch. His comments made towards the ref were not helped by the referee's comments back to Joe as he entered and subsequently left the pitch”*.
- 25.6. For case **11461756M** the club confirm the denial of the charge adding *“Josh, along with the other players of the Worcester united team were kept out of the changing room while the referee grabbed his belongings. Please see previous statement entered by Josh Lloyd”*.
26. The response also contains a statement from a club official who took part in the fixture who provides the following observations;
- 26.1. He begins with noting *“The referee made a seriously poor decision regarding a handball leading to a Kington goal. To which 20 of the 22 players on the field that day stopped play. One of our younger players approached the ref very calmly to ask how he let that go which led the referee to sin bin him without any discussion taking place”*. At this point Josh Lloyd had approached the Referee to ask what was going on and how the Official could justify their decisions; the author also walked over to listen.
- 26.2. A *“brief discussion”* broke out between the player and the Referee with the mood not helped by *“the referee repeatedly said to Josh “come on then, do something” whilst shrugging his shoulders back and moving his head forward in an aggressive manner. He said this several times. I pulled Josh away telling him to leave it and I turned to the referee and said to him “you cannot say that, you are not allowed to do that” he continued to do and say this. Josh then left the field of play”*.

- 26.3. Moving onto the post-match incidents, they saw people around the Referee as they were walking back to the changing rooms *"I cannot remember who these were but I ran over to the referee and said to him "go and get changed and I will keep the players out of the changing room" to which I did. He continued to argue with anyone who approached him."*. They accept members of their team and supporters had acted inappropriately *"this all could have been calmed down by the referee de-escalating the situation by speaking to management from both teams or captains. The arguing back by the referee throughout provoked player reactions, again, reactions I don't deem acceptable but easily preventable"*.
- 26.4. In a further exchange of e-mails on the 24 November 2023 the club confirm the charges are all to be delt with by correspondence and understand the outcome would only be determined on what has been provided.
27. That concluded the relevant evidence in the case.

Standard of Proof

28. The applicable standard of proof required for this case is the civil standard of the balance of probability. This standard means, we would be satisfied that an event occurred if we considered that, on the evidence, it was more likely than not to have happened.

The Findings & Decision

29. For cases **11461770M (Charge 1) & 11461768M (Charge 2)** the E3 charges for Joe Bruce have both been accepted. The Commission is satisfied the threshold for both charges have been met and have found both **Proven** by admission.
30. For cases **11461778M (Charge 2) & 11461779M (Charge 3)** the E21 charges for failure to control spectators for Worcester United FC, a response has been made accepting these charges. The Commission believe the actions as stated by the Referee do meet the threshold for the charges including the threatening elements and these has been found as **Proven** by admission.

31. For case **11461756M** E3 charge of Improper Conduct against a Match Official including use of Foul and Abusive Language for Joshua Lloyd there is a threshold for this within the FA Handbook as follows;
 - 31.1. *“96.1 Threatening behaviour: words or action that cause the Match Official to believe that they are being threatened. Examples include but are not limited to: the use of words that imply (directly or indirectly) that the Match Official may be subjected to any form of physical abuse either immediately or later, whether realistic or not; the raising of hands to intimidate the Match Official; pretending to throw or kick an object at the Match Official.”*
32. The allegation from the Referee refers to the initial exchange between himself and Joshua Lloyd when he has been confronted *“nose-to-nose... he was red in the face”* and then told by the player he was going to *“smash me up”* and *“you fucking have it ref”*. The player also needed to be escorted from the field of play by a team mate. There was a further allegation of the player placing objects outside of the changing room door which the Referee believed to be an act of intimidation. The Referee has confirmed he had felt for their safety and had considered calling the Police. The statement from Kington notes the player was arguing with the Referee from the moment they were sin-binned and was a coming together. Although they were unable to hear what was said the witness does describe Joshua Lloyd as *“irate”*.
33. The player has admitted there was a discussion but they also note they were *“pretty calm”* and alleges the Referee had actually stormed over to him, up into his face and shown the red card. He then admits to losing his cool and heated words were exchanged. He has also approached the Referee afterwards but they would not engage with him; there is no mention of the allegation of the placing of objects outside of the Referees’ changing room.
34. A club official has provided a supporting statement and this confirms the *“brief discussion”* and alleges the Referee saying *“come on then do something”* several times, whilst acting aggressively; he has also stated he has challenged the Referee over their behaviour. He also notes pulling Joshua Lloyd away and telling them

