

IN A MATTER OF DISCIPLINARY PROCEEDINGS



Tim Ollerenshaw, Chair
Gordon McKay
Tarik Shamel

BETWEEN:

THE WORLD PROFESSIONAL BILLIARDS AND SNOOKER ASSOCIATION (“**WPBSA**”)

World Governing Body for Snooker and Billiards

-and-

THANAWAT TIRAPONGPAIBOON

Respondent

DECISION
OF
THE WPBSA DISCIPLINARY COMMITTEE

INTRODUCTION

1. This is the Decision of the Disciplinary Committee (**Committee**) of the World Professional Billiards and Snooker Association (**WPBSA**) convened to hear allegations of breaches of the **WPBSA** Members Rules (Betting Rules) by the Respondent Thanawat Tirapongaiboon (**TT**), arising from incidents between 2013 and 2015 by fixing the outcome of certain snooker matches.
2. The Hearing of the Case took place by way of Zoom conference call on 25 October 2022. The WPBSA were represented by Mr Nigel Mawer and TT had as spokesman and translator Mr Krailast Vongsurakrai (**Mike**). The Player also had the benefit of Mr Neil Tompkins of the WPBSA Players Association and Mr Mike Dunn of the WPBSA Governance and Players Boards making representations to the Committee.

ALLEGATIONS

3. The Allegations were set out to the Respondent by letter emailed to him dated 31 August 2022 that, contrary to Rule 2.1.2.1 of the WPBSA Members Rules (Betting Rules), he had fixed the following matches with:-
 - 1) Noppon Saengkham at the Australian Open Qualifier in Gloucester on 1 June 2013.
 - 2) Ross Muir at the Shanghai Masters Qualifiers in Doncaster on 7 August 2013.
 - 3) Ding Junhui at the China Open Qualifiers in Gloucester on 16 February 2014.
 - 4) Martin Gould at the Welsh Open in Wales on 19 February 2014.
 - 5) Stuart Bingham at the UK Championships in York on 25 November 2014.
 - 6) Martin O'Donnell at the PTC European Tour 2 in Furth, Germany on 28 August 2015.

contrary to WPBSA Conduct Regulations:

Part 1 WPBSA MEMBERS Rules – Section 2 Betting Rules

2.1.2 Corruption:

2.1.2.1 to fix or contrive, or to be a party to any effort to fix or contrive, the result, score, progress, conduct or any other aspect of the Tour and/or any Tournament or Match.

4. The Player had indicated prior to the Hearing that he would accept the Allegations and when they were put to him at the Hearing he did so accept them. The Committee accordingly found the Breaches proven and recorded the same.

FACTS AND EVIDENCE

5. The Parties, the Representatives and the Committee had the benefit of a very helpful Case Summary provided by Mr Mawer. A copy of that Document is in the Schedule attached to this Decision. Nothing in the Case Summary relating to the history or facts set out was disputed in any way by the Player or by the Representatives on his behalf. The Committee therefore also finds that all the historical and material facts as set out in the Case Summary are agreed and accurately expressed.
6. The Committee noted that there were a number of matches (four) that had been reported by the betting analysis company but which had not been admitted by the Player. Three of these were not proceeded with or pursued by the WPBSA, although one of them (the match against Noppon Saengkham played on 1 June 2013) did in fact become the subject of a "Charge", was subsequently admitted, pursued and found proven.
7. Jurisdiction is dealt with in the Case Summary (at Paragraph 17) and the Committee noted that it had appropriate jurisdiction to deal with the Case.

CONSIDERATION OF SANCTION

8. A large part of the Hearing on 25 October was therefore concerned with a consideration of an appropriate Sanction. As a precursor to this, both parties by their representatives set out the background to the Case and the circumstances leading up to the current position. Mike relayed the family and personal history of the Player and the involvement of a third party

who had been instrumental in the match-fixing. Both parties made very useful contributions to what Mr Mawer appropriately described in his Case Summary as a “sentencing dilemma”. At the Hearing Mr Mawer amplified the points set out in paragraphs 28-35 of the Case Summary emphasising the balance that needed to be drawn in considering some significant mitigating factors with a need to send an appropriate message about the seriousness of the breaches and impact on the Sport.

