

DISCIPLINARY DECISION



	France v Ireland		
Competition	Rugby World Cup Women's 2025		
Date of match	14 September 2025	Match venue	Sandy Park, Exeter
Applicable rules	Tournament Disciplinary Programme		

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE

Player's surname	Berthoumieu	Player's forename(s)	Axelle
Player's Union	France	Date of birth	9 July 2000
Referee's name	Aimee Barrett-Theron		
Foul Play	☒ Admitted ☐ Not admitted	Red card warranted	☒ Admitted ☐ Not admitted
Offence	Law 9.12 (physical abuse, biting)	SELECT: Red card ☐ Citing ☒ Other ☐ If "Other" selected, please specify:	
Summary of Sanction	9 weeks/matches		

HEARING DETAILS

Hearing date	16 September 2025	Hearing venue	Remote (at Player's request)
Chairman/JO	Christopher Quinlan KC, Judicial Panel Chair		
Other Members of Disciplinary Committee	Juan Pablo Spirandelli, Argentina, former referee Bogdan Zebega, Romania, former player		
Appearance Player	Yes ☒ No ☐	Appearance Union	Yes ☒ No ☐
Player's Representative(s)	Oliver Harland (Northridge Law) Christophe Reigt (Manager in charge of France Womens' teams) Lionel Rossigneux (Team Service Manager, FFR) Edward Reay-Jones (Head of Legal Affairs and Compliance, FFR)	Disciplinary Officer and/or other attendees	Stephan Smith, Disciplinary Officer.
List of documents/materials provided to Player in advance of hearing	- Citing report - Footage of the incident and post-incident complaint - Photographs of the injury - Interviews of Aoife Wafer and Samantha Monahan		

	• Player's submissions to the Foul Play Review Committee ('FPRC') and to the Disciplinary Committee • FPRC decision • Statement from Stephan Smith, Senior Counsel World Rugby and Disciplinary Officer
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SUMMARY OF ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CITING/REFEREE'S REPORT/INCIDENT FOOTAGE

The essential facts were not disputed. The bite occurred in the second half at 41.53. Axelle Berthoumieu ('the Player') was tackled by Ireland 3 and Ireland 5 and went to ground. Once on the ground, Ireland 7 (Aoife Wafer, ['AW']) attempted to take possession of the ball. The referee penalised the Player for holding on. The Player, took hold of AW's right wrist with her left hand, held it in place and deliberately bit the lower part of her right arm. AW reacted immediately in a way consistent with having been bitten and made an instant complaint to the referee and other Ireland players including her captain, who asked the referee to review it. The referee can be heard on the footage stating that she did, "*not see anything live*" but that the incident was being reviewed.

After the match the citing commissioner interviewed separately AW and Samantha Monahan, the Ireland captain. AW confirmed that she had been bitten and showed the citing commissioner an area of reddening on her right forearm caused thereby, of which we have seen two photographs. AW said it was a "*proper bite*" and when the citing commissioner asked her to select from a range of options to measure the force, said the bite was a "*clamp with pressure*".

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

A medical report obtained from Dr Matthew Cosgrave, the Ireland Team Doctor, on 15 September 2025 states:

"Aoife Wafer (#7) sustained a bite to her right forearm from an opposing player. I assessed this injury post match. There was evidence of a minor superficial bite mark on the volar aspect of the right mid forearm. The site was cleaned. It required no further treatment."

Two photographs taken after the match showed a small area of reddening on Ms Wafer's arm.

Samantha Monaghan confirmed that AW reported being bitten and showed her an area of reddening to the lower arm. She saw the incident replayed on the stadium screen.

SUMMARY OF PLAYER'S EVIDENCE

The Player accepted committing foul play, which merited a red card. In a written statement provided in advance of the hearing, she explained her actions thus:

"Ireland #7's arm came across my face and I felt trapped and unable to move on the ground. This was a very unpleasant feeling which continued for what felt like a significant amount of time. I began to feel quite claustrophobic and oppressed as a result. I made several attempts to move my head in an effort to free my face from Ireland #7's arm, but was unable to do so."