- to “leave it”. The Referee has noted in his statement making a similar comment but with additional words that changed the context of what has been alleged and noted they would be in further trouble if the player had responded with physical violence.
35. Of the allegation post-match, the Referee is clear they had seen Joshua Lloyd outside of their changing rooms and it was they that had placed items outside of the changing room door. As he had been previously engaged in the sin-bin and subsequent dismissal of the player it is more likely than not the Referee would be able to positively identify them and he has seen this player in the area of the changing rooms. This has also taken place after Joshua Lloyd has made another attempt to approach the Referee after the game to discuss their dismissal which had been rebuffed.
36. Having reviewed the evidence presented, the Commission believe there was an approach by Joshua Lloyd to the Referee which has led to a heated exchange of words during this confrontation. It is also accepted they were very close and the player was angry at the time. The statements from the Match Referee were submitted on the day of the fixture when the events were likely to have been fresh in their mind which adds credibility. There is also support for these statements from Kington.
37. The Commission believe, in the midst of the heated exchange after the player has been sin-binned and, on the balance of probability, believe it was more likely than not the words were used as alleged by Joshua Lloyd. It is also believed it is more likely than the participant charged has also been involved in the placing of items outside of the changing room. Additionally, the Commission believe the words and actions of the participant charged do meet the threshold for threatening behaviour and the charge has been found as **Proven**.
38. For case **11461775M** the aggravated E21 charge for failure to control spectators including physical contact or attempted physical contact for Worcester United FC, there is a threshold for the physical contact element within the FA Handbook 2023-24 which states;

- 38.1. *“96.2 Physical contact or attempted physical contact: physical actions (or attempted actions) that are unlikely to cause injury to the Match Official but are nevertheless confrontational, examples include but are not limited to: pushing the Match Official or pulling the Match Official (or their clothing or equipment)”.*
39. The Referee has alleged he was struck by a conker and had found further items, at least seven during the game; this has also caused a minor injury. The statement from Kington also makes reference to the witness overhearing a conversation between two individuals, one identified as *“the player sent off”* and presumed to be Joshua Lloyd and a supporter regarding conkers. The club make no reference to this allegation aside from their response on 24 November 2023 to deny this took place.
40. The Referee is clear in the allegation and also notes the injury they had received of a small lump following being struck by the missile in follow-up communication with Worcestershire FA. The statement from Kington also provides further support to the Referee and was submitted on 10 October 2023 only three days after the fixture. With no evidence to counter from the club who, despite stating the game was being recorded, this could have provided solid evidence to refute the charge, this has not been done.
41. It is the belief of the commission on the balance of probability it is more likely than not there were conkers thrown towards the Referee during the fixture by personnel associated with Worcestershire United FC. Furthermore, the Commission believe this does meet the threshold provided for the physical contact element of the charge, therefore this charge has been found as **Proven**.

Previous Disciplinary Record

42. Joe Bruce’s Participant Offence History contains one previous misconduct charge relevant to their charges;

- 42.1. 12 November 2022 E3 Improper Conduct against a Match Official - (including abusive language/behaviour) sanction of a 2-match suspension and a fine of £40.
43. Joshua Lloyds' Participant Offence History only contains two cautions outside of this fixture.
44. Worcester United FC have nine teams, their five-year offence history contains the following previous misconduct charges relevant to this offence;
- 44.1. 29 October 2022 E21 (Dev) sanction £250;
- 44.2. 26 April 2023 E21 (First) sanction of £80.

Mitigation

45. As cases **11461768M**, **11461770M**, **11461778M** and **11461779M**, have been accepted the "*credit for a guilty plea*" can be considered. Nothing further has been received in mitigation.

