

# DISCIPLINARY DECISION



Match	Ireland v France		
Player's Union	FFR	Competition	6 Nations (Women)
Date of Match	22 March 2025	Match venue	Kingspan Stadium, Belfast
Applicable rules	2025 SIX NATIONS DISCIPLINARY AND ANTI-DOPING RULES		

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE			
Player's Surname	Vernier	Player's Forename(s)	Gabrielle
Player's Date of birth	2 June 1997	Referee's Name	Hollie Davidson
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 : A player must not tackle an opponent early, late or dangerously.	SELECT: Red card <input checked="" type="checkbox"/> Citing <input type="checkbox"/> Other <input type="checkbox"/>  If "Other" selected, please specify:	
Summary of sanction	3 matches. This can be reduced to 2 matches if the player successfully applies for and undertakes the HCP Coaching Intervention Programme.		

HEARING DETAILS			
Hearing date	26 March 2025	Hearing venue	Zoom call
Chairman/JO	Richard Cole (Wales)		
Other members of Disciplinary Committee	Martyn Wood, ex- international player (England) Ofisa Tonu'u, ex-international player (New Zealand)		
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)	Oliver Harland accompanied by Lara Curtis (Northridge Law).	Disciplinary Officer and/or other attendees	Tom Price, Holi Smith and Annie Quantrill (6N); Lionel Rossigneux (Team Manager FFR) Edward Reay-Jones (Head of Legal Affairs FFR)
List of documents/ materials provided to Player in advance of hearing	Footage of the incident; Referee's Report from Hollie Davidson; Report from Quinton Immelman, Foul Play Review Officer; Statement from the injured Ireland player, Eve Higgins; Statement from the Ireland team Doctor, Dr Matthew Cosgrave.		

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

The referee's report said the following: "The player made direct head contact with the opposition ball carrier. The player was upright and in direct line of sight. No mitigation."

The FPRO report said the same thing. The report confirmed that there was a high degree of danger with no mitigation.

The footage, in brief, showed the following:

- Ireland in an attacking position on the French 22m line.
- The ball is passed by Ire #9 to Ire #13 who in turn passes it to Ire #5 in midfield.
- Ire #5 passes it to Ire #12, Eve Higgins, receiving the ball mid-way between the French 22m and 50 m lines, in the centre of the pitch.
- France #12 advances at speed as part of the French defence.
- France #12 attempts to wrap her arms around Ire #12 and make a tackle but does not lower her body to do so. She remains upright.
- France #12's head collides with Ire #12's face, square on.
- Both fall to the ground and Ire #12 holds her lip area.
- France #12 immediately apologises to Ire #12.

Eve Higgins (Ire #12) said:

- As I caught the ball I felt head on head contact to my lip.
- Gabrielle was immediately apologetic and remorseful.
- I injured my lip, was assessed on field by team doctor and physio and removed for a head injury assessment.
- I then passed my HIA and returned to play.
- After the game my lip was sutured by the stadium doctor.
- I had numerous conversations after the game with Gabrielle and again she was remorseful and apologetic.

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

Dr Cosgrave, the Ireland team Doctor said:

Eve suffered a head to head collision with a French opponent in the 44th minute of the game. I attended to Eve on pitch immediately. On initial assessment she had sustained a lip laceration. She was removed from play for a head injury assessment (HIA) due to the mechanism of injury and an instrumented mouthguard alert. Eve passed her HIA 1 and returned to play. Post match she passed her HIA 2. She required 3 sutures to close her lip laceration post match.

Eve will need to complete her HIA 3 and neurocognitive testing on Monday 24th March before a concussion can be out ruled but at present there is no evidence that a concussion has been sustained.

## SUMMARY OF PLAYER'S EVIDENCE

The Player said the following in her statement:

- In the 45th minute, France was leading 5-17 (and went on to win 15-27). Ireland had possession of the ball at the base of a ruck on the France 22metre line. I was about 15metres away from the ruck and part of a flat defensive line. The ruck was to my left and I was the sixth France defender in the line from the ruck.
- Ireland #9 passed the ball from the base of the ruck to Ireland #13. When Ireland #9 passed the ball, the France defensive line pressed forward quickly to close the space in front and to tackle Ireland #13 or whoever she would pass to.
- There were several potential ball carriers to the left of Ireland #13. There was a line of three forwards (in order – Ireland #s 6, 5 and 3). Ireland #12 was a fourth potential runner, set up in a deeper position behind Ireland #3.
- Ireland #13 passed to Ireland #5, who then passed the ball behind the back of Ireland #3 to Ireland #12. I remember thinking that Ireland #12 was the most likely recipient of the ball, but it did cross my mind as I was rushing forward quickly that Ireland #5 might hold onto the ball or that she might pass short to Ireland #3.
- When I saw Ireland #5 pass, I continued to rush forward as quickly as possible and adjusted my running angle very slightly towards Ireland #12. My intention was to close down Ireland #12 as quickly as possible, and to make a dominant tackle with contact at the height of the ball, to prevent her from offloading the ball.
- As Ireland #12 caught the ball she immediately stopped and tried to sidestep to her right (my left). This caused a change in her body position. I was not expecting this and went into the tackle with my head in the wrong position. I think that, if I had approached with less speed, I would have been better able to adjust my position, get my head on the correct side and make a legal tackle with my shoulder.
- I realised immediately that the right side of my head had made contact with Ireland #12's head. I immediately stopped to check that Ireland #12 was feeling ok and apologised to her.
- I was shown a yellow card by the referee and immediately left the field. Ireland #12 left the field for a Head Injury Assessment (HIA) but later returned to the pitch as she passed her HIA.
- The Foul Play Review Officer reviewed the footage in the bunker and determined that the yellow card should be upgraded to a red card. The referee informed the teams in the 50th minute, when the score was 10-17 to France. I accept that decision.
- I apologised again to Ireland #12 after the final whistle, and we also had a conversation about the incident during dinner on the evening of the match. Ireland #12 graciously accepted my apologies. It was not my intention to commit Foul Play. I approached the tackle at speed, and when Ireland #12 caught the ball and stopped, I got my body positioning wrong. I acknowledge and accept that this was reckless.

