

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	Nicotera	Player's Forename(s)	Giacomo
Player's Date of birth	15 July 1996	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 9.20 (dangerous play in a ruck or maul) A player must not charge into a ruck or maul. Charging includes any contact made without binding on to another player in the ruck or maul.	SELECT: Red card <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Citing <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/> If "Other" selected, please specify:	
Summary of sanction	4 weeks (free to play on 28 April 2025)		

HEARING DETAILS			
Hearing date	18 March 2025	Hearing venue	Zoom call
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 Venedetti (Italy National Team Manager) Paul Gustard (Defence Coach Stade Français)	Disciplinary Officer and/or other attendees	Tom Price, (6Nations Disciplinary Administrator and Head of Sports) Annie Quantrill (6Nations Rugby Administrator)
List of documents/materials provided to Player in advance of hearing	<ol style="list-style-type: none"> 1. Letter convening hearing 2. Referee's report on an ordering off 3. Foul Play Review Officer's report on ordering off 4. Match footage (broadcast and FPRO clips) 5. Statement of Peter O'Mahony 6. Statement of Dr Stuart O'Flanagan (IRFU Team Doctor) 7. Player's response to standing directions 		

8. Player's disciplinary record
9. Player's forthcoming schedule of matches

INTRODUCTION AND ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF REFEREE'S REPORT/INCIDENT FOOTAGE

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 Giacomo Nicotera 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 15th March 2025 ("the Match").

The essence of the allegation of foul play was that the Player had been ordered off for having charged dangerously into a ruck without binding onto an opponent and in doing so had made contact with his right arm to the head of an opponent (Peter O'Mahony).

The rules applicable to the 2025 6Nations 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 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

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 the alleged foul play and what was understood to be the Player's position from his written response to standing directions, i.e., that he accepted the content of the referee's report and accepted his conduct merited a red card. The Player confirmed this was correct.

The Evidence

The chairman then proceeded to read the evidence in the case as follows:

Referee's report

The referee's report on the ordering off had erroneously stated that the Player had been guilty of a dangerous tackle contrary to Law 9.13; however, in a subsequent email, the referee had confirmed that the correct classification and description of the foul play was an offence contrary to Law 9.20(a) (dangerous charge into a ruck).

Foul Play Review Officer report on an ordering off

The FPRO (Mr Trainini) had provided a report stating that the Player had contravened Law 9.20(a) in the second half of the Match when 39 minutes of that half had elapsed. It stated that the match official was within five metres of the incident and at the time the score was Italy 17, Ireland 22.

The narrative description of the FPRO read as follows:

"Number 16 Italy charged Number 20 Ireland into a ruck and made contact with the head. An official review showed the incident reached the yellow card threshold and sent to a foul play review. As FPRO, I upgraded to a red card, because the degree of danger was high (direct contact to the head with force) and there was no mitigation (clear line of sight, Irish player standing still)."

Statement of Peter O'Mahony

Peter O'Mahony was playing No. 20 for Ireland during the Match. He had provided a statement as follows:

"I was at front of a breakdown looking at the ground when I felt a bang on my right shoulder. As I wasn't looking forward, I didn't see it coming and wasn't braced"

Statement of Dr Stuart O'Flanagan

The Ireland team doctor, Dr Stuart O'Flanagan had provided an email which confirmed the following:

"There was no on-field medical check at the time of the event and the player¹ did not require any follow-up medical assessment after the game"

Match footage

The footage will show the following:

At a ruck formed near the Ireland 22-metre line, Ireland were in possession of the ball. There was an Italy player in the ruck lying sideways facing towards the Irish try line. There were three Irish players attempting to "seal" the ruck so as to protect the scrum half as he secured possession of the ball at the base of the ruck.

The Ireland player at the front of the ruck on the Italy side was Peter O'Mahony (Ireland No. 20) who could be seen bent over at the waist with both hands on the ground beyond the body of the prone Italy player. O'Mahony was in a very low position with his head barely above the height of the prone Italy player.

