

## **Decision of PRL Panel regarding the appropriate points allocation following the cancellation of the Gallagher Premiership Rugby Match between Sale Sharks and Worcester Warriors**

**Date:** Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> 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 Sale Sharks' inability to fulfil a fixture as a result of COVID-19 and the cancellation of the Round 22 Gallagher Premiership match between Sale Sharks and Worcester Warriors, Worcester Warriors shall be awarded a 20 - 0 win. The 20 points equates to a 4 try win, giving Worcester Warriors 5 league points.

### **Background to the match cancellation**

2. On Thursday 1<sup>st</sup> October 2020, the Sale Sharks players and support staff were tested for COVID-19 as part of the Premiership Rugby weekly testing programme.
3. On Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020, the results returned from the independent Radox testing laboratory confirmed that 19 players and staff from Sale Sharks had tested positive for COVID-19 (2 players and 1 staff member were repeat positives that had already tested positive previously within the last 2 weeks) The 16 new positives were immediately placed into isolation for a period of 10 days.
4. Sale Sharks confirmed a further 6 players as close contacts, as required under the Professional Game Board's Minimum Operating Standards and contact tracing process, and these too were placed into isolation for a period of 14 days.
5. On Friday 2<sup>nd</sup> October 2020, Sale Sharks advised Premiership Rugby that despite the number of positive tests and players in isolation it had sufficient players in its squad to fulfil the Round 22 fixture against Worcester Warriors scheduled for Sunday 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020.
6. The Professional Rugby Testing Oversight Group (PRTOG) had expressed concern that such a high number of positive tests may suggest that there was a broader outbreak of COVID-19 which presented significant health risk and discussed the matter with a representative from the DCMS Elite Sport Medical Group and PHE.
7. On Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2020, PHE North West wrote to Sale Sharks and recommended that the game should be postponed until further tests had been undertaken.
8. Despite the concerns raised by the PRTOG and PHE, Sale had confirmed that they had sufficient players to fulfil the fixture, on Saturday 3<sup>rd</sup> October 2020, the match could not be cancelled.

9. However, Premiership Regulation 4.1(c) allows Premiership Rugby to postpone the fixture. It was therefore decided that the Sale Sharks v Worcester Warriors fixture be postponed until Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October subject to:
  - a. An additional round of testing to be completed at Sale on Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020. It is essential that all tests are clear and that PHE is satisfied with the results.
  - b. Sale Sharks and Worcester will not register any new players with the RFU prior to the rescheduled game.
  - c. An independent audit of the track and trace processes at Sale is undertaken over the next few days before the game is played.
10. On Tuesday 6<sup>th</sup> October 2020, all Sale Sharks players and staff members in the testing pool were tested for COVID-19 as part of the Premiership Rugby weekly testing programme.
11. On Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020 the testing results confirmed that 27 players and staff from Sale Sharks had tested positive for a COVID-19 (this included the original 19 positive cases and 8 new cases). All were immediately placed into isolation for a period of 10 days.
12. As required under the Professional Game Board's Minimum Operating Standards, Sale Sharks will now complete their contact tracing and will isolate any new contacts for a period of 14 days.
13. On Wednesday 7<sup>th</sup> October 2020, the PRTOG met with representatives of PHE, PHE North West, Salford City Council and the Club. All agreed that the Club was now unable to fulfil the fixture.
14. The Panel understands that the PRTOG meeting also discussed how to manage this from a public health perspective but this does not form part of this decision.

### **Decision of the Panel**

15. 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.
16. 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 the decision to cancel the Northampton Saints v Gloucester Rugby fixture on 4<sup>th</sup> October 2020 and consistent with previous decisions in other competitions.

17. Consequently, the Panel concluded that due to Sale Sharks inability to fulfil the fixture due to Covid-19, Worcester Warriors shall be awarded a 20 - 0 win. The 20 points equates to a 4 try win, giving Worcester Warriors 5 league points.

## **Appeal**

18. Although the regulations provide for an appeal of this decision, the Panel noted that on 10<sup>th</sup> August 2020 the PRL Clubs unanimously agreed to waive any right of appeal of these Panel decisions due to Covid-19.

**Andy Higginson**

**Darren Childs**

**Phil Winstanley**

**7<sup>th</sup> October 2020**