The player did not wish to supplement her written evidence orally at the hearing. She did however express, in terms, that she would seek to modify her tackling technique in future.

## FINDINGS OF FACT

- This was a high speed, reckless, dangerous tackle by the player. It was not deliberately or intentionally dangerous.
- Ireland were in an attacking position on the French 22m line.
- The ball is passed by Ire #9 to Ire #13 who in turn passes it to Ire #5 in midfield.
- Ire #5 Ire passes it behind her to Ire #12, Eve Higgins, receiving the ball mid-way between the French 22m and 50 m lines, in the centre of the pitch.
- The player rushed forward, as she described, and her intention was to close down Ire #12 as quickly as possible, and to make a dominant tackle with contact at the height of the ball, to prevent her from offloading the ball.
- Even though the player considered that there was some movement by the Ireland player's body, the tackle was poorly executed. The player did not lower herself sufficiently into the tackle. She was too upright. She had her head in the wrong position.
- The player's head collided with Ire #12's face and she was injured.

## 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 player's actions were not deliberate. This was an example of a poorly executed tackle.
Nature of actions – clause 2.5.89 (c)
This was a head on head collision as part of a poorly executed tackle.
Existence of provocation – clause 2.5.89 (d)
N/A
Whether Player retaliated – clause 2.5.89 (e)
N/A
Self-defence – clause 2.5.89 (f)
N/A

Effect on victim – clause 2.5.89 (g)
The victim underwent a HIA following the collision. She passed this and carried on playing. She received sutures to her lip following the match. Mr Harland informed us that social media postings suggested that she had passed the latest concussion test.
Effect on match – clause 2.5.89 (h)
None. France were leading 17-5 at the time of the incident and went on to win the match.
Vulnerability of victim – clause 2.5.89 (i)
Ire #12 was vulnerable in the sense that she was unable to protect her face from a high speed head on head collision.
Level of participation/premeditation – clause 2.5.89 (j)
N/A
Conduct completed/attempted – clause 2.5.89 (k)
The collision was complete.
Other features of Player’s conduct – clause 2.5.89 (l)
N/A

**ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUSNESS CONTINUED**

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

\*If top end, the JO or Disciplinary Committee must identify, based on his/her/its assessment of the seriousness of the conduct, an entry point between the top end and the maximum sanction and provide the reasons for selecting this entry point, below (see clause 2.5.90).

Reasons for selecting entry point above top end

**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 acknowledged her actions immediately. She apologised to Ire#12 on the ground. She continued to do so after the match. She accepted that her actions constituted foul play throughout this process.	This is the first red card she has ever received.

Youth and/or inexperience of Player – clause 2.5.91 (c)	Conduct prior to and at hearing – clause 2.5.91 (d)
The player is experienced having won 49 caps	Excellent conduct at the hearing
Remorse (and timing if remorse) – clause 2.5.91 (e)	Other off-field mitigation – clause 2.5.91 (f)
The player was immediately remorseful on the pitch and continued to apologise to the injured player after the game.	

Number of weeks/matches deducted:

Summary of reason for number of weeks/matches deducted:  Immediate remorse and concern for the injured player Excellent previous disciplinary record
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**RELEVANT OFF-FIELD AGGRAVATING FACTORS**

Player’s status as an offender of the Laws of the Game – clause 2.5.94 (a)
N/A
Need for deterrence – clause 2.5.94 (b)
Whilst we appreciate the general need to deter head on head collisions this was not a deliberate act of foul play. It was reckless and so no further weeks are added to the sanction.
Any other off-field aggravating factors – clause 2.5.94 (c)
N/A

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	Sending off sufficient <input type="checkbox"/>
Sanction commences	26 March 2025	
Sanction concludes	20 April 2025	
Matches/tournaments included in sanction	France v Scotland, 29 March France v Wales, 12 April Italy v France, 19 April  If the player successfully applies for and undertakes the HCP Coaching Intervention Programme then she will become available for selection for the match v Italy.	

Costs	None
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Signature (JO or Chairman)	Richard Cole	Date	26 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](mailto:disciplinary@sixnationsrugby.com).