

# DISCIPLINARY DECISION



Match	Italy v Ireland		
Player's Union	Italy	Competition	Men's Six Nations 2025
Date of Match	15 March 2025	Match venue	Stadio Olimpico, Roma
Applicable rules	2025 SIX NATIONS DISCIPLINARY AND ANTI-DOPING RULES		

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE			
Player's Surname	Vintcent	Player's Forename(s)	Ross
Player's Date of birth	05/06/2002	Referee's Name	Luke Pearce (England)
Foul play	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Admitted <input type="checkbox"/> Not admitted	Red card warranted	<input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Admitted <input type="checkbox"/> Not admitted
Offence	Law 9.13 Dangerous tackle. "A player must not tackle an opponent early, late or dangerously. Dangerous tackling includes but is not limited to, tackling, or attempting to tackle an opponent above the line of the shoulders even if the tackle starts below the line of the shoulders".	SELECT: Red card <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Citing <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If "Other" selected, please specify:	
Summary of sanction	3 weeks suspension but eligible for inclusion in the World Rugby Coach Intervention Programme		

HEARING DETAILS			
Hearing date	18 March 2025	Hearing venue	Zoom
Chairman/JO	Simon Thomas (Wales)		
Other members of Disciplinary Committee	Valeriu Toma (Romania) (former referee and international match official) Maryn Wood (England) (former international player and coach)		
Appearance Player	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>	Appearance Player's union	Yes <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> No <input type="checkbox"/>
Player's representative(s)	Benedetto Blasi (Lawyer)  Giamba Vendetti (Italy National Team Manager)	Disciplinary Officer and/or other attendees	Tom Price, (6Nations Disciplinary Administrator and Head of Sporting Operations)  Annie Quantrill (6Nations Rugby Administrator)

List of documents/materials provided to Player in advance of hearing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> <li>1. Letter convening hearing</li> <li>2. Referee’s report on an ordering off</li> <li>3. Foul Play review Officer’s report on ordering off</li> <li>4. Match footage (broadcast and FPRO clips)</li> <li>5. Statement of Hugo Keenan (Ireland No.15)</li> <li>6. Dr Stuart O’Flanagan (Ireland Team Doctor)</li> <li>7. Player’s response to standing directions</li> <li>8. Player’s disciplinary record</li> <li>9. Player’s forthcoming schedule of matches</li> </ol>
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## INTRODUCTION, ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF ALLEGATION AND EVIDENCE

### **Introduction**

The disciplinary committee (“the Committee”) had been appointed by World Rugby’s independent judicial panel chairman, Christopher Quinlan KC, to hear the case relating to Vintcent Ross of Italy (“the Player”), following the ordering off of the Player for an alleged act of foul play during the match played between Italy and Ireland on 15<sup>th</sup> March 2025 (“the Match”).

The essence of the allegation of foul play was that, following a kick re-start, the Player had committed a dangerous (high) tackle on Hugo Keenan (Ireland No15) who caught the ball. The Player had run into Keenan at high speed and his head made contact with the face/head of Keenan.

The rules applicable to the 2025 Six Nations Tournament (“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 Rules 2.5 89 – 2.5 94 together the table of sanctions found at Appendix 2 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 show issue a red card was wrong (Rule 2.5.11). Pursuant to Rule 2.5.87, if a player succeeds in demonstrating this to a committee, ordinarily the committee takes no further action (i.e. imposes no suspension of the player) and the red card is disregarded for the purposes of 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, all 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’s legal representative at a hearing on 18 March 2025. 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

### **Match Footage**

The match footage was from two angles. It showed that at a restart kick, Italy kicked the ball high into the air towards the middle of the pitch. The Irish fullback (Hugo Keenan) caught the ball. As he did so, the Player who had run from his own half immediately tackled Keenan whilst both the Player and Keenan were in an upright position. The Player's head made direct contact with the face of Keenan and both players fell to the ground. The referee blew the whistle and then watched the incident on the big screen. The referee observed that the Player had been too upright as he committed to the tackle. He noted that there was head contact and regarded there being a high degree of force. The referee issued a yellow card and directed that the matter be reviewed by the Foul Play Review Officer. Following the review, the yellow card was upgraded to a red card and the Player was ordered off from the field permanently for an offence of dangerous tackling

### **Referee's report**

The referee's report confirmed the incident as set out above and in his description, he merely stated "*the above player tackled his opponent dangerously*".

