

DISCIPLINARY DECISION



Match	Spain U20 v France u20		
Competition	U20 World Championship		
Date of match	02/07/2026	Match venue	AIA Arena, Georgia
Applicable rules	Tournament Disciplinary Programme		

PARTICULARS OF OFFENCE

Player's surname	Aragon	Player's forename(s)	Mateo
Player's Union	Spain	Date of birth	2006
Referee's name	N/a. Citing Commissioner – Tim Lowry		
Foul Play	☐ Admitted ☒ Not admitted	Red card warranted	☐ Admitted ☒ Not admitted
Offence	9.12 Verbal abuse	SELECT: Red card ☐ Citing ☒ Other ☐ If "Other" selected, please specify:	
Summary of Sanction	7 weeks		

HEARING DETAILS

Hearing date	04/07/2026	Hearing venue	Remote
Chairman/JO	Jennifer Donovan (Ireland)		
Other Members of Disciplinary Committee	Juan Pablo Spirandelli (former international referee) Victoria Irwin (former international player)		
Appearance Player	Yes ☒ No ☐	Appearance Union	Yes ☒ No ☐
Player's Representative(s)	Lola Saez de Ilarra – Legal Counsel Jesus Collado - Team Manager Joan Barcenilla – Team-mate (JB) Nicolas Pooli – Fitness Coach (NP)	Disciplinary Officer and/or other attendees	Brian Hammond – World Rugby. Luke Keletaona – France No.10. Matheo Frisach, France No. 17 Edouard Jabea, France No. 1. Bastian Rascal, France No.12 Regis Lespinas, France Backs Coach. Florian Derruyre – France Team Manager. French and Spanish Translators

List of documents/materials provided to Player in advance of hearing	Referral from French Team Manager to Citing Commissioner Citing Report Match footage Statement of Luka Keletaona, F10 Statement of Matheo Frisach, France No. 17 (F17) Statement of Edouard Jabea, France No 1 (F1) Statement of Bastian Rascal, France No.12 Statement of Regis Lespinas, France Backs Coach. Received from Player: Instagram Messages received by player Messages between Player and Barcenilla. Statement of Player.Statement of Joan Barcenilla (JB) Statement of Nicolas Pooli – (NP) Submissions to FPRC. Replies to Directions / Submissions to DC Playing Schedule and Disciplinary Record.
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SUMMARY OF ESSENTIAL ELEMENTS OF CITING/REFEREE’S REPORT/INCIDENT FOOTAGE
The citing report set out that that a referral had been made to the Citing Commissioner by the French team, who alleged that the player directed a racially abusive comment at F10. Statements were obtained from F1, F10, F12, F17 and from Regis Lespinas (France Attack and Backs Coach). The referral indicated that the player had said "Casse-toi avec tes yeux bridés et ta gueule de Chinois," which was reported to have translated as "Get the fuck out with your Asian eyes and your Chinese face." The Citing Commissioner reported that he spoke to the referee who did not hear the utterance and in any case did not speak French and so would not have understood the phrase if he had heard it. It was reported that the match footage showed the player approaching F10 but there was no clear audio from either the footage or the referees microphone. The Citing Report concluded as follows: "Having carefully considered all of the available evidence, I conclude that there is credible witness evidence from the complainant together with four independent supporting witnesses alleging that Spain No. 23, Mateo Aragon, made a racially abusive remark towards France No. 10, Luka Keletaona. In my opinion, the alleged words, if spoken, clearly meet the Red Card threshold due to their discriminatory and abusive nature. Accordingly, on the balance of probabilities, I cite Spain No. 23, Mateo Aragon, for an alleged breach of World Rugby Law 9.12". There were no preliminary issues raised by either team but Mr. Hammond did make a submission in relation to the applicable standard of proof as set out in Regulation 17, the standard being the "balance of probabilities". Mr. Hammond submitted that the seriousness of the allegation has relevance in this regard. He said that the seriousness of an offence did not alter the balance but that the evidence relied upon must be clear, cogent and reliable.

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

(The following is a necessarily a summary only of the evidence given in statements and at the hearing by all parties and the lack of reference to any submission, statement or other matter in this decision does not mean that it was not heard or considered by the committee)

The statements of F10 and all of the French witnesses described the Spanish substitutes moving on to the pitch in celebration of a Spanish try.

F10 provided a statement as follows (English translation):

The Spanish player number 23 said the following words "go away with your Chinese head and your eyes..." I did not hear the rest but my teammates did. At that moment I looked for my captain to warn the referee but the match went ahead with a restart. I was upset because this kind of words does not have its place on a rugby field or any other sport. I was still upset at the end of the match and also disappointed that players can say these words during a match.

