

FOUL PLAY REVIEW COMMITTEE

DECISION

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE			
Player's surname	Kelly	Player's forename(s)	Seb
Player's Union	Rugby Football Union (England)		
Match	South Africa U20 v England U20		
Competition	World Rugby Junior Championship 2026	Match Date	13 July 2026
Offence	Law 9.12 - A player must not physically or verbally abuse anyone. Physical abuse includes, but is not limited to, biting, punching, contact with the eye or eye area, striking with any part of the arm, shoulder, head or knee(s), stamping, trampling, tripping or kicking	SELECT: Red card ☒ Citing ☐	
Finding of Committee <i>Foul play determined?</i> <i>Red card/Citing upheld?</i>	We find that Player's actions constituted foul play. We find the Player's actions merited a red card.		
Summary of Sanction	A suspension of 6 weeks		
Matches/tournaments included in sanction	Saturday 18th July - England U20s vs New Zealand Saturday 5th September – Premiership Rugby Cup R1 Saturday 12th September – Premiership Rugby Cup R2 Saturday 19th September – Sale FC vs Bury St Edmonds Saturday 26th September – Premiership Rugby R1 / Sale FC vs Tonbridge Saturday 3rd October – Premiership Rugby R2 / Sale FC vs Leeds		
REASONS FOR DECISION			
The Committee considered the following evidence: • Match footage • Match Official reports • Information relating to any injury to victim player • The Player's bundle of written submissions, character references and a previous disciplinary decision The evidence showed that in the thirty third minute of the first half of the match, South Africa had possession of the ball about 5 metres into the England half. SA13 drops the ball and it is quickly gathered by SA15 who manages to take a few steps before being tackled low and around the leg by the Player. SA15 manages to make a few metres progress but is tackled by the Player who has now managed to grasp SA15 around both legs. SA15 is brought to ground with his back flat on the playing surface and his head facing upwards. The Player is on his front with his head near the waist of SA15. At this point the referee has blown his whistle to stop play and other players can be seen			

reacting to this (walking away). Suddenly the Player lunges horizontally in a forceful movement and strikes SA15 with the top of his head to the jaw/face of SA15 who is in obvious discomfort and holds his head for several seconds.

The Committee carefully considered the Player's written statement and the submissions on his behalf by the RFU Legal Counsel for Discipline and Integrity.

The essence of the Player's case was that having tackled S15 to the ground he intended to *"drive through the tackle and clear out the player like a ruck, making contact with the chest, but in the process of doing this (he) made contact with N15's head"*

Having closely examined the match footage from various angles in slow motion and real time, the Committee rejected the Player's explanation. The match footage was more consistent with a deliberate strike with a head than an attempt to "clear out" a player who was lying flat on his back and who was underneath him.

Furthermore, the reference to a previous disciplinary decision where a similar argument was made was of little assistance to the Committee's evaluation of the facts in this case, as each case depends on its individual merits.

The Committee concluded on the balance of probabilities that the Player's actions in striking with his head to the opponent were deliberate. The Committee did not find that the player had acted following provocation, or in retaliation or in self-defence). SA15 was vulnerable although fortunately suffered no injury. His on field reaction to the strike of holding his face with his hand for a period indicated he had suffered pain as a result of the strike.

In applying the facts to the World Rugby sanctioning process under Regulation 17.18, the Committee considered that the appropriate Appendix 1 Regulation 17 entry point was "mid-range" which for an offence of striking with the head has a starting point of 10 weeks.

Turning to the issue of any off-field mitigating circumstances as prescribed under Regulation 17.9.3, the Committee noted that the Player was described as having good character by his coaches, was relatively young and inexperienced and had a good disciplinary record. However, the Player had denied intentionally striking an opponent and had unsuccessfully sought to persuade the Committee that he had been attempting to execute a legitimate act. In many similar circumstances a player would lose considerable credit in the eyes of disciplinary committees for failing to acknowledge their wrongdoing in this way. However, in the view of this Disciplinary Committee taking all matters into account including in particular his age, the Committee considered the Player should receive a 40% discount from the entry point of ten weeks leaving a resultant suspension of six weeks.

No off field aggravating factors were identified which might have increased the sanction.

For avoidance of doubt, World Rugby had indicated prior to the Committee convening that the Player was not eligible to be considered for coaching intervention.

Foul Play Review Committee Members	Simon Thomas (Wales- Chair), Martyn Wood (England) ¹ Ruhan Straeuli (South Africa) ²		
Signature Chair	<i>Simon Thomas</i>	Date	14 July 2026

Proposed sanction	Accepted by Player ☐ Not accepted by Player ☐
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¹ Former international player

² Former player