### **The Foul Play Review Officer's report**

This confirmed the following: -

*"No. 21 of Italy arrived at speed on No. 15 of Ireland who was receiving the restart kick. He made contact with the head and it was foul play. An official review showed the incident reached the yellow card threshold and sent to a foul play review. As Foul Play Review Officer, I upgraded to a red card, because the degree of danger was (high speed) and there was no mitigation (clear line of sight, no control)".*

### **Statement of Hugo Keenan**

Mr Keenan had provided a short statement to his team manager which read as follows:

*"I recall getting a glancing blow and having a little nosebleed after. He apologised straight after and also after the full-time whistle"*

### **Witness statement of Dr Stuart O'Flanagan**

Dr O'Flanagan, the Ireland national team doctor, had provided a statement as follows:

*"On-field assessment for Hugo revealed a minor nosebleed which ceased with direct pressure within 30 seconds. He was alert, orientated and appropriate throughout my assessment and I was satisfied that he was fit to play on. The match-day doctor subsequently requested a follow-up on-field assessment a few minutes later. This was performed and again, I had no medical concerns about his ability to play on"*

### **Player's response to standing directions**

The Player, through his representative Mr Venedetti had provided the Player's written response to the allegation which confirmed that the Player accepted that the match officials' reports that were true and accurate and that he had committed the act of foul play as described in the official report and that his conduct had merited a red card.

He said as follows:

*"I acknowledge that my intervention led to the foul play, and I take full responsibility for it. However, I would like to highlight that while the challenge may have appeared strong, it was absolutely not intentional. As seen in the video footage immediately after the incident, I recognised the awkwardness of my movement and immediately apologised to the opponent. This reflects my awareness of the situation of my regret for the unintended outcome. I just want to add that I even went to him after the game as well to ask if he was okay and to apologise"*

## SUMMARY OF PLAYER'S EVIDENCE

The Player was asked to give evidence in relation to the matter and he stated as follows:

*“As the ball was kicked, I knew that it was likely to be heading towards the Ireland 22-metre line. I started to run as fast as I could. By the time I became aware as to where the ball was landing, I realised that I was closer to Hugo Keenan than I anticipated. I moved to my left in order to tackle him - not head-on- but he, at the same time, moved to his right. As he did so, my head unfortunately made contact with his head. He fell to his left not to his right and I fell to my left side.”*

When asked by the Committee which part of his head had made contact to the Player's head, he said that it was on or above his hairline. He confirmed he had been wearing a head protector and had not felt any pain. When asked where he believed his head had made contact to that of Keenan, he said that he could not be 100% sure but it could have been his nose because he had since discovered that Keenan had suffered a nosebleed.

He was asked about what training he has had to tackle safely in such situations. He said that he played at No. 7 and that his team (Exeter) had given him training in such situations. He said that he had made tackles following restarts before, but in this instance he simply arrived too quickly.

When asked what he would do if the situation was repeated, the Player said that he thought that he would give himself and the opposing player more space and time. He also said he would slow his feet and lower his body angle so that he was bent more at the waist.

He acknowledged that by tackling in an upright position there was a real risk of causing head contact with the opponent. He said, in his defence, however, that the video footage indicated that he had started to lower his height to tackle the Player but that it had not been enough.

He was asked whether Mr Keenan had acknowledged his apology on field. The Player said that he thought Mr Keenan may not have heard him but the Irish player James Lowe (who was nearby) acknowledged his on-field apology.

The Player said that following the Match he went on to Keenan to apologise to him again. He said Keenan was “fine” and replied “*Was that you?*”. When asked how he was, Keenan told the Player he was “*not too bad*”.

In submissions on behalf of the Player, Mr Blasi stated that it was very important to understand the context of the incident. At the time of the incident, the scores were close and either team could have won the Match.

He said that Italy wanted to avoid the “wooden spoon”. It was an open match, and the incident had occurred at very high speed. Mr Blasi emphasised that the whole action lasted no more than three seconds and that when the ball was kicked high into the air, the Player could not initially see it.

Mr Blasi referred to the match footage which indicated that as the ball was caught by Keenan, the Player moved to his left side to avoid a front-on contact in the tackle. However, unfortunately, Keenan mirrored the actions of the Player by moving to Keenan's right. Fortunately, despite how the match footage looked, there was no significant impact with Keenan's head and the data readings from Mr Keenan's smart mouthguard did not indicate that any head injury assessment was required.

### **Submissions as to sanction**

Following the conclusion of the evidence, the Chairman outlined the prescribed sanctioning process the Committee was obliged to follow.

Firstly, the Committee must consider the on-field facts of the case against the entry point criteria, which is an assessment of the seriousness of foul play.

Once it has decided the appropriate entry point, it then has to consider the existence of any off-field mitigating factors as prescribed under the Rules, which might reduce the sanction. Finally, the Committee must consider the existence of any off-field aggravating factors under Rules, which could increase the sanction.