F12 stated that heard the words "t'as gueule avec ta tête de chinois et tes yeux bridés".

F1 stated that he heard the words "avec ta tête de chinois et tes yeux bridées"

F17 said that he heard "t'as gueule avec t'as tête de chinois et tes yeux bridées".

Mr. Lespinas said he heard (translated) What do you want, with your ugly Chinese face?"

At the hearing all of the above gave evidence as per their statements. All were asked about their position on the pitch and proximity to the player and F10 and were asked to point out their positioning by reference to the footage available. All of the French players said that they were in close proximity to the player (5 meters or less), were certain about what they had heard and were certain that the words were spoken by the player.

F10 confirmed that he had gestured to the Spanish substitutes to leave the pitch, as could be seen on the match footage. He denied that he used foul language towards them. F10 was asked why the matter was not reported to the match officials as soon as it happened. F10 said that he wanted to tell his captain but the captain was speaking to the referee. He said that he did not have an opportunity to tell the referee and in any event did not speak the same language. He said that one of his coaches had heard what was said but had told the team to keep playing. F10 said that it was not the first time that he had been racially abused whilst playing rugby. He said that he was annoyed and upset about it. He said that the team spoke about it at half time and again after the match.

F1 said that after the maul which led to the try, he was aware of the Spanish substitutes on the pitch and that they were teasing the French players. He said that he was 5 meters at most from the player when he heard what the player said. F12 said that he was approx. 1 meter away only and that he heard the player say "t'as gueule avec ta tête de chinois et tes yeux bridés". He said that they tried to speak to the touch judge about it had a language difficulty.

F17 said in his evidence that he was walking towards the posts when he heard the player speaking. He said he turned toward the player as he was speaking and said to the player that he should not use such words. When F17 was asked if he was sure of the number of the player who had spoken he said that the player was known to him as they had played at the same club for a year. F17 also said that he had tried to tell the Assistant Referee about the incident it but could not make himself

understood. When asked, he said that he had shaken hands with the player at the end of the match but had again briefly made reference to what the player had said. He agreed, when asked, that he had not put any of those details in his statement.

Mr. Lespinas said that he heard what was said although he was 10-15 meters away. He said that at the time he wanted to move on with the match but now regretted not having taken action during the match. He said that he underestimated how much F10 had been upset by what had been said and how he was affected by it.

Mr. Hammond asked the translator about the translation of “yeux bridées” and whether there were any colloquial terms for “Asian eyes” or “slanted eyes”. The translator advised that “yeux bridées” would translate as “slanted eyes” rather than “Asian eyes” and the French witnesses agreed. The translator explained that “Asian eyes” was not really a phrase used in French.

At the conclusion of the evidence of the French witnesses, the Spanish representatives were asked if they wished, through the chair, to direct any questions to the French witnesses. They confirmed that they did not.

SUMMARY OF PLAYER’S EVIDENCE

Submissions were made by/on behalf of the player and the player gave evidence at the hearing. The written submissions included the following:

I reject racism and discrimination in all their forms. Such behaviour has no place in rugby, in sport or in society, and I fully support World Rugby’s commitment to eliminating discriminatory conduct from the game. For that very reason, I categorically deny having made the racist remarks attributed to me in the Citing Report. A brief verbal exchange did occur following Spain’s try in the 35th minute. However, the words that I am alleged to have spoken were never uttered by me. The allegation is the result of a misunderstanding of a heated exchange during the match and is not supported by objective evidence.

Immediately after Spain scored its try in the 35th minute, the Spanish replacements, including me, entered the field to celebrate with their teammates before returning to the technical area.

During that moment, France No. 10, Luka Keletaona, made a dismissive hand gesture towards the Spanish replacements, signalling for us to leave the field.

According to the evidence that accompanies these submissions, he also addressed us with the words: “Ferme ta gueule” meaning: “shut the fuck up” and: “Espagnols de merde” meaning: “fucking Spaniards” or “Spanish bastards”.

I clearly understood the words that were spoken, as I am bilingual in French and currently play rugby in France. In response to that earlier provocation, I said:

“Casse-toi d’ici avec ta tête de vilain” meaning: “Go away with your ugly face.” That was the entirety of my response. I did not refer to his ethnicity. I did not refer to his nationality. I did not refer to his

physical appearance in racial terms. I did not use the words "Chinese", "Asian", "slanted eyes", or any similar expression. The allegation that I uttered those words is simply untrue.