It was for that reason she said she bit AW's right forearm. She was wearing a gumshield. She did not, she said, intend to cause injury. She added:

"I accept that the incident warrants me being suspended for the remainder of the World Cup. I am devastated to have let my team down in such a way and that I will miss the Semi-Final and the Final or Bronze medal match at the World Cup, as well as matches for Stade Bordelais."

In a public apology posted on social media she said she “*lost her temper*” which was “*not acceptable*” and that was “*puts an end*” to “[her] *World Cup*”. She also apologised to AW, to the Ireland team and her teammates. She said:

“It is not the image I want to give nor the player I want to be. I accept the sanction...”

She repeated that account before us during the hearing. She told us she apologised to AW in person after the match.

Through her representative’s written submissions, the Player contended that the appropriate entry point was low-end and her case was comparable to *Makua (2022)*. If we concluded the appropriate entry point was mid-range, then she submitted (as with low end) she was entitled to full mitigation.

FINDINGS OF FACT

The fact and circumstances of the bite are obvious from the footage, supported by the evidence of AW and the photographs and accepted by the Player. We find those facts proved and they amount to an act of foul play which merits a red card. Accordingly, the citing is upheld.

DECISION

Foul play	Admitted ☒ Determined ☐ Not determined ☐ Other disposal (please state) ☐
Red card warranted	Admitted ☒ Determined ☐ Not determined ☐ Other disposal (please state) ☐

SANCTIONING PROCESS

ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUSNESS

Assessment of Intent – R 17.18.1(a)-(b) (or equivalent Tournament rule)	
Intentional ☒	Reckless ☐
State Reasons	
The player held AW’s arm and turned her head to effect the bite.	
Nature of actions – R 17.18.1(c) (or equivalent Tournament rule)	
A deliberate bite.	
Existence of provocation – R 17.18.1(d) (or equivalent Tournament rule)	
None	
Whether player retaliated – R 17.18.1(e) (or equivalent Tournament rule)	
She did not.	

Self-defence – R 17.18.1(f) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
No question of self-defence arises.
Effect on victim – R 17.18.1(g) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
AW suffered an injury and was obviously (and understandably) shocked to have been bitten.
Effect on match – R 17.18.1(h) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
None.
Vulnerability of victim – R 17.18.1(i) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
She was vulnerable in the sense that her arm was exposed, and she was in no position to defend or protect herself.
Level of participation/premeditation – R 17.18.1(j) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
It was a relatively spontaneous but deliberate action, which included holding AW's arm in place to bite.
Conduct completed/attempted – R 17.18.1(k) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
The act was complete.
Other features of player's conduct – R 17.18.1(l) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
None

ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUSNESS CONTINUED

Entry point (select entry point and indicate n° of weeks/matches starting point)		
Top end* ☐	Mid-range X	Low-end ☐
N° of Weeks/Matches	18 Weeks/Matches	N° Weeks/Matches

*If Top End, the JO or Panel should identify, if appropriate, an entry point between the Top End and the maximum sanction and provide the reasons for selecting this entry point, below.

In making this assessment, the JO/Committee should consider World Rugby Regulations 17.18.1(a), 17.18.1(g), and 17.18.1(h) or the equivalent provisions within the Tournament Rules referred to above.

Reasons for selecting Entry Point above Top End

RELEVANT OFF-FIELD MITIGATING FACTORS

Acknowledgement of commission of foul play – R 17.19.1(a) (or equivalent Tournament rule)	Player's disciplinary record – R 17.19.1(b) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
The Player admitted committing foul play which merited a red card.	She has a clean disciplinary record.
Youth and/or inexperience of player – R 17.19.1(c) (or equivalent Tournament rule)	Conduct prior to and at hearing – R 17.19.1(d) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
She is neither inexperienced nor especially youthful.	Exemplary.

