

## DISCIPLINARY DECISION



Match	Connacht Rugby v Vodacom Bulls		
Player's Club	Connacht Rugby	Competition	United Rugby Championship
Date of match	17/10/2025	Match venue	Dexcom Stadium, Galway, Ireland
Rules to apply	United Rugby Championship 2025/26 Disciplinary Rules		

### PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE

Player's surname	Murphy		
Forename(s)	Josh		
Referee Name	Mike Adamson	Plea	<input type="checkbox"/> Admitted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not admitted
Offence	Law 9.12 - A player must not physically or verbally abuse anyone (Strike to the face)	SELECT:    Red card X If "Other" selected, please specify:	
Summary of Sanction	No Sanction and red card expunged		

### HEARING DETAILS

Hearing date	22/10/2025	Hearing venue	Zoom video conference
Chair	Simon Thomas		
Other Members of Disciplinary Committee	Declan Goodwin, Leah Thomas		
Appearance Player	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>	Appearance Club	YES <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> NO <input type="checkbox"/>
Player's Representative(s)	Tim Allnutt	Disciplinary Officer and/or other attendees	Amy Monaghan, Jude Canniffe
List of documents/materials provided to Player in advance of hearing	Broadcast Footage Referee's Report Assistant Referees Reports TMO Report Player response to standing directions Two slow motion close up video clips supplied by the Player		

### INTRODUCTION

#### Introduction

The disciplinary committee (“the Committee”) had been appointed by URC’s independent judicial panel chairman, Mr Roger Morris, to hear the case relating to Josh Murphy of Connacht Rugby (“the Player”), following the ordering off of the Player for an alleged act of foul play during the match played between Connacht Rugby and Vodacom Bulls on 17<sup>th</sup> October 2025 in Dexcom Stadium, Galway, Ireland (“the Match”).

The essence of the allegation of foul play was that the Player had struck Vodacom Bulls number 2 twice to the head with his arm whilst they were both on the ground at a ruck.

The rules applicable to the 2025/2026 URC (“the Rules”) and World Rugby Regulations 17 and 20 (“the Regulations”) applied to the hearing.

Pursuant to the Rules and Regulations, at a disciplinary hearing following an ordering off, a player is required to confirm whether they accept they committed the alleged act of foul play specified in the referee’s report and whether they accept that the foul play warranted the issuing of a red card. If they so accept, a committee considers the evidence in the case and decides what sanction, if any, ought to be imposed in accordance with the three-stage sanctioning process prescribed by Regulations 7.6.30 to 7.6.35 together the table of sanctions found at Appendix 9 of the Rules.

In a case arising out of a player being shown a red card, the burden is on that player (if they so wish) to demonstrate to the satisfaction of a committee that the referee’s decision to issue a red card was wrong (Rule 7.2.1). Pursuant to Rule 7.6.28, if a player succeeds in demonstrating this to a committee, the committee takes no further action (i.e. imposes no suspension of the Player) and the red card is expunged from the Player’s disciplinary record.

In the event that a player either admits he committed an act of foul play which warranted a red card or fails to satisfy the committee that the referee’s decision was wrong, the committee proceeds to determine the question of sanction as referred to above.

In accordance with Rules, factual determinations made by disciplinary committees are on the balance of probabilities.

This written judgment is the unanimous decision of the Committee following consideration of all of the evidence it had seen and heard and following written and oral submissions by the Player and his representatives at a hearing on 22<sup>nd</sup> October 2022. It is not intended to be an exhaustive record of all the evidence and submissions presented at the hearing and the absence of a reference to some evidence or submission is not to suggest that such evidence or submission was not taken into account by the Committee at the hearing.

### **The Hearing and Preliminary Matters**

At the outset of the hearing, the Chairman introduced all present and explained the procedure to be followed in accordance with the Rules. He then confirmed what evidential material had been circulated to ensure that everyone had received the same in good time.

No preliminary issues were raised, and the Chairman summarised what was understood to be the Player's position from his written response to standing directions, i.e., that he had struck Bulls 2 twice but did so instinctively as Bulls 2 was grabbing and twisting his testicles when they were both competing at a ruck. He had accepted he had committed foul play but that in the particular circumstances his actions did not meet the red card threshold.

The Player confirmed this remained his position and that he would seek to persuade the Committee that the decision to issue a red card was wrong pursuant to Rule 7.2.1.

### **Other Relevant Matters**

Immediately prior to this hearing Bulls 2 had been the subject of a disciplinary hearing held before the same Committee. That hearing had arisen following a citing complaint by the Match appointed Citing Commissioner for an allegation of foul play against Bulls 2 contrary to Law 9.27 (an act contrary to good sportsmanship – grabbing, squeezing or twisting the testicles of another player – Josh Murphy (i.e. the Player)). The incident complained of was the precursor to the strikes and the red card against the Player.