In his evidence, the player again categorically denied having racially abused F10. He said that no-one reacted to what he had said and no issues was raised about it. He said that he first became aware of the allegation of racial abuse when it appeared in the media about two hours after the match, the allegation having been made by the French team to the media. He said that he had received a number of abusive messages as a result and that he was very upset by the allegation.

The player was asked if he could offer any explanation for the fact that racial abuse was alleged by F10 and four other French witnesses. The player said that he had said "bad face" and perhaps this had been misheard. The player was asked to say both phrases (in French) in order to compare both.

The French representatives were asked how the matter came to be reported in the press. F10 said that he was asked a question in the post match press conference about the nature of the match and that he replied by telling the reporter what he heard. He described the words that he himself heard and not what his team-mates had heard. This was subsequently reported by Le Figaro.

The player made reference to Whatapp messages between him and his team-mate, JB, sent at 17.04, very shortly after the match in which both the player and JB confirm that there had been no racial element in what had been said to F10.

The player was asked if the French players, including F10, had shaken his hand after the match. He said that F10 had been substituted and was not on the pitch but that he had shaken hands with the others and had gone to the stands with two other French players and nothing was said to him.

JB provided a written statement which included the following (English translation):

The starting players of France, who were approximately five metres away from us, began to address us repeatedly so that we would stop cheering. On several occasions they told us in French: "Ferme ta gueule" ("shut the fucking mouth"), in addition to insisting that we shut up. Some of us said no and continued to encourage our team.

The tension increased and some French players came to insult us with expressions like "Espagnols de merde" ("shit Spaniards"), also showing an attitude of confrontation.

In that context of tension and crosswords, one of our players said to a French player: "Casse-toi d'ici avec ta tête de vilain" expression that means, approximately, "get out of here with that bad face or ugly. At no time did he say the expression "tête de chinois" ("Chinese face"), nor did he make any comments related to the origin, race or ethnicity of the player.

The subsequent statement that "Casse-toi d'ici avec ta tête de chinois" was said is completely false and does not correspond to what happened. The expression used was "tête de vilain", which has no racial content or refers to the nationality or physical appearance of any person.

For all this, I deny any racist comment by the Spanish player, since this accusation does not reflect the reality of the facts.

JB also gave evidence at the hearing. He said that he was only a meter way from the player. He said that he was sure that the player did not make any racist comment and he was sure that he heard the entirety of what the player said. When he became aware of the media report he urged the player to make a statement denying the allegation as it was not true.

NP provided the following statement and also gave evidence at the hearing

"I, Nicolas Pooli, as Physical Trainer of the Spanish U20 national team, being present in the place, a few metres from where the events occurred and is accused of an alleged verbal aggression of our player number 23 Mateo Aragón to player number 10 of France Luka Keletaona, I certify as a witness, that our player has never said the words for which he is accused.

That the undersigned speaks French and the words Mateo Aragon said were exactly "casse toi avec ta tête de vilain".

In his evidence NP said that he was only 1-2 meters from the player and did not hear him say the phrase complained of. He also said that no-one turned and spoke to the player as had been alleged.

At the conclusion of the Spanish evidence Mr. Hammond and the French representatives were asked if they wished to have anything further put to the player. A question was raised by Spain as to whether or not France had raised the matter with the Spanish manager on the pitch after the match. The French representative said that they had not. He said that they had spoken about it at half time but because they only had four hours to make a referral to the citing commissioner, he wanted them all to discuss it fully as a group after the match in order that it could be properly reported.

FINDINGS OF FACT

The committee was mindful of the provisions of Regulation 17.16.1 (b) which states that where a player seeks to show that a decision of a Citing Commissioner was wrong, a Disciplinary Committee may review the decision of Citing Commissioner and the circumstances surrounding it but shall not make a finding contrary to the decision of the referee or Citing Commissioner unless they are satisfied, on the balance of probabilities that the decision of the Citing Commissioner was wrong. In this case, therefore, the burden of proof rested with the player who was required to demonstrate, on the balance of probabilities, that the decision to cite him for the offence set out in the citing report, was incorrect.

The committee listened to the evidence of all parties and carefully considered all of the evidence before it. It was a lengthy hearing and a difficulty case.

The decision to cite was based on the evidence of F10 and the other French witnesses, all of whom said that they heard the player utter the phrase complained of. The evidence of each of these witnesses was tested at hearing at they all gave evidence of having been close to the player and F10 and having heard the verbal abuse. F12 in particular was in very close proximity and this can be seen from the match footage. The written statement of F12 was consistent with the evidence given by him at hearing.

