

Decision of PRL Panel regarding the appropriate points allocation following the cancellation of the Gallagher Premiership Rugby Match between Gloucester Rugby and Northampton Saints

Date: Saturday 3 October 2020

Panel:

- Andy Higginson (PRL Chairman)
- Darren Childs (PRL CEO)
- Phil Winstanley (PRL Rugby Director)

Summary of Panel's Decision

1. As a result of Northampton Saints' inability to fulfil a fixture as a result of Covid-19 and the cancellation of the Round 22 Gallagher Premiership match between Gloucester Rugby and Northampton Saints, Gloucester Rugby shall be awarded a 20 - 0 win. The 20 points equates to a 4 try win, giving Gloucester Rugby 5 league points.

Background to the match cancellation

2. On Tuesday 29th September 2020 Northampton Saints played Sale Sharks in its Round 21 fixture of the Gallagher Premiership Rugby competition.
3. On Thursday 1st October 2020, the Sale Sharks players and support staff were tested for COVID-19 as part of the leagues weekly testing programme. On 2nd October the results returned from the independent Randox testing laboratory confirmed that 19 players and staff from Sale Sharks had tested positive for a COVID-19.
4. As prescribed in the Professional Game Board's Minimum Operating Standards, Northampton Saints completed a contact tracing process on all players and it became clear that the Club would not have insufficient players to fulfil its fixture obligations under Premiership Regulations for its Round 22 match against Gloucester Rugby on Sunday 4th October 2020.

Premiership Regulations state that "*In the interests of safety each team playing in the Premiership must have at least six (6) fit and able Players in the squad who can play at hooker, tight head prop and loose head prop who are suitably trained and experienced to ensure that on the first occasion that a replacement in any front row position is required (whether due to injury or consequent to a Player(s) being temporarily suspended or ordered off) the team can continue to play safely with contested scrums.*"

5. On Saturday 3rd October 2020 Northampton Saints wrote to Premiership Rugby setting out a list of all of its Effectively Registered Front Row Players, as summarized below:

NORTHAMPTON SAINTS Front Row Status Summary - 3rd October						
Player	Status	Details	Injury date	RTP estimate	Status Summary	
	Injured					
	Injured					
	Injured					
	Injured					
	Injured					
	Injured					
	Covid Close contact Isolation					
	Covid Close contact Isolation					
	Covid Close contact Isolation					
	Covid Close contact Isolation					
	Covid Close contact Isolation					

6. Following extensive discussions between Northampton Saints and Premiership Rugby, Premiership Rugby is satisfied that Northampton Saints cannot meet the regulatory requirements for having sufficient front row forwards. Due to the expiry of the RFU registration deadline, it was not possible to register any further players prior to the fixture v Gloucester Rugby on Sunday 4th October 2020.
7. The Panel note that the situation has been created due to the positive tests in relation to the Sale Sharks players and that this unfortunate situation was not created by the actions of Northampton Saints and/or its players.

Decision of the Panel

8. Pursuant to Premiership Regulation 14.1(b) the PRL Board has granted authority for the Panel to make a ruling where a Club is unable to fulfil its fixture obligations.
9. The appropriate approach to player unavailability linked to the COVID-19 pandemic was approved by the PRL Clubs on 10 August 2020 as follows (under Premiership Regulation 4.4(j)):

Single Club fails to fulfil fixture

In the event that a Club is unable to fulfil its fixture obligations due to Covid-19, injury or for disciplinary reasons it shall be deemed to be at fault and the opposition Club shall be awarded a 20-0 win (counted as 4 tries), resulting in 5 league points being added to the league table.

It is noted that this approach is consistent with other competitions. For example, in 2017, Timisoara Saracens ("TS") were unable to play a European Challenge Cup match due to frozen pitches. Their opposition, Stade Francais, were awarded 5 league points. TS were ordered to pay a fine of 30,000 euros.

10. Consequently, the Panel concluded that due to Northampton Saints' inability to fulfil the fixture due to Covid-19, Gloucester Rugby shall be awarded a 20 - 0 win. The 20 points equates to a 4 try win, giving Gloucester Rugby 5 league points.

Appeal

11. Although the regulations provide for an appeal of this decision, the Panel noted that on 10th August 2020 the Premiership Rugby Clubs unanimously agreed to waive any right of appeal of these Panel decisions due to COVID-19.

Andy Higginson

Darren Childs

Phil Winstanley

3 October 2020