9. The two representatives from the Players Associations echoed those latter points and emphasised the mitigation available including the Player’s cooperation in recent times. Mike, in summing up, also emphasised the points set out in the written documents: the profuse apologies the Player was offering, the fact that he had taken responsibility for his actions and learned much as well as his deep regret, assurances as to his future behaviour and commitment to educating others by engaging in a support programme to assist others not to fall into the same trap.
10. In reaching its decision the Committee was able to take into account not only all the points and documents made or referred to above, but also:-
 - 10.1. A document entitled “Thanawat Testimony” emailed on 1 July 2022 being effectively his witness statement and mitigation document; and
 - 10.2. A further short statement referred to at the Hearing by Mike and forwarded immediately after the Hearing; and
 - 10.3. A transcript of an interview held on 12 July 2022 between Mr Mawer, TT and Mike, the accuracy of which was also accepted by the Player; and
 - 10.4. Copies of email traffic passing between the Parties between 1 July and 5 August 2022, and letters sent by the BSAT President Suntorn Jarumon.
11. The Committee was mindful of the following:-
 - (a) the Case referred to in the Case Summary of Cao Yupeng in 2018 although, as acknowledged at the Hearing, the Committee is not bound in making its Decision by previous cases, and further that, at risk of stating the metaphor of a well trodden path, each individual case is different and must turn on its specific facts.
 - (b) the points highlighted at paragraph 31 of its Case Summary as being potentially available to TT in respect of proportionality namely:-
 - His early admissions of guilt in this process
 - That the events took place between seven and nine years ago
 - That TT was between 19 and 21 years old at the time of the fixes
 - No evidence of fixing any matches in non-professional events since 2015
 - The BSAT submission on his behalf of his current position and its support for him
 - The ongoing support of his sponsor

- That he has self-excluded from seeking to play on the World Snooker Tour since 2016, a period of six years
- His full cooperation including the offer of defined support for the WPBSA anti-corruption strategy

(c) assessing the likelihood or otherwise of TT “re-offending”.

12. Dealing (in the same order) with the points above the Committee in its deliberations has assessed the following:-

- (a) While each case as stated is wholly unique, overall there does have to be if possible some eye to a comparative general balance of penalties in cases of a certain genre such as match-fixing. The case of Cao Yupeng (see above) is a useful point for a consideration of relevant factors.
- (b) Apart from qualifications on 31.1 of the Case Summary (relating to early admissions where one case was not admitted at the earliest stage, but the vast majority were) and in relation to 31.7 (relating to self-exclusion from the Sport on which the Committee placed no significant weight) the Committee accepts that all the other points highlighted are available to the Respondent. He is certainly extremely well-supported by relevant sections of the snooker world and the Committee is also mindful of the benefit of redemption being available in appropriate cases and the benefit also of what can be utilised by the WPBSA in its anti-corruption strategy.
- (c) TT has the benefit of support and the confidence of a number of individuals representing various parts of the WPBSA. The Committee also places store in the support offered by Mike and were greatly helped in the Hearing by his translation and comments made on behalf of the Player.

13. Overall, the Committee has decided to pitch its Decision based upon the points that follow here:-

- The correct starting point in this Case is for a suspension from playing of nine years. The Committee considered that for the admission of guilt made by him, overall he should have a reduction of one third. That would equate to a period of suspension of six years. The Committee has also decided to suspend 55% of that period on the basis of the Player undertaking to provide defined support for the WPBSA’s anti-corruption strategy.
- The Committee has therefore decided to impose a suspension of six years of which two years nine months (c 45%) will take effect unconditionally, and three years and three months (c 55%) will be themselves suspended provided the Player adheres to the required support for the WPBSA’s anti-corruption strategy.

The Committee is also conscious that there was a significant degree of risk in TT coming forward and confessing in the detail and range of his admissions to breaches some of which may have gone undiscovered. Further it notes that there was no evidence that the Respondent benefitted in any significant financial way from the fixes.

14. The Committee does find these matters of the most serious type and recognises the importance of the Sport needing (for its participants, audience and partners) to protect the

integrity, image and reputation of the Sport so that the Sanction should send a clear message to all those playing or being involved in it. Furthermore, any breach of the conditions as to the three years and three months suspended element of the Sanction is likely to be treated in the most serious way.

15. Accordingly, the Committee has decided to impose the following Sanction:-

15.1. The Player TT be suspended from playing in or being involved in Snooker related activities for a total period of six years from 15 June 2022 (the date he was refused WPBSA Membership) until 11:59 on 14 June 2028.

15.2. The period of that overall suspension be itself suspended from 15 March 2025 until 11:59 on 14 June 2028 provided the Player adheres to the written terms of an agreement to be entered into between the WPBSA and the Player in relation to the WPBSA's anti-corruption strategy for the requisite time identified by the WPBSA. This means that TT can play in all snooker competitions from 15 March 2025.

COSTS

16. The Committee accepts the WPBSA's contention that the Player has been entirely responsible for the costs of the proceedings both by causing the conduct that led to the investigation and also its determination. The Respondent has not denied this.

17. The Costs of bringing the proceedings are not being sought although the costs of the Disciplinary Committee and the Committee's administration costs of the proceedings are sought by the WPBSA. The Committee orders that the Respondent should pay the costs assessed at £1,925.

SUMMARY

18. The Decisions of the Disciplinary Committee are that:-

18.1. TT is suspended from playing or being involved in Snooker activities from 15 June 2022 to 11:59 on 14 June 2028.

18.2. The suspension in 18.1 will itself be suspended from 15 March 2025 provided TT adheres to written terms in place between him and the WPBSA.

18.3. TT do pay the costs of this Case in the sum of £1,925 by 14 December 2022.

Tim Ollerenshaw, Chair
Gordon McKay
Tarik Shamel

16 November 2022

SCHEDULE

Case Summary dated 14 September 2022