Rule provides that the maximum reduction from the entry point suspension is limited to 50%, but that Committee must start at zero and then work their way up depending upon the circumstances of the case.

Appendix 2 to the Rules provides the following entry point suspension for acts of foul play, contrary to Law 9.13 as follows:

Low-end: Two weeks/matches

Mid-range: Six weeks/matches

Top-end: 10-plus weeks/matches (maximum 52 weeks/matches)

### **Player's submissions as to sanction**

Mr Blasi submitted the following to the panel:-

1. The Player's actions were not intentional.
2. The Player's actions were reckless.
3. As far as the nature of the actions, Mr Blasi commented that the incident was contributed to by the movement of both athletes and that the Player had, in fact, tried to slow his speed.
4. This was not a case involving either provocation, retaliation or self-defence.
5. As to the effect of the Player's actions on the victim, there was, fortunately, no consequence beyond a temporary minor nosebleed which was stopped within 30 seconds.
6. There was no effect of the Player's actions on the Match.
7. It was accepted that the victim was vulnerable.
8. As to the level of participation, whilst the Player had fully participated, the participation itself had been less than a second from the ball being caught by Mr Keenan to the timing of the tackle.
9. The Player's conduct was completed.

As to mitigating factors, Mr Blasi confirmed that the Player should receive maximum credit because he had put forward an early acknowledgement of the commission of the offence and that he had acknowledged that it amounted to a red card. The Player had an unblemished disciplinary record. The Player was young and even though he was playing for the Italian national team, he was relatively inexperienced, and certainly inexperienced at international level. The Player was 22 years of age and had 14 caps/appearances for Italy having made his debut in 2024. He had previously played for Zebra in 2022, having made three appearances for them. He had then spent one year at university and played rugby at university before joining Exeter Chiefs.

The Player's conduct prior to and at the hearing had been exemplary. The Player had demonstrated remorse for his conduct to the victim and had done so at the earliest opportunity. The Player was spoken of highly by his team manager who described him as a very positive influence within the changing room to his team members and was a hard worker.

### **Other Issues Relating to Sanction**

Mr Blasi asked that the Player be considered eligible to participate in the World Rugby Coach Intervention Programme.

The Italian Rugby Federation did not have any agreement with non-Italian clubs about resting their national team players following the Six Nations tournament and so the Player was fit, able and expected to play for his club, Exeter Chiefs, in their next match.

## FINDINGS OF FACT

The Committee retired in private to consider the evidence and the submissions it had heard, and made the following finding of facts:

1. In the 49<sup>th</sup> minute of the half of the Match, Italy kicked the ball from a re-start into the Ireland 22 area near the centre of the field.
2. The Player chased the kick in order to compete for the ball and/or tackle the Ireland catcher.
3. Hugo Keenan (Ireland 15) successfully caught the ball cleanly before the Player could compete for it
4. The Player had run towards Keenan at high speed to tackle him.
5. As the Player reached Keenan, he was in a too upright body position which meant there was a real risk of committing a dangerous tackle above the line of Keenan's shoulders.
6. The Player and Keenan both moved sideways slightly in the same direction just before impact.
7. As the Player reached Keenan, he attempted to tackle him but his head made direct contact with Keenan's head with the impact to Keenan's nose.
8. Both Players fell to the ground at which point the referee stopped play to review the incident before awarding a penalty and yellow card against the Player pending an off field review by the Foul Play Review Officer.
9. The Player had suffered no injury whereas Keenan had suffered a nose bleed which was attended to by the Ireland medical team. The nose bleed stopped within 30 seconds of treatment.
10. Keenan suffered no further injury and an HIA assessment was not deemed necessary
11. The Player attempted to apologise to Keenan immediately on field and repeated this apology after the Match.
12. Although the Player had not intended to commit a dangerous tackle, the Player's actions had been reckless in that he knew that by being in an upright position and attempting to tackle at high speed there was a risk of head contact with the opponent.

## DECISION

Foul play	Admitted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Determined <input type="checkbox"/> Not determined <input type="checkbox"/> Other disposal (please state) <input type="checkbox"/>
Red card warranted	Admitted <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Determined <input type="checkbox"/> Not determined <input type="checkbox"/> Other disposal (please state) <input type="checkbox"/>

## SANCTIONING PROCESS

References below are to provisions in the 2025 Disciplinary and Anti-Doping Rules, which form Schedule Four of the 2025 Six Nations Terms of Participation documentation.

## ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUSNESS

Assessment of intent– clause 2.5.89 (a) and (b)
Intentional <input type="checkbox"/> Reckless <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
State reasons
The Committee concluded that the Player was aware that by failing to take sufficient care in a high-speed situation with a lack of control, there was a significant risk of his head coming into contact with an opponent's head.
Nature of actions –clause 2.5.89 (c)
The Player had attempted to tackle an opponent with the ball, but had done so at high speed in far too an upright position causing a head-on-head contact with an opponent.

Existence of provocation – clause 2.5.89 (d)
Not applicable.
Whether Player retaliated – clause 2.5.89 (e)
Not applicable.
Self-defence – clause 2.5.89 (f)
Not applicable.
Effect on victim – clause 2.5.89 (g)
Fortunately, the effect on the victim had been relatively minor resulting only in a short-lived nosebleed.
Effect on match – clause 2.5.89 (h)
None.
Vulnerability of victim – clause 2.5.89 (i)
The victim’s head was unprotected and he was vulnerable to injury. It was fortunate that no serious injury had occurred.
Level of participation/premeditation – clause 2.5.89 (j)
The Committee concluded the Player had fully participated; however, the incident had been fast-moving and the Player had not had much time to react.
Conduct completed/attempted – clause 2.5.89 (k)
Completed.
Other features of Player’s conduct – clause 2.5.89 (l)
None.

**ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUSNESS CONTINUED**

Entry point		
Top end Weeks/matches <input type="checkbox"/>	Mid-range Weeks/matches <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> 6 weeks	Lower end Weeks/matches <input type="checkbox"/>

**REASONS FOR SELECTING ENTRY POINT**

The Committee reminded itself that where foul play involves contact with the head or neck of an opponent, it cannot impose less than a mid-range sanction. In this instance, the Committee concluded that mid-range was the appropriate entry point.

**RELEVANT OFF-FIELD MITIGATING FACTORS**

Acknowledgement of foul play (and timing) – clause 2.5.91(a)	Player’s disciplinary record – clause 2.5.91 (b)
The Player had acknowledged that his foul play merited a red card at the earliest opportunity.	The Player had an unblemished disciplinary record before this matter.

Youth and/or inexperience of Player – clause 2.5.91(c)	Conduct prior to and at hearing – clause 2.5.91 (d)
The Player was relatively young and inexperienced, even though he was playing for the Italian national team.	The Player had conducted himself appropriately and with all due respect during the hearing and had made a good impression of himself.
Remorse (and timing if remorse)–clause 2.5.91(e)	Other off-field mitigation – clause 2.5.91(f)
The Player had expressed apology immediately after the incident to the victim and had also sought him out afterwards to apologise again.	It was accepted the Player was of positive good character.

Number of weeks/matches deducted:

Summary of reason for number of weeks/matches deducted:

The Player was entitled to the maximum mitigation reduction from the entry point (50%) permissible under the Rules.

### RELEVANT OFF-FIELD AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Player’s status as an offender of the Laws of the Game – clause 2.5.94 (a)
Not applicable.
Need for deterrence – clause 2.5.94 (b)
Not applicable.
Any other off-field aggravating factors– clause 2.5.94 (c)
Not applicable.

Number of additional weeks/matches:

## SANCTION

**NOTE:** PLAYERS ORDERED OFF OR CITED ARE PROVISIONALLY SUSPENDED PENDING THE HEARING OF THEIR CASE, SUCH SUSPENSION SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN SANCTIONING – CLAUSES 2.5.14 AND 2.5.33.

Total sanction	3 weeks, but the final week can be replaced by successful completion of the Coach Intervention Programme.	Sending off sufficient <input type="checkbox"/>
Sanction commences	15 <sup>th</sup> March 2025	
Sanction concludes	Monday, 21 <sup>st</sup> April 2025 (or 31 March 2025 if the CIP is successfully completed before that date).	
Matches/tournaments included in sanction	22 <sup>nd</sup> March 2025: Exeter Chiefs –v– Bristol Bears, 29 <sup>th</sup> March 2025: Exeter Chiefs –v– Newcastle Falcons, 19 <sup>th</sup> April 2025: Exeter Chiefs –v– Bath,	

Costs	No order.
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Signature (JO or Chairman)	Simon Thomas	Date	18 March 2025
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**NOTE:** THE PLAYER WILL HAVE UNTIL 4PM (GMT) ON THE THIRD DAY (EXCLUDING WEEKENDS) AFTER RECEIPT OF THE WRITTEN NOTICE OF THE DECISION OF THE CHAIRMAN/JO TO FILE AN APPEAL WITH THE CHAIRMAN OF THE DISCIPLINARY PANEL C/O THE DISCIPLINARY OFFICER –CLAUSE 2.6.4.APEAL TO BE EMAILED TO [disciplinary@sixnationsrugby.com](mailto:disciplinary@sixnationsrugby.com).