The Sanction

46. For case **11461770M** Joe Bruce's E3 **Charge 1** for threatening behaviour towards a Match Official, the sanction range is as follows;
- 46.1. Suspension of 56 to 182 days with an entry point before considering mitigating and aggravating circumstances of 112 days;
- 46.2. A fine up to £100 with a mandatory minimum of £50;
- 46.3. Mandated FA Education.
47. The entry point for this offence is 112 days suspension, a fine of £50 and mandated education. The nature of the verbal threat, with additional use of multiple expletive laden comments and uninvited entry into the field of play were aggravating factors which had placed the sanction higher than the entry point at 154 days, a fine of £80 and mandated online education. Having viewed their offence history and taken into account the credit for the acceptance of the

charge, the Commission considered these to balance each other out. Therefore, the sanction will be;

47.1. To serve a suspension of 154 days from all football activity;

47.2. fined a sum of £80;

47.3. Joe Bruce is to satisfactorily complete a mandatory online education programme before the suspension is served or Joe Bruce be suspended until such time, he successfully completes the mandatory education programme, the details of which will be provided to them; and

48. For case **11461768M** Joe Bruce's E3 **Charge 2** for abusive language/behaviour towards a Match Official, the sanction range is as follows;

48.1. Suspension of 0-6 matches to include a ground/venue ban;

48.2. A fine up to £70.

49. The entry point for this offence was considered by the Commission to be 2 matches and a fine of £30 in parity with the on-field offence of Offensive, Insulting or Abusive language. The nature of the repeated verbally abusive comments alongside the repeated refusal to leave the area following the issue of the red card were aggravating factors that placed this beyond the entry point. When further considering the offence history, with a previous such offence, as a further aggravating factor the Commission placed the sanction at the upper limit of the sanction range at a suspension of 6-matches and a fine of £70. Having considered their acceptance of the charge in mitigation, the sanction will be;

49.1. To serve a suspension of 5 matches to include a ground/venue ban;

49.2. fined a sum of £60.

50. For case **11461756M** Joshua Lloyds' E3 charge for threatening behaviour towards a Match Official, the sanction range is as follows;

- 50.1. Suspension of 56 to 182 days with an entry point before considering mitigating and aggravating circumstances of 112 days;
 - 50.2. A fine up to £100 with a mandatory minimum of £50;
 - 50.3. Mandated FA Education.
51. The entry point for this offence is 112 days suspension, a fine of £50 and mandated education. The issuing of a threat on more than one occasion towards the match official, the adoption of an aggressive posture when engaging with the Referee, the time taken to leave the field of play and the further actions after the game had finished to place objects in front of the changing room door were aggravating factors that placed the sanction at the higher end of the sanction range at a suspension of 168 Days, a fine of £90 and mandated education. Having considered their offence history, the sanction will be;
- 51.1. To serve a suspension of 140 days from all football activity;
 - 51.2. fined a sum of £75;
 - 51.3. Joshua Lloyd is to satisfactorily complete a mandatory online education programme before the suspension is served or Joshua Lloyd be suspended until such time, he successfully completes the mandatory education programme, the details of which will be provided to them; and
 - 51.4. 8 (eight) Club Disciplinary Points to be recorded;
52. For case **11461775M E21 Charge 1** for Worcester United FC, the sanction range for this offence is;
- 52.1. Fine up to £300
53. For the actions described in the Referee's report solely focussing on this case, due to the nature of the charge including the throwing of objects, namely conkers, by spectators towards the Match Referee, striking them and causing a minor injury

- have placed this in the high bracket of the sanction range at £250. Having taken into account the offence history, the sanction will be;
- 53.1. Fined a sum of £225;
 - 53.2. Warned as to future conduct.
54. For case **11461778M** E21 **Charge 2** for Worcester United FC, the sanction range for this offence is;
- 54.1. Fine up to £300.
55. For the actions specific to the individual who was identified as the cameraman, for the abusive verbal comments towards the Match Referee on multiple occasions have placed the sanction in the middle band of the sanction range at £100. Having considered the acceptance of the charge and offence history as mitigating factors the sanction will be:
- 55.1. Fined a sum of £75;
 - 55.2. Warned as to future conduct.
56. For case **11461779M** E21 **Charge 3** for Worcester United FC, the sanction range for this offence is;
- 56.1. Fine up to £300.
57. The actions of the three supporters, in isolation of the other actions described in the reports of the Match Official, to verbally abuse the Referee and to subsequently issue a threat towards them placed the sanction in the high bracket of the sanction range at £165. Having considered the acceptance of the charge and offence history as mitigating factors the sanction will be:
- 57.1. Fined a sum of £140;
 - 57.2. Warned as to future conduct.
58. The decision is subject to the right of appeal under the relevant FA Rules and Regulations.

Signed...

Steve Francis (Commission Chair)

27 November 2023