

## DISCIPLINARY DECISION



Match	Connacht Rugby v Vodacom Bulls		
Player's Club	Vodacom Bulls	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	Wessels		
Forename(s)	Jan-Hendrik		
Referee Name	Mike Adamson	Plea	<input type="checkbox"/> Admitted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Not admitted
Offence	Law 9.27 - A player must not do anything that is against the spirit of good sportsmanship	SELECT: Red card <input type="checkbox"/> Citing <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If "Other" selected, please specify:	
Summary of Sanction	Low-end: 12 weeks, reduced to 9 weeks following mitigation.		

### HEARING DETAILS

Hearing date	22/10/2025	Hearing venue	Zoom video conference
Chair	Declan Goodwin (Wales)		
Other Members of Disciplinary Committee	Simon Thomas, Leah Thomas (both Wales)		
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)	Marius Botha  Also in attendance: Johan Ackermann Eugene Hare Thato Mavundla	Disciplinary Officer and/or other attendees	Amy Monaghan Jude Canniffe
List of documents/materials provided to Player in advance of hearing	Video footage, including broadcast footage and zoomed-in clipped footage Citing Commissioner Report Referees Report Assistant Referees Reports TMO Report Josh Murphy (Connacht Rugby) audio statement taken by the Citing Commissioner Player response to standing directions Written Submissions from the Player's Representative including Annexures		

### 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 Jan-Hendrik Wessels of Vodacom Bulls ("**the Player**"), following a citing concerning 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 grabbed and twisted the testicles of Josh Murphy, Connacht Rugby 6, ("**C6**") 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 a citing, a player is required to confirm whether they accept they committed the alleged act of foul play specified in the Citing Commissioner'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 cited, the burden is on that player (if they so wish) to demonstrate to the satisfaction of a committee that the Citing Commissioner's complaint was wrong because the player did not commit the act(s) of Foul Play specified in the complaint and/or those act(s) did not warrant a red card (Rule 7.6.11.1).

In accordance with the Rules, factual determinations made by disciplinary committees are on the balance of probabilities. This is a lesser standard than proof 'beyond reasonable doubt' applied in criminal cases.

Therefore, for the purposes of this matter, and in accordance with Rule 7.6.11.1, the Committee must be satisfied, based on the evidence put forward by the Player, or on his behalf, that it is more likely than not that the findings of the Citing Commissioner were wrong.

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 22nd 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**

The Chair introduced all present and explained the procedure to be followed in accordance with the Rules.

The Chair enquired whether the Player's replies to the standard directions remained correct and that the Player would therefore be contesting the citing, seeking to demonstrate that the Player did not commit an act of Foul Play. The Player's Representative confirmed this was correct.

The Chair explained that the Committee was provided with clipped versions of the footage of the incident approximately 90 minutes prior to the start of the hearing. This additional footage was a version of the original footage shared with the Player by the Disciplinary Officer at the outset, which had been clipped to show the incident in isolation, at a slower speed, zoomed in and frame by frame in places. The Player, via his Representative, was asked if there were any objections to including this in evidence. There was no objection. The Chair also offered a short adjournment to the hearing after playing this additional footage. The Player's Representative confirmed an adjournment was not required, noting the additional footage supported the Player's submissions with regards to the incident.

## **SUMMARY OF ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CITING/REFEREE'S REPORT/MATCH FOOTAGE**

The Citing Commissioner's report states:

*The incident occurred during open play following a Connacht clearance kick downfield. The ball landed just outside the Bulls' 22-metre area, where the second ruck subsequently formed on the left-hand side of the pitch. The Bulls secured possession, and Connacht No.6 Josh Murphy, engaged in a legitimate contest for the ball.*

*Murphy entered the ruck legally, eventually positioning his left arm over the back of Bulls No.2, Jan-Hendrik Wessels. Both players were grounded, yet still actively engaged in the ruck. At this point, Murphy was positioned to the left of Wessels, with their bodies in close proximity—Murphy's head near Wessels' hips and vice versa. It is at this juncture that the alleged act of foul play occurred.*