At that hearing the Committee had found that Bulls 2 had intentionally committed the act of foul play alleged in the Citing Complaint (grabbing and twisting the Player's testicles) and had been suspended from rugby for 9 weeks.

## **THE EVIDENCE**

The hearing proceeded by the Chairman first narrating the written evidence which was as follows:

### **Referee's Report**

The Referee, Mike Adamson, had provided a report on the ordering off. He stated the offence had occurred in the 19<sup>th</sup> minute of the first half of the Match. The narrative description of the report contained the following:

*"During a ruck, I saw Connacht 6 strike out towards the head of a Bulls player. I penalised this live. When the Players were standing up C6 made an allegation that he was grabbed in the groin area. I put it on the big screen to review the incident. We looked for the grab but found no conclusive evidence of this. After the alleged grab, I could see C6 striking the head of the Bulls player twice with his arm while they were on the ground. I deemed this deliberate and with a high degree of danger".*

### **Assistant Referee 1– Andrew Cole**

This report read as follows:

*“When at the screen to review the incident, we initially acknowledged the neck grab by bulls 6 on Connacht 6, then we reviewed the strike to the head of bulls 2 by Connacht 6, we determined that it met the YC threshold for off field review. As Hawkeye was not in operation, the referee awarded a 20 minute RC to Connacht 6 for striking bulls 2 in the head”.*

Assistant Referee 2 – Jack MacNeice

This report contained the following:

*“A formal review was initiated. On review we observed 6 white on the neck of green 6 (no number on jersey). We reviewed footage around an alleged grab by white 2, however the footage was inconclusive. We then reviewed the actions of green 6 & determined that there was an act of foul play that met the yellow card threshold. As Hawkeye was not in operation, the referee determined the act of foul play met the threshold for a 20-minute red card”.*

Television Match Official Report – Hollie Davidson

Ms Davidson’s written report stated:

*“Within the one incident Mike Adamson the referee referred two potential foul plays; a grab of the groin area by 2 Bulls and then a strike to the head by 6 Connacht. Are reviewing there was no footage of any foul play by 2 Bulls. We then referred the foul play by 6 Connacht where we saw two strikes to the head by 6 Green. After discussion with the referee, in which I said I didn’t believe it was high danger, Mike gave a 20min red card to 6 Connacht.”*

Video Footage

The video footage of the entire passage of play leading up to the ruck in question and ending with the review of the alleged foul play by both players involved was shown from various angles.

This depicted the following:

Connacht kicked the ball high towards the Bulls 22-metre line. The ball was caught by B11 who was immediately tackled. He goes to ground and a ruck is formed. The Bulls retain possession and B9 passes the ball from the back of the ruck to his right. The ball is received by Bulls 4 who runs forward but is almost immediately tackled. He turns to present the ball to his own side. The Bulls forwards perform an effective “clear out” removing the Player from the ruck, albeit Bulls 6 seemingly grasps the Player around the neck area with his left arm when doing so. The Player manages to partially free himself from Bulls 6 and re-enters the ruck. With his left arm, the Player binds onto B2 who is kneeling on the ground facing forward. As the Player binds on to B2, B6, who was behind him, grabs the Player’s shirt from behind towards the top of the Player’s back. He pulls the Player towards him and then pushes the Player forward, causing him to become destabilised. This has the effect of the Player collapsing and pushing over B2 onto B2’s right side.

B2, who is closer to the camera angle, is seen with his right hand on the ground and his torso and head in a 45-degree angle from the ground. B2 brings his left hand off the ground slightly bent at the elbow but extended underneath the Player in the general direction of the Player’s groin. Due to the body positions of the Player and B2 it is not possible to see clearly where B2s left hand is.

Suddenly, the Player appears to react to something by raising his left arm and brings his left arm and hand down towards the head of B2. The footage shows the Player’s left wrist area brushing the head of B2 but it does not appear to make forceful direct contact. Immediately after this, the Player shoves

or strikes B2 with his left hand to B2's head or upper chest area knocking him backwards and away from the Player. The referee is in a good position and observes this. He blows the whistle and stops play. The Player immediately tells the referee that he has been grabbed to the genital area and points to B2 and he also gestures to that effect.

Following a review on the stadium screen, a 20-minute red card is issued to the Player.

### SUMMARY OF PLAYER'S EVIDENCE

The Player gave his explanation by reference to the close up video footage that he had supplied. He described how he had been "doing his job counter-rucking" but that by the time of any foul play any meaningful counter-rucking had probably been concluded. He said a Bulls player had grabbed him by the neck. He said that when he was on the ground, the Bulls 2 had grabbed and squeezed his testicles. The Player said that you could see the look of shock in his face.

The Player said that the video footage showed how, as B2 was attacking his testicles, the Player lifted his hips up to try and extricate himself from the grip of B2. He described his striking actions as being defensive. He said he was very vulnerable. He said that he had been trying to pull away from B2. In relation to the strikes, whilst admitted, the Player said that he acted in a restrained manner in the circumstances and had not tried to go "after him" (B2) and take the law into his own hands. Instead, he said, he immediately reported the incident to the referee.