The Player (seen wearing No. 16) is standing at the left of the ruck. He outstretches his right arm and then drops his height so that his torso is parallel with his hips. He then drives powerfully towards the direction of O'Mahony. The Player's right arm and hand are "tucked" so that his elbow is facing outwards and away from

¹ O'Mahony

his body. As he drives forward, there is clearly no attempt with the right arm to grasp an opponent. Additionally, another angle of footage showed that at the time the Player's right shoulder and right elbow made direct contact with O'Mahony's head. Also, the Player's left hand does not attempt to grasp O'Mahony. Instead, the Player's left hand is placed firmly onto the legs of the prone Italian player.

After contact with O'Mahony takes place, the Player moves his left hand from the leg of his teammate and then binds on to O'Mahony's leg.

The various angles of the footage clearly show that there was a significant amount of contact between the Player's right arm and O'Mahony's head. O'Mahony's reaction upon being struck is to roll away from the ruck onto the ground and he grasps his right shoulder with his left-hand, suggesting he is in discomfort.

O'Mahony gets up and runs behind the defensive line again at which point the footage stops.

Player's response to standing directions

Prior to the hearing, and in accordance with the standing directions applicable to the Rules, the Player's legal representative had submitted his response. The salient parts of this response were as follows:

- The Player accepted that he committed an act of foul play as set out in the official report and that his act warranted a red card.
- He went on to state as follows:

"I sincerely regret the incident and apologise for my unaccomplished movement to fully grasp O'Mahony. Unfortunately, I kept my elbow too wide, but my only intention – just two minutes before the end of the match – was to regain possession of the ball through a counter ruck and create an opportunity to win the game. My challenge was meant to be strong on the shoulder of the opponent. After the match, I went to him to check how he was doing and to apologise."

SUMMARY OF PLAYER'S EVIDENCE AND SUBMISSIONS

Mr Blasi made submissions on behalf of the Player to try and put the act of foul play in context.

He stated that the foul play took place in the very last minutes of the Match. It was the last day of the 6Nations Tournament. The Italian team could have finished last within the tournament, but equally, they could have won this Match. The action was taking place on the Ireland 22, so therefore near the "try zone". There was pressure on the Player. As Ireland were in the possession of the ball, the Player wanted to counter-ruck. He needed to apply strong force, but the force that he used was proportionate to the situation and was not within a "scope of making damage"

Mr Blasi suggested that the video evidence showed that the Player had made an attempt to wrap with his left arm whilst entering the ruck. There had been no attempt by him to bind with his right arm because of the position of O'Mahony's head, such that if he had attempted to bind with the right arm, his arm or hand would have struck O'Mahony's head in the process.

Player's evidence

The Player said that he could see O'Mahony was in a very low position and that he wanted to wrap him and remove him from the ruck. The Player said that he had had to enter the ruck through "the gate" and that he had tried to exercise control. He was asked about what coaching he had received in such situations. He said that he was coached to enter the ruck in a very low position and to wrap the other player and then drive his legs.

It was put to the Player that the video footage did not, in fact, show him attempting to wrap O'Mahony with his left arm and that when the contact with O'Mahony takes place, the Player's right arm is tucked and the left arm and hand are placed on the leg of his fellow player. It was put to him that it was only after the contact had taken place that his arms moved to wrap O'Mahony. The Player acknowledged this.

It was put to the Player that there had been no realistic prospect of being able to recover or compete for the ball by counter-rucking, because the footage showed the ball was already secured on the other side of the ruck. The Player said that he acknowledged the ball was already behind the Irish side but that he wanted to do what he could to disrupt Ireland.

The Player stated that he wanted to evade any head contact and that is why he approached the ruck in the manner that he did. His intention had been to disrupt the ruck and try and slow the ball down. The Player acknowledged that by charging into a ruck in such a manner, he was aware or ought to have been aware that there was a significant risk of contact with he and O'Mahony's head taking place.