*The live television feed, while not conclusive in capturing direct contact, clearly shows Wessels' right elbow grounded and his head turning backwards toward Murphy. Simultaneously, Wessels' left arm, partially obscured, can be seen moving in an unnatural, arc toward Murphy's groin area. The movement is not consistent with any legitimate rucking, grasp or binding action.*

*Immediately following the contact, Murphy reacts with visible and audible distress. He attempts to push/strike Wessels away and can be heard, several times, on the referee's microphone exclaiming, "He grabbed me right here!" gesturing unmistakably to his groin. His tone is one of shock, distress, and disbelief, yet he remains articulate and composed in his protest.*

*In a post-match voice note interview, Josh Murphy presented himself as professional and composed. He recounted the incident with clarity and consistency. When asked how long the contact lasted, he estimated "three to five seconds" a timeframe that aligns with the footage and his visible reaction. He further stated that his testicles were "grabbed and twisted," a claim made with conviction and without embellishment.*

*I was present at the match, positioned approximately 20 metres from the incident. My direct line of sight corroborated the sequence of events as described by Murphy and partially captured on video. The reaction from Murphy was immediate and unmistakably one of frustration.*

*While the video footage does not provide irrefutable visual confirmation of the exact point of contact, the totality of evidence, Murphy's immediate reaction, his consistent and credible testimony, the unnatural movement of Wessels' arm, and the corroborating live observation, leads to a compelling conclusion.*

*The movement of Wessels' left arm, away from his body and toward Murphy's groin, is not only unnatural but also unnecessary in the context of ruck engagement. His backward glance further suggests awareness. On the balance of probabilities, and in light of the evidence presented, it is my firm belief that Vodacom Bulls No.2 Jan-Hendrik Wessels committed a serious act of foul play by grabbing and, as alleged, twisting the testicles of Connacht No.6 Josh Murphy. I formally submit that Vodacom Bulls No.2 Jan-Hendrik Wessels be cited for a breach of Law 9.27*

The Referee's Report states:

*After penalising a strike to the head by Connacht 6, C6 made an allegation that he was grabbed in the groin area by Bulls 2. My TO4 reviewed this serious allegation on the big screen but we were unable to see any clear evidence from the angles that were shown of the allegation. It was therefore unsanctioned on the pitch.*

The TMO and both Assistant Referees' reports provide almost identical detail to that provided by the Referee.

The recorded audio statement from C6 is as summarised via the Citing Commissioner's report set out above.

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.

The footage shows the Player's arm in a position where the Player would have been able to carry out the incident as alleged. The image below shows where the alleged incident starts:



Following the image above, the video shows C6 moving his hips upwards and away from where the Player's arm is located. This is shown in the image below:



Immediately following the image above, the video shows, C6, with his head turned to directly face and look at the Player, swinging his arm and striking the Player with the inside of his forearm as a reaction to what has occurred:



As a result of C6's strike, the Player is knocked backwards. The Referee then blows his whistle. C6 gets to his feet and reports the incident to the Referee.

#### **ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF OTHER EVIDENCE (e.g. medical reports)**

The Disciplinary Officer requested a medical report from Connacht Rugby. A report was not provided as C6 had no ongoing injury to report on following the incident, as stated in C6's recorded audio statement.

#### **SUMMARY OF PLAYER'S EVIDENCE**

The Player's Representative presented the Player's case via written submissions together with oral submissions at the hearing. Both were consistent, and are summarised below.

The Player's Representative questioned the accuracy of the Citing Commissioner's report, noting the ruck at which the incident occurred is shown to be approximately 25 meters from the touchline, whilst the Citing Commissioner's report states that he was approximately 20 meters from the incident. In addition, the Player's Representative claimed the match officials were in a superior position compared to the Citing Commissioner, and they were not able to identify the offence, including with the benefit of technology.