It was clear from the footage that something had occurred and the player confirmed that there had been a verbal exchange. There was no audio recording of the words spoken and they were not heard by the match officials. The player made reference to this in his submissions. The committee did not find that this meant that, on balance, the words were not spoken. None of the words spoken by the player were picked up on audio recording yet it was agreed by all parties that the player had directed a comment at F10. The exchange, whatever the content, was simply not clearly recorded.

It was not accepted that the allegation arose as a result of a misunderstanding as suggested by the player. It is unlikely, on the balance of probabilities, that several members of the French team all misunderstood what was said.

The player also pointed to the lack of supporting evidence from the match officials. The French witnesses said that the language barrier prevented this. This was not challenged by the player. F10 also said that his coach was keen to get on with the match and he did so. The committee did not find that the lack of an immediate complaint was compelling evidence that the foul play had not occurred.

The player pointed out that the only witnesses confirming the allegation were French witnesses and so were not independent. The same, of course, is true on respect of the player's denial. The only witnesses who denied the allegation were Spanish.

Given all of the evidence before it, and being bound by the provisions of Regulation 17.16.1, the committee found that the player had not discharged the burden of proof and had failed to demonstrate, on the balance of probabilities, that the decision to cite for an offence contrary to Law 9.12 was incorrect. The citing was therefore upheld.

The player's representative sought a low end entry point for sanction. Given the racial nature of the abuse the committee were of the view that this was not appropriate and determined the appropriate entry point to be mid-range. Racial abuse of any kind has no place in the game of rugby and the sanctions imposed must reflect that.. Full mitigation was also sought but given that the player did not accept that he had committed an act of foul play it was not considered appropriate to apply mitigation of 50%. Mitigation was applied as set out below.

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 nature of the offence is such that it can only be intentional. One can only speak if they intend to do so.	
Nature of actions – R 17.18.1(c) (or equivalent Tournament rule)	
The offending was serious as the verbal abuse was racist in nature.	
Existence of provocation – R 17.18.1(d) (or equivalent Tournament rule)	

There was an element of provocation in the gesturing of F10 at the Spanish substitutes including the player.
Whether player retaliated – R 17.18.1(e) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
The verbal abuse of F10 was in response to the gesturing of F10 (albeit an unacceptable response)
Self-defence – R 17.18.1(f) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
N/a
Effect on victim – R 17.18.1(g) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
F10 described that he was annoyed and upset by the comment.
Effect on match – R 17.18.1(h) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
Nil
Vulnerability of victim – R 17.18.1(i) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
No physical vulnerability but F10 indicated that this was not, unfortunately, the first time that he had suffered racial abuse on a rugby pitch (not of course attributable to the player in any way)
Level of participation/premeditation – R 17.18.1(j) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
Full
Conduct completed/attempted – R 17.18.1(k) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
Completed
Other features of player's conduct – R 17.18.1(l) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
N/a

ASSESSMENT OF SERIOUSNESS CONTINUED

Entry point (select entry point and indicate n° of weeks/matches starting point)		
<u>Top end</u> * ☐	<u>Mid-range</u> x ☐	<u>Low-end</u> ☐
N° of Weeks/Matches	N° of Weeks/Matches 12	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 did not accept that he had committed the offence	The player 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)
The player has been playing since he was 4 years old but is still young (born 2006) and relatively inexperienced at international level	The player was co-operative throughout
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)
None. The player was unaware of the allegation until after the match and therefore denied the allegation.	N/a

Number of weeks/matches deducted

5

Summary of reason for number of weeks/matches deducted:

Mitigation was applied in respect of the players youth, clean disciplinary record and conduct at the hearing. Full mitigation was not applied as foul play was not accepted.

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)
N/a
Need for deterrence – R 17.20.1(b) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
N/a
Any other off-field aggravating factors – R 17.20.1(c) (or equivalent Tournament rule)
N/a

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	7 weeks	Sending off sufficient ☐
Sanction commences	02/07/2026	
Sanction concludes	To be determined on confirmation of the players playing schedule. Player to submit details of fixtures as soon as they are known to him	
Matches/tournaments included in sanction	Spain v Fiji 07/07/2026. Remaining matches depend on the progress of Spain through the tournament and the player's schedule thereafter	
Costs	Nil	

Signature (JO or Chairman)	Jennifer Donovan	Date	05/05/2026
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NOTE: YOU HAVE **48 HOURS (15s) / 24 HOURS (7s)** FROM NOTIFICATION OF THE DECISION OF THE CHAIRMAN/JO TO LODGE AN APPEAL WITH THE TOURNAMENT DIRECTOR – R 17.24.2(a) / R 17.38.1 (or equivalent Tournament rule)