

IN THE MATTER OF A FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION  
INDEPENDENT REGULATORY COMMISSION

BETWEEN:

THE FOOTBALL ASSOCIATION

and

MR MATHEUS CUNHA;  
WOLVERHAMPTON WANDERERS FC.

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WRITTEN REASONS AND DECISION OF  
THE INDEPENDENT REGULATORY COMMISSION FOLLOWING THE  
HEARING  
ON 21 MARCH 2025

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## Background

1. These are the written reasons for a decision made by an Independent Regulatory Commission which sat by video conference on 21 March 2025.
2. The Regulatory Commission members were Mr Gareth Farrelly, Chairman and Independent Football Panel Member, Mr Francis Benali, Independent Football Panel Member and Mr Francis Duku, Independent Football Panel Member.
3. Mr Michael O'Connor, FA Judicial Services Assistant Manager acted as Secretary to the Regulatory Commission.

## Charges, Evidence and Replies

4. By letter dated 5 March 2025, The Football Association ("The FA") charged Mr Matheus Cunha of Wolverhampton Wanderers FC with misconduct for a breach of The FA Rules pursuant to FA Rule E3.1 in respect of the FA Cup fixture between AFC Bournemouth and Wolverhampton Wanderers FC on 1 March 2025.
5. The Football Association designated this as a Non-Standard Case due to the incident occurring outside the jurisdiction of the Match Official.
6. Rule E3.1 states that –

*A Participant shall at all times act in the best interests 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. It was alleged that in or around the 121<sup>st</sup> minute of the fixture, following his dismissal, he acted in an improper manner.
8. The FA included the following evidence with the respective charge: -
  - Extraordinary Incident Report Form of the Match Referee, Mr. S. Barrott, dated 2 March 2025;
  - Email correspondence between [REDACTED], and Fourth Official Mr. R. Jones dated 3 March 2025; and
  - A video clip of his dismissal and what followed.
9. With regard to the incident the Match Referee stated: -

*"After his dismissal from the Field of Play in the 120+1 minute for Violent Conduct, Matheus Cunha of Wolverhampton Wanderers failed to leave the field in a timely manner following the completion of the VAR Check. He was then confrontational at the bottom of the tunnel, where he had to be restrained and held back by numerous members of the Wolverhampton Wanderers technical area.*

10. The Fourth Official, Mr Rob Jones stated, inter alia: -

*“Following the dismissal and the conclusion of the VAR check around the incident, Mr Cunha was eventually escorted off the field of play by his colleagues (substituted players and staff). At this point some of his coaching staff and substitute players tried to get Mr Cunha to head down the tunnel to his dressing room. He spoke to me briefly at this stage in the technical area and asked why he was sent off and not Mr Kerkez. However, at this point the security team and some of his colleagues were grabbing and pushing him towards the tunnel area. At this point he became frustrated with their actions. He was telling them to let go of him and stop touching him.*

*In my opinion at the time, Mr Cunha needed someone to talk to him calmly and for people to stop touching him as he clearly didn't appreciate what they were doing and they were inflaming the situation. The actions of his colleagues and security were clearly well intentioned but I can see why this would anger him too.*

*I therefore insisted that the staff stopped touching him and I spoke with Mr Cunha at the back of the technical area in the mouth of the tunnel one to one when people had stopped touching him. He was obviously distressed about the whole incident, but after I spoke with him calmly and explained the reasons for his sending off he agreed to go to his dressing room. He was never disrespectful or aggressive with me at any stage”.*

