

Decision of the OFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee

passed on 20 January 2026

DECISION BY:

Mark Anthony (Fiji),

**Chairman of Adjudicatory Chamber, acting pursuant to Article 87
of the OFC Disciplinary Code**

ON THE CASE OF:

Ati KEPO

(Decision OFCDEC-001)

REGARDING:

Art. 49 of the OFC Disciplinary Code - Violence

I. SUMMARY OF FACTS

Competition: OFC Professional League 2026

Match: PNG Hekari FC - Solomon Kings FC

Date: 18 January 2026

Venue: Eden Park, Kingsland, Auckland, New Zealand

1. The Match Report notes the following player from PNG Hekari FC received an expulsion with the corresponding reason:
 - 9 Ati KEPO (50 - Violence).
2. The Referee Incident Report of the above-named match states the following:
 - Brief explanation of the facts of the incident:
"In the 50th minute player strike's an opponent with closed fist on the neck while the ball was out of play for throw in for Solomon Kings FC."
 - Brief explanation of the context of the incident, i.e. any injury as a result, did the player return to the match, etc:
"The Solomon Kings player was treated on the FOP and continued to play."

II. APPLICABLE REGULATIONS

1. It is accepted that the applicable Regulations for this matter are:
 - a. The OFC Disciplinary Code 2019 (**Disciplinary Code**); and
 - b. The OFC Professional League Competition Regulations 2025 (**Competition Regulations**).

a. Jurisdiction of the OFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee

2. Pursuant to Article 48 of the Competition Regulations:

48.1 Disciplinary incidents during the Competition are dealt with in compliance with the OFC Disciplinary Code in force as well as with the relevant regulations, circulars, OFC Statutes and directives, with which the Participating Clubs undertake to comply.

3. In accordance with the OFC Disciplinary Code, Article 2 provides that the Disciplinary Code applies to every match and competition organised by the OFC and pursuant to Article 85 of the Disciplinary Code, the OFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee (**Committee**) is authorised to sanction any breach of OFC regulations, which does not come under the jurisdiction of another body.

4. On that basis, it is accepted the Disciplinary and Ethics Committee has competence to decide over this matter.

b. Jurisdiction of the Chairman ruling alone

5. Article 87 of the OFC Disciplinary Code provides:

1. The chairman of the Disciplinary and Ethics Committee when acting under this Code may take the following decisions alone:

- a. suspend a person for up to three matches or for up to two months;
- b. impose a fine of up to NZD 500;
- c. rule on a request to extend a sanction (cf. art. 142);
- d. settle disputes arising from objections to members of the Disciplinary and Ethics Committee;
- e. pronounce, alter and annul provisional measures (cf. art. 138).

2. *If the chairman is prevented from attending and/or participating the deputy chairman replaces him. If the deputy chairman is prevented from attending and/or attending the member holding the most senior position will replace him.*

6. The current Chairmen of the Disciplinary and Ethics Committee are as follows:

- a. Member Michael Goodwin (Chairman of OFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee); and

- b. Member Mark Anthony (Chairman of the Adjudicatory Chamber of the OFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee).
7. Member Goodwin has been unable to participate in this matter, therefore it is accepted Member Anthony may act in accordance with Article 87 of the Disciplinary Code for this matter.

c. OFC Disciplinary Code

8. It is held the following provisions of the Disciplinary Code are applicable to the facts set out above:

Article 19 Expulsion

1. An expulsion is the order given by the referee to someone to leave the field of play and its surroundings, including the substitutes' bench, during a match. The person who has been sent off may be allowed into the stands unless he is serving a stadium ban.
2. Expulsion takes the form of a red card for players. The red card is regarded as direct if it sanctions serious unsporting behaviour as defined by Law 12 of the Laws of the Game; it is regarded as indirect if it is the result of an accumulation of two yellow cards (cf. Art. 18, par. 2).
3. An official who has been sent off may give instructions to the person replacing him on the substitutes' bench. He shall, however, ensure that he does not disturb the spectators or disrupt the flow of play.
4. An expulsion automatically incurs suspension from the subsequent match, even if imposed in a match that is later abandoned and/or cancelled and/or forfeited. The Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may extend the duration of the suspension.

Article 20 Match suspension

1. A suspension from a match is a ban on taking part in a future match or competition or to attend it in the area immediately surrounding the field of play.
2. The player who has been suspended shall not be included on the players' list for the match.

3. The suspension is imposed in terms of matches, days or months. Unless otherwise specified, it may not exceed twenty-four (24) matches or two (2) years.
4. If the suspension is to be served in terms of matches, only those matches actually played count towards execution of the suspension. If a match is abandoned, cancelled or finally forfeited (except of violation of art 73), suspension is only considered to have been served if the team to which the suspended player belongs is not responsible for the facts that led to abandonment, cancellation or forfeiture of the match.
5. A match suspension is regarded as no longer pending if a match is retroactively forfeited because a player took part in a match despite being ineligible (art. 73). This also applies to the match suspension imposed on the player who took part in the match despite being ineligible.
6. If a suspension is combined with a fine, it is prolonged until the fine has been paid in full.