Submissions from Mr Paul Gustard

Mr Gustard made representations about the Player's intent. He explained that the three areas of contest for the ball in rugby are in the air, in the tackle or on the floor. He pointed out that "crocodile rolls" as methods of removing persons from rucks are no longer allowed. Therefore, powerful counter-rucking is important.

The Player approached the ruck in a controlled manner and had not charged any significant distance into the ruck. O'Mahony was a clear target and was adopting an illegal body position because both his hands were resting on the ground over the ruck. Mr Gustard said that the gap in time between the Player's contact with O'Mahony's shoulder and the wrapping of the Player's left arm was somewhat inevitable because of O'Mahony's body position and that the Player's arm needed to swing around in order to bind on to O'Mahony's leg.

Other evidence

In asking the Player about his previous record, he confirmed that he had recently been suspended for dangerous play in a ruck or maul, having made contact with the neck of an opponent in a ruck. He had been

suspended for four weeks, which had been reduced by a further week due to him having completed the World Rugby Coach Intervention Programme.

The Player was asked what he had learned from the Coach Intervention Programme, and he said that he had focused upon his body position when entering rucks, his height when entering rucks, and carefully targeting the appropriate area of the body of an opponent when counter-rucking.

It was also put to the Player that he had been previously suspended for a dangerous tackle. He acknowledged this was the case, approximately ten years ago. He described how he was playing for Mogliano at the time, and it was the first match that he had played in, and was somewhat overexcited and eager to impress.

Finally, the Player was asked about his age, experience and pattern of forthcoming matches. He confirmed that he was born on 15 July 1996 (and therefore now aged 28). He had spent four seasons playing for Treviso, and had been awarded 35 appearances/caps with the Italy national side. Prior to playing for Treviso, he had played in the top Italian tier of rugby, but it was not fully professional.

The Player concluded his evidence by stating that he was apologetic for the incident, and had expressed the apology to Mr O'Mahony personally. He had never intended to commit an act of foul play, and had certainly not intended to impact upon the head of Mr O'Mahony.

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 a critical period of the Match with Ireland, only five points ahead, a ruck formed close to the Ireland 22-metre line.
2. Ireland had secured possession of the ball in the ruck. Ireland No. 20 (Peter O'Mahony) was leaning over Italy No. 10 (Paolo Garbisi) in the ruck with his hands on the floor, making it difficult for the Player to counter-ruck due to O'Mahony's body position.
3. The Player had a clear line of sight of O'Mahony, and paused before deciding to drive into the ruck to drive O'Mahony away from the ruck by the use of his right shoulder to O'Mahony's right shoulder.
4. The Player drove into the ruck with some considerable force (as he needed to) in order to remove O'Mahony from the area, and disrupt the ruck.
5. The Player's actions were always illegal in that he made no attempt to bind onto O'Mahony as he made contact with him. The Player's left arm belatedly came around to bind upon O'Mahony as a secondary action.
6. There were no mitigating factors which are recognised by the Head Contact Process (such as sudden movement of O'Mahony) which could have mitigated the seriousness of the foul play.
7. In his attempt to make contact with O'Mahony, the Player's right arm was in a tucked position with the elbow extended. The Player's right arm made visible direct contact with O'Mahony's head, although the panel concluded that the principal point of contact was between the Player's right shoulder and O'Mahony's right shoulder.
8. O'Mahony was caused discomfort by the contact, as O'Mahony could be seen rolling away and reaching for his right shoulder.
9. Mr O'Mahony did not suffer any obvious discomfort or injury to his head.
10. The Player was subject to a red card following the Foul Play Review Officer's reassessment of the conduct.
11. Following the Match, the Player made an apology to Mr O'Mahony as soon as he was able.
12. It was clear that the Player had a good view of O'Mahony before charging into the ruck without attempting to bind and therefore, the Committee concluded that the Player had intended to act illegally (by not binding when joining the ruck), however, the Committee found that the Player had not intended to make contact with O'Mahony's head. Rather, he was reckless as to whether contact with O'Mahony's head would occur.