The Player's Representative also identified issues with the statement of C6. Including:

1. multiple bodies being present at the ruck, impacting the ability to specifically identify the Player;
2. C6's uncertainty with regards to the duration of the incident, first stating five seconds, then three to five seconds; and
3. the absence of any physical or medical evidence to support the allegation.

The Player's Representative highlighted two previous cases to the Committee and provided copies of these cases as annexures to the written submission:

1. Kyle Sinkler, arising out of a British & Irish Lions fixture on 31 July 2021; and
2. Adre Smith (on Appeal) arising out of a URC fixture on 2 October 2021.

The purpose of highlighting these cases was to emphasise the approach of the committees in those cases, who acknowledged that a serious allegation (biting in the Sinkler case and Smith appeal) must be proved by "*clear, cogent and exact evidence*".

The Player's Representative asserted that there is a lack of irrefutable evidence, no eye-witnesses (other than C6) and that the citing by the Citing Commissioner is based on what can only be implied from the position of the Player's arm and the "*unnatural movement*" without any corroborating evidence to support the Citing Commissioner's view.

It was highlighted that the ruck at which the incident took place contained multiple players, and the Player's Representative submitted that any of them could have made contact with the groin area of C6.

The Player, who conducted himself well at the hearing, provided evidence both via his Representative's written submissions and orally at the hearing. Again, both were consistent. He described entering the ruck as the third Bulls player, he felt a force from his side resulting in him lying on his side with his leg trapped under players at the ruck. The Player described using his left arm to push down on his leg to relieve pressure on his knee and free his leg. Further to questioning by the Committee, the Player denied that he grabbed C6's testicles for the purpose of freeing himself and relieving pressure on his knee.

Further to questions from the Committee, the Player stated that based on his position he accepted that it was possible for him to have touched the groin area of C6, but that he did not, he asserted that he attempted to pull his leg free, then pressed down on his knee to relieve the pressure on it.

### **Adjournment**

After considering all of the available evidence, the Committee decided to adjourn the hearing on the basis that, having heard the Player's evidence, the Committee wished to obtain further

evidence regarding the incident from C6, before arriving at a decision with regards to this matter.

Following a brief adjournment, the Disciplinary Officer arranged for C6 to attend the hearing to provide evidence. C6 was accompanied by Tim Allnutt and Billy Millard of Connacht Rugby.

### **Josh Murphy's Oral Evidence**

C6 was invited to describe the incident and stated that he was counter-rucking and described feeling the Player grab, squeeze and twist his testicles, noting this was consistent with a deliberate act. Further to questions from the Committee, C6 stated that what he felt could only have been a deliberate action and not accidental. C6 stated it could not have been a blow from a leg, foot, elbow or anything else and was certain that the Player had grabbed, twisted and squeezed his testicles with his hand. When asked how he was certain of this, C6 stated that upon feeling this, he turned to see the Player with his hand in C6's groin.

The Player's Representative was invited to put questions to C6 via the Committee and questioned why C6 was so certain now, after he did not identify the Player via his recorded audio statement after the Match. C6 stated he was able to reflect on what had happened and had also viewed the match footage, which added to his certainty.

The Player's Representative enquired why C6 did not show any visible discomfort after the incident. C6 stated that he did show some discomfort and his main objective after the incident was to report it to the Referee.

Having concluded his oral evidence, C6 left the hearing.

The Player's Representative was then given a further opportunity to provide final submissions to the Committee in light of the additional evidence from C6. In addition to the points made prior to the adjournment, the Player's Representative stated that:

1. the evidence from C6 was inconsistent;
2. C6 wasn't certain as to who he alleged to have carried out the incident after the Match, but now was certain; and
3. C6 did not show any visible discomfort following the incident.

The Player's Representative invited the Committee to reject the citing on the basis that there is not sufficient evidence, the evidence that is available is inconsistent, the Player provided credible evidence which was not subjective and provided a probable version of events.