Article 33 Combined sanctions

1. Unless otherwise specified, the sanctions provided for in the general and special parts of this code may be combined.
2. In less serious cases, the body may only pronounce a reduced sanction or a caution or a reprimand.

Article 49 Violence

1. A player who deliberately assaults someone, but without harming him physically or damaging his health, will be suspended for at least two (2) matches. An official who commits such an infringement will be suspended for at least four (4) matches.
2. If a person assaults someone by spitting at him, he will be suspended for at least six (6) matches.
3. In any case, the body shall also impose a minimum fine of NZD250. In the case of tournaments with an age limit, the fine can be reduced appropriately.

d. OFC Professional League Competition Regulations

9. It is held the following provisions of the Competition Regulations are applicable to the facts set out above:

Article 30 Red and Yellow Cards

30.1 ...

30.2 If a Player or Team Official is sent off as a result of two yellow cards during the same Match, or a direct red card for reasons other than those set out in Article 30.3, they will be automatically suspended from their Participating Club's next Match in the Competition. In addition, further sanctions can be imposed in line with the OFC Disciplinary Code in force at the time of the Competition.

30.3 If a Player or Team Official is sent off as a result of a direct red card for:

30.3.1 Serious foul play;

30.3.2 Biting or spitting; or

30.3.3 Violent Conduct (each as defined in the Laws of the Game),

The default period of suspension for that Player or Team Official shall be their Participating Club's next three Matches. The OFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee may reduce or extend the default suspension as it considers appropriate to the conduct of the Player or Team Official. In addition, further sanctions can be imposed in line with the OFC Disciplinary Code in force at the time of the Competition.

III. CONSIDERATIONS OF THE DISCIPLINARY AND ETHICS COMMITTEE

10. The Committee reviewed the Referee Incident Report, and in accordance with Article 106 of the Disciplinary Code it is presumed to be accurate.

11. The Committee also reviewed the video footage of the incident. From the video footage it is apparent that forceful contact was made by the player to the opponent, specifically a deliberate closed-fist strike to the neck while the ball was out of play for a throw-in to Solomon Kings FC. The Referee initially issued a yellow card for the incident; however, following a VAR review, the decision was upgraded to a red card, and the player was expelled from the match.

12. The opponent received treatment on the field of play but did not sustain serious injury and was able to continue participating in the match.
13. Players have a duty not to endanger the safety of their opponents, and such conduct requires appropriate sanctioning to deter similar behaviour in future matches. This duty is heightened in a professional football environment, and the Committee emphasises that such actions are unacceptable, particularly at the commencement of the inaugural OFC Professional League where maintaining high standards of conduct and professionalism is essential.
14. The Committee are aware the player has previously appeared before this Committee in August 2022 as a result of receiving an expulsion pursuant to Article 19 of the Code. At that time the player was expelled from the field of play for receiving two yellow cards for unsporting behaviour and persistent infringement. The Committee notes the player did not receive a sanction for the conduct therefore this cannot be considered as an aggravating or factor.
15. The Committee found Mr Kepo to be in breach of Article 49(1) of the OFC Disciplinary Code, and notes that it also has the authority to extend sanctions under Articles 19(4) and 49(3) of the Code and Article 30.3 of the Competition Regulations.

IV. SANCTION

16. The Committee notes Article 33 of the OFC Disciplinary Code, which permits sanctions in the Code being combined. Accordingly, after considering the circumstances of the incident, the Committee imposes a suspension pursuant to Articles 19(4), 49(1) and 49(3) of the OFC Disciplinary Code on Mr Kepo for **2 matches and a fine of NZD 500.00, to be paid on or by 20 February 2026.**
17. The sanction imposed does not include the automatic one match suspension pursuant to Article 19(4) (resulting in a total suspension of three matches).

18. Article 49(3) imposes a minimum fine of NZD250.00; however, the deliberate and forceful nature of the conduct led the Committee to increase the fine to NZD500.00 as per its discretion. The Committee notes Mr Kepo and PNG Hekari FC are jointly liable for this fine pursuant to Article 16(4) of the Code.

19. The Committee was satisfied that such sanctions emphasise the importance of deterring such conduct in future matches and acts as a reminder to Mr Kepo to ensure a safe and successful future of the OFC Professional League.

OCEANIA FOOTBALL CONFEDERATION INC.



Franck Castillo

General Secretary - CEO

NOTE RELATING TO LEGAL ACTION:

Pursuant to Article 127 of the Code, an appeal may be lodged to the OFC Appeals Committee against any decision passed by the Disciplinary and Ethics Committee unless the sanction pronounced is:

1. A warning;
2. A reprimand;
3. A suspension for less than three (3) matches or up to two (2) months; or
4. A fine of less than NZD1,000 on a Member Association or a club and of less than NZD500 in other cases. (refer Article 127 of the Code).

Eligibility to appeal is governed by Article 128 of the Code and the grounds of appeal are set out in Article 130 of the Code.

Notice of intention to appeal must be received by the OFC Secretariat of the OFC Disciplinary and Ethics Committee within 15 days of the communication of this decision.