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 checked="" type="checkbox"/> Reckless <input checked="" type="checkbox"/>
State reasons
The Committee was satisfied on the evidence that the Player had intended to commit an illegal act as he used his shoulder to drive O’Mahony away from the ruck without any attempt to bind onto O’Mahony. His conduct was therefore always illegal. The Committee concluded that the Player had not formed any intention to strike O’Mahony to the head, but that his actions in that regard were reckless because he knew or ought to have known that by driving into the ruck without appropriate care, this was a realistic possibility.
Nature of actions –clause 2.5.89 (c)
The Player drove into the ruck without attempting to bind and in the process, his right arm made direct contact with O’Mahony’s head.
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)
O’Mahony suffered some temporary discomfort to his left shoulder but recovered quickly. There was no discernible injury to his head and O’Mahony had not reported any contact with the head.
Effect on match – clause 2.5.89 (h)
None
Vulnerability of victim – clause 2.5.89 (i)
O’Mahony was vulnerable because even though he was in a ruck, and may have expected to have been the subject of an attempted counter ruck, his head was facing down and was unprotected

Level of participation/premeditation – clause 2.5.89 (j)
The Player had fully participated in the foul play. Although the Committee found that the foul play was intentional, it could not be said there was any degree of pre-meditation.
Conduct completed/attempted – clause 2.5.89 (k)
The conduct was completed.
Other features of Player’s conduct –clause 2.5.89 (l)
Not applicable.

ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUSNESS CONTINUED

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

Reasons for selecting entry point above top end
In accordance with World Rugby’s mandatory sanctioning process involving contact with an opponent’s head, the panel must impose at least mid-range sanction. In this instance, a mid-range sanction was appropriate.

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 admitted responsibility at the earliest opportunity and had engaged in the process.	The Player did not have an unblemished record. The Player had a recent suspension (2023/2024) for a similar offence and notwithstanding having completed the Coach Intervention Programme, he had committed a further dangerous charge into a ruck involving head contact, which was concerning.
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 neither young nor inexperienced.	The Player’s conduct at the hearing had been very good. He had behaved responsibly and respectfully throughout.
Remorse (and timing if remorse)–clause 2.5.91(e)	Other off-field mitigation – clause 2.5.91(f)
The Player had demonstrated remorse and had done so to Mr O’Mahony shortly after the incident.	The Player was spoken of highly by his team managers in terms of his work ethic and general conduct.

Number of weeks/matches deducted: 2

Summary of reason for number of weeks/matches deducted:

The Committee considered at length whether the Player’s recent transgression for a similar offence and failure on the part of the Coach Intervention Programme to have been effective was of concern to the panel. The Committee gave careful consideration to allowing a reduction of one week for mitigating circumstances. However, having reflected on the fact that the Player had only been suspended once in the last ten years, it felt that a two-week reduction (a 33.3% reduction from entry point) was the appropriate reduction in the particular circumstances.

In applying the suspension to the Player’s stated forthcoming matches, it was confirmed by the Player’s representatives that the Italy national team did not have an agreement with non-Italian clubs to rest players following the end of the Six Nations tournament and the evidence given to the Committee was that he was fit, able and expected to play this forthcoming weekend for Stade Francais. The Six Nations Disciplinary Administrator was invited to comment but did not make any representations to the contrary.

RELEVANT OFF-FIELD AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Player’s status as an offender of the Laws of the Game – clause 2.5.94 (a)
None
Need for deterrence – clause 2.5.94 (b)
None
Any other off-field aggravating factors– clause 2.5.94 (c)
None

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	4 weeks suspension	Sending off sufficient <input type="checkbox"/>
Sanction commences	15 March 2025	
Sanction concludes	28 April 2025	
Matches/tournaments included in sanction	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> Stade Francais Paris (SFP) v Bayonne SFP v Montpellier 	

	<ul style="list-style-type: none"> • SFP v Stade Toulousin • SFP v Racing
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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. APPEAL TO BE EMAILED TO disciplinary@sixnationsrugby.com.