## **FINDINGS OF FACT**

After considering all of the available evidence, the Committee determined that:

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, the Player participated in the ruck to support his team with securing possession.
3. C6 counter-rucks, driving forward to a position where he is side by side with the Player.
4. C6's body moves sideways towards the Player resulting in both being on the floor.
5. The Player is seen to turn towards C6 with his arm in a position where it is possible for him to reach the testicles of C6.
6. The Player committed an act of foul play in that he grabs and twists the testicles of C6, as alleged by C6 and the Citing Commissioner. Whilst not conclusive, the video evidence supports and shows movements which are consistent with this finding immediately before, during and after this incident occurs.
7. The Citing Commissioner's report is based on his own eye-witness evidence, the evidence of C6 and the video footage.
8. The oral evidence from C6 was deemed to be clear, detailed and certain. C6 was forthcoming in answering the Panel's questions in full. Whilst the evidence the Player provided was also credible, his oral evidence was brief.
9. The Player was concerned about the pressure on his knee and his actions were an attempt to quickly remove the body of C6 from putting pressure on the Player's knee.
10. The Player's actions were not in error and this was not fleeting contact with the testicles of C6. Given the direct and intentional nature of the Player's actions the Committee are satisfied that the foul play meets the threshold for a Red Card.

As a result of the findings set out above, the citing is upheld.

## DECISION

The Citing Commissioner's report is based on his own eye-witness evidence, the evidence of C6 and the video footage.

The oral evidence provided by C6 was deemed credible, clear and detailed by the Committee. In reviewing the evidence of C6, the Committee acknowledged there was a discrepancy with regards to the duration of the incident, but this was not given significant weight and did not alter the Panel's view of the fundamental aspects of C6's evidence. The Committee also considered that C6 had his own interests to serve in giving an exculpatory explanation for him striking the Player as he was facing a disciplinary hearing for his Red Card also, but notwithstanding this the Committee found his evidence to be credible.

Whilst the Player's evidence was also credible, his oral evidence was brief and not supported by any third party. The Committee's view is that the video footage supports the evidence put forward by the Citing Commissioner and C6, rather than the Player.

While reviewing the evidence and determining the facts, the Committee considered the cases referenced by the Player's Representative (Sinkler 2021 and Smith 2021) and were satisfied that the evidence in favour of the citing from C6 was "*clear, cogent and exact*" and noted from the Smith case that "*the Rules are clear*" and "*The test to be applied is that of the balance of probabilities*".

The Committee is satisfied that the Player has not discharged the burden on him pursuant to rule 7.6.11.1 of the Rules.

As a result of the findings set out above, which are based on the Committee's assessment of the evidence and are on the balance of probabilities, the citing is upheld.

## SANCTIONING PROCESS

### ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUSNESS

Assessment of intent – DR 7.6.30(a) and (b)
Intentional <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reckless <input type="checkbox"/>
State Reasons
Given the Player's line of sight at the time of the incident and the description of the Player's actions by C6, being that the Player grabbed and twisted C6's testicles, the Committee determined on the balance of probabilities that the Player's actions were intentional.
Nature of actions – DR 7.6.30(c)
The Player grabbed and twisted the testicles of C6.
Existence of provocation – DR 7.6.30(d)
None.
Whether the Player retaliated – DR 7.6.30(e)
N/A
Self-defence – DR 7.6.30(f)
N/A
Effect on victim – DR 7.6.30(g)
C6 reacted immediately by striking the Player, showing some shock, and received a 20 minute Red Card as a result.
Effect on match – DR 7.6.30(h)

C6 received a 20 minute Red Card for striking the Player following this incident. The Player continued to play following an inconclusive review of the incident by the TMO and Match Officials.
Vulnerability of victim – DR 7.6.30(i)
C6 was vulnerable in that he was lying in a ruck and would not have expected the actions of the Player.
Level of participation/premeditation – DR 7.6.30(j)
Full participation.
Conduct completed/attempted – DR 7.6.30(l)
Conduct completed.
Other features of the Player’s conduct – DR 7.6.30(l)
Immediately prior to this incident, the Player described players in the ruck lying on his leg with considerable pressure on his knee. The Player explained that his actions were to release pressure on his knee and free his leg. This was also explained to the Referee by the Player promptly following the incident further to C6’s allegation.

**ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUSNESS CONTINUED**

Entry point					
<u>Top end*</u>	<u>Weeks</u>	<u>Mid-range</u>	<u>Weeks</u>	<u>Low-end</u>	<u>Weeks</u>
<input type="checkbox"/>		<input type="checkbox"/>		<input checked="" type="checkbox"/>	

\*If Top End, the JO or Committee should identify, if appropriate, an entry point between the Top End and the maximum sanction and provide the reasons for selecting this entry point, below.

In making this assessment, the JO/Committee should consider World Rugby Regulations 17.19.2(a), 17.19.2(h), and 17.19.2(i) or the equivalent provisions within the Tournament Rules referred to above.

<b>Reasons for selecting Entry Point</b>
C6 suffered no ongoing injury from this incident and did not require medical attention, as such the Committee deemed this to warrant a Low-end entry point.

**RELEVANT OFF-FIELD MITIGATING FACTORS**

Acknowledgement of guilt and timing – DR 7.6.32(a)	Player’s disciplinary record/good character – DR 7.6.32(b)
N/A – the citing was contested.	The Player has a relatively good record having only received a Red Card in 2019 as an 18 year old and a further Red Card in 2021.
Youth and inexperience of player – DR 7.6.32(c)	Conduct prior to and at hearing – DR 7.6.32(d)
The Player is 24, has played professionally for 5 years and has 9 caps for South Africa.	The Player conducted himself well prior to and during the hearing.
Remorse and timing of remorse – DR 7.6.32(e)	Other off-field mitigation – DR 7.6.32(f)

Whilst this was a contested citing, it is noted that the Player did not show any concern for C6 after the Match and did not speak to him.	None.
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Number of weeks deducted:

Summary of reason for number of weeks deducted:

With no acknowledgement of guilt, no remorse shown and a disciplinary record which is good, but not clean, the Committee determined that the Player could not be entitled to the full 50% mitigation.

The Player receives credit for a relatively good disciplinary record, his conduct prior to and at the hearing and is still in the early part of his professional career. As a result the Committee deducted 3 weeks (25%) from the sanction.

**ADDITIONAL RELEVANT OFF-FIELD AGGRAVATING FACTORS**

Player's status as an offender of the Laws of the Game – DR 7.6.35(a)
N/A
Need for deterrence – DR 7.6.35(b)
None.
Any other off-field aggravating factors – DR 7.6.35(c)
None.

Number of additional weeks:

**SANCTION**

**NOTE:** PLAYERS ORDERED OFF ARE PROVISIONALLY SUSPENDED PENDING THE HEARING OF THEIR CASE, SUCH SUSPENSION SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN SANCTIONING – R 17.14.5(f) (or equivalent Tournament rule)

Total sanction	9 weeks	Sending off sufficient <input type="checkbox"/>
Sanction commences	18 October 2025	

Sanction concludes	22 December 2025
Matches/tournaments included in sanction	Glasgow v Bulls, URC, 24 October 2025 SA v Japan, ANS, 1 November 2025 France v SA, ANS, 8 November 2025 Italy v SA, ANS, 15 November 2025 Ireland v SA, ANS, 22 November 2025 Wales v SA, ANS, 29 November 2025 Bulls v Union Bordeaux Begles, EPCR, 6 December 2025 Northampton Saints v Bulls, EPCR, 14 December 2025 Sharks v Bulls, URC, 20 December 2025

Costs	None.
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Signature (Chair)	Declan Goodwin	Date	23 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)