The Player added that since the incident he had reflected on matters and was clear that he would not have acted differently with the benefit of hindsight. He maintained that his reactions were instinctive, appropriate and what any normal person would have done in those circumstances.

#### Player's Submissions as to Whether to Uphold the Red Card

Mr Allnut (Connacht Team Manager) stated that in addition to the particular circumstances which had given rise to these strikes, it was important to note that the two strikes to Bulls 2 were not serious and did not meet the red card threshold. He referred to the Television Match Official's report in particular which had described the Player's conduct as not having a high degree of danger.

### FINDINGS OF FACT

The Committee considered all of the evidence it had seen and heard and had in mind the fact that Bulls 2 had been suspended for nine weeks by the same Committee immediately prior to this hearing for intentionally grabbing and twisting the testicles of the Player.

The Committee concluded that the following had occurred:-

1. In the 18<sup>th</sup> minute of the first half of the Match, a ruck had formed close to the Bulls 22-metre line.

2. Bulls were in possession of the ball at the ruck, but the Player began to counter-ruck, driving forward to disrupt the ability of the Bulls players to pass the ball out.
3. Bulls 2 was forming part of that ruck but was at a lower level in height than the Player.
4. The Player began advancing through the ruck and was bound on to Bulls 2 with his left arm.
5. A Bulls player approached the Player from behind and grabbed his jersey near the collar and pulled him back before propelling him forward with a push.
6. As a consequence of this propulsion, the Player ended up on the floor and Bulls 2 also became destabilised.
7. As the Player was trying to regain his balance, Bulls 2 reached out with his left arm and hand and grabbed and squeezed the Player's testicles and did so deliberately.
8. The Player was shocked, alarmed and distressed by this and reacted by bringing down his left arm with the palm facing downwards across the top of the head of Bulls 2.
9. This action had been more of a glancing than a heavy blow to Bulls 2's head. Immediately following this strike, the Player was facing Bulls 2 with their heads very close to each other.
10. The Player struck B2 near the head area, causing Bulls 2 to be pushed backwards onto the floor.
11. The referee immediately blew his whistle, whereupon the Player appealed to the referee, alerting him to the fact that Bulls 2 had had his testicles grabbed.
12. The Player also made a physical gesture to indicate what had transpired.
13. The referee had seen the Player's strike but upon review of the video footage had been unable to be satisfied that an attack on the Player's genitals had taken place.
14. Consequently, the Player was dismissed.

In assessing the matter, the Committee took into account the following:-

1. The Player had (up until his testicles had been grabbed) been acting entirely properly and in accordance with the Laws of Rugby Union.
2. When his testicles were unexpectedly attacked by Bulls 2, the Player was shocked, alarmed and in discomfort.
3. As a reaction to this, the Player lifted his hips to try and extricate himself from the grip of B2 and at the same time brought his left hand down with an open hand (not a closed fist) which had a glancing strike upon the head of B2. After this initial strike, the Player and B2 were still close to each other and the Player struck B2 towards the head area propelling him backwards onto the floor.
4. The Player did not continue to attempt to strike B2 but had acted in a relatively restrained manner taking into account the actions of B2.
5. The Committee concluded that whilst the Player had admitted committing acts of foul play by striking B2 to the head, the circumstances giving rise to these strikes were quite exceptional and the Player's actions were an instantaneous reaction to an attack on a highly vulnerable part of the body which had been unexpected.
6. The first strike had occurred when B2 still had hold of the Player's testicles and the second strike had the effect of moving B2 away from the Player.
7. Neither of the strikes were with a closed fist and no injury had been caused by them to B2.
8. In assessing the seriousness of the matter, the Committee concluded that the Player's actions were substantially mitigated and understandable in the circumstances due to the conduct of B2 and were little more than was necessary to protect himself and move B2 away from him.

Taking these matters into account, notwithstanding the Player's admission that he had committed foul play by striking an opponent, the Committee concluded that the Player's actions did not merit a red card.

In coming to the above conclusion, the Committee noted that it would be very rare indeed for an intentional strike to an opponent's head to not meet the red card threshold, but in these particular and exceptional circumstances, this was such a case.

### DECISION

As the Player had discharged the burden of showing that the Referee's decision to issue a red card was wrong, the red card would be expunged from his record

The Committee also observed that there should be no criticism of the referee for his on-field decision at the time as, unlike the referee or other match officials, the Committee had had the benefit of a full and careful review of close up video evidence and oral testimony.

Costs	None
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Signature (Chair)	Simon Thomas	Date	22 October 2025
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**NOTE:** YOU HAVE 48 HOURS FROM NOTIFICATION OF THE DECISION OF THE CHAIR TO LODGE AN APPEAL WITH THE TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR – DISCIPLINARY RULES 8.1 (PAGE 4-28)