Remorse and timing of remorse – R 17.19.1(e) (or equivalent Tournament rule)	Other off-field mitigation – R 17.19.1(f) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
She expressed remorse which we accepted as genuine, as we do her apology to AW.	None.

Number of weeks/matches deducted

9

Summary of reason for number of weeks/matches deducted:

We think it appropriate to explain why we have arrived at a conclusion which differs from the Foul Play Review Committee ('FPRC'), which has been made public. Under the disciplinary process, this was a hearing known to lawyers as *de novo* (from the beginning, anew). The Player did not have to establish that the FPRC made an error or imposed a sanction which was excessive. We were required to consider sanction afresh. Having done so, we determined that the appropriate starting point was mid-range. We did so for these reasons:

- (1) It was an intentional bite, the Player holding AW's arm in place before and while she bit her.
- (2) The force used was significant.
- (3) The bite caused injury which remained for some time after it was inflicted.
- (4) The bite was a wholly disproportionate reaction to AW's legitimate attempt to win possession. The position the Player was in was my no means usual.

In addition, to *Makua (2022)* we were referred to the decision of *Tounesi* (also in the last Women's Rugby World Cup). The exercise of assessing the seriousness of foul play is fact and case specific and limited value is derived from comparing one case or decision with another.

The mid-range starting point is 18 weeks/matches.

Turning to mitigation, the Player admitted both foul play and that it merited a red card; she has not been sent off or cited before; and we accepted as genuine both her remorse and her apology. We therefore concluded that consistent with prevailing and established practice over many years the Player is entitled to full mitigation. The FPRC took a different view on the extent of the mitigation because it said:

"Full mitigation was not given due to the seriousness of the players actions as it appeared from the video footage that the player appeared to nudge Ireland 7's forearm twice before she bit her, suggesting an intention to bite the Ireland player, and two opportunities to stop and not continue with a bite, not taken by the player."

With respect those factors are relevant but only to the assessment of the seriousness of the conduct (i.e. the entry point) and not to the level of mitigation. That is why we differed and why we discounted 9 weeks, not 6 weeks, from the starting point of 18 weeks.

There are no aggravating factors within the specific meaning of World Rugby Regulation 17.20.

Therefore, the sanction is a suspension of 9 weeks/matches.

ADDITIONAL RELEVANT OFF-FIELD AGGRAVATING FACTORS

Player's status as an offender of the Laws of the Game – R 17.20.1(a) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
Not applicable.
Need for deterrence – R 17.20.1(b) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
Not applicable.
Any other off-field aggravating factors – R 17.20.1(c) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
None

Number of additional weeks/matches

0

SANCTION

NOTE: PLAYERS ORDERED OFF OR CITED BY A CITING COMMISSIONER ARE PROVISIONALLY SUSPENDED PENDING THE HEARING OF THEIR CASE, SUCH SUSPENSION SHOULD BE TAKEN INTO CONSIDERATION WHEN SANCTIONING – R 17.12.5(f) / 17.13.7 (or equivalent Tournament rule)

Total sanction	9 weeks/matches.	Sending off sufficient ☐
Sanction commences	The sanction takes effect immediately.	
Sanction concludes	15 December 2025 if all the matches below are played as scheduled.	
Matches/tournaments included in sanction	- France's two remaining matches in the Rugby World Cup - The following of her club's Bordeaux matches: Bobigny (11 October 2025) ASM Romagnat (18 October 2025) Villeneuve d'Ascq Lille (2 November 2025) Toulouse (9 November 2025) Blagnac (23 November 2025) Montpellier (30 November 2025) Lyon (14 December 2025)	
Costs	We make no order for costs.	

Signature (JO or Chairman)	Christopher Quinlan KC	Date	17 September 2025
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