11. The following is a summary of the principal submissions provided to the Commission. It does not purport to contain reference to all the points made, however the absence of a point, or submission, in these reasons should not imply that the Commission did not take such point, or submission, into consideration when the members determined the matter. For the avoidance of doubt, the Commission has carefully considered all written and video evidence in respect of this case.
12. Mr Cunha admitted the charge by reply on 13 March 2025. He did not request a personal hearing, and the case was dealt with on the papers only. The Club submitted a detailed statement setting out the context of the incident from Mr Cunha's perspective and mitigation on his behalf. This was further supported by witness statements from Mr Cunha himself as well as his teammates, Mr Daniel Bentley, Mr Nelson Semedo and the Head of Security, Mr Peter Fraser.
13. In summary, it was Mr Cunha's position that as he walked towards the tunnel, after receiving the red card, he could see the Fourth Official. He wanted to ask him why he had been sent off and the AFC Bournemouth player had not also been red carded. However, he had been completely surrounded by people from the Club, be it the Head of Security and his teammate. They kept putting their arms around him, touching him and pushing him towards the tunnel. He believed this to be completely unnecessary, as he was not being confrontational or aggressive with the Fourth Official and intended to go down the tunnel in any case. He did not need to be pushed and shoved by anybody, He felt they were being rough and physical with him, and he wanted them to stop touching him and putting their arms around him. For completeness, Mr Bentley and Mr Fraser acknowledged that they both reacted in the wrong way, but this was well meaning as they did not want Mr Cunha to get in any more trouble after his sending off.

## **Sanction**

14. With regard to sanction, The FA provided submissions as well as the written reasons for Mr Cunha's recent breach of FA Rule E3.1. The submissions assisted the Commission. They invited the Commission to impose both a sporting and financial sanction. It was submitted that Mr Cunha's actions were highly improper. He had only left the vicinity of the field of play and technical area after being verbally and physically encouraged to do

so by several other individuals, he had sought to question the Fourth Official about his dismissal, and he did not leave the vicinity of the field of play and technical area until over a minute after being dismissed. It was claimed that this conduct occurred in a high-profile FA Cup fixture contested by two Premier League teams and was visible to those in attendance and a global television audience. The Commission were also invited to note Mr Cunha's recent sanction for a separate breach of FA Rule E3.1, and that any sanction should serve as an adequate deterrent for future cases.

15. It was the Club's position that the incident did not merit a playing sanction based on the compelling mitigation submitted and that a warning as to Mr Cunha's future conduct was appropriate.
16. Having considered all of the written and video evidence in this case, the Commission unanimously agreed that a sporting and financial sanction was appropriate. The Commission are aware that any sanction must be fair and proportionate. It was noted and accepted that Mr Cunha admitted the charge. He had apologised for the inconvenience caused and his statement did assist the Commission in explaining and clarifying his actions following his sending off. The Commission were also assisted by the Club's submissions. However, this did not excuse Mr Cunha's conduct. His colleagues' conduct was well intentioned and sought to assist Mr Cunha. His reaction to their interventions was improper. Firstly, he should not have sought out the Fourth Official, and secondly, he should not have reacted to his colleagues in the manner that he did. He should have proceeded down the tunnel of his own accord. Given his recent charge, it is unsurprising that his colleagues were sensitive to what had just occurred. This awareness does not appear to have extended to Mr Cunha. He is responsible for his conduct. The charge was clearly made out. The Fourth Official's statement was also of assistance to Mr Cunha. It confirmed the accounts put forward by both him and the Club. By way of further mitigation, it was noted that at no point had Mr Cunha been disrespectful or aggressive with the Fourth Official and after speaking with him, the incident resolved itself.
17. The Commission were provided with Mr Cunha's previous disciplinary record for this and the preceding five seasons as well, the most recent of which was 16 December 2024, as well as his remuneration from football. This was considered in relation to determining the appropriate sanction.

## **Conclusion**

18. The Commission, having carefully considered all of the written and video evidence imposed the following sanction on Mr Cunha:
  - (i) He is given a one match (1) sporting suspension; and
  - (ii) He is fined the sum of £50,000.00.
19. This decision is subject to the relevant Appeal Regulations.

Mr Gareth Farrelly, Chairman and Independent Football Panel Member  
Mr Francis Benali, Independent Football Panel Member  
Mr Francis Duku, Independent Football Panel Member  
26 March 2025