

IFO

THE INDEPENDENT
FOOTBALL OMBUDSMAN



Chartered Trading
Standards Institute
ADR Competent Authority

The Independent Football Ombudsman is approved by Government under the Alternative Dispute Resolution for Consumer Disputes (Competent Authorities and Information) Regulations 2015

IFO COMPLAINT REF: 19/15

POOR EXPERIENCE AT THE TOTTENHAM v ARSENAL MATCH IN MARCH 2019

The Role of the Independent Football Ombudsman (IFO)

1. The office of the IFO has been established by the three English football authorities (The Football Association [FA], The Premier League and The English Football League [EFL]) with the agreement of Government. The IFO has been designated as the final stage for the adjudication of complaints which have not been resolved within football's complaints procedure. The IFO is an Approved Alternative Dispute Resolution Body and its findings are non-binding. IFO Adjudications will normally comprise two parts: an impartial assessment of the substantive complaint and a review of the procedure by which the complaint was handled. The IFO's role is to investigate the complaint and judge whether it was dealt with properly and whether the outcomes were reasonable for all parties concerned. Under the procedure agreed by the Football Governing Bodies, the adjudication of the IFO is final and there is no right of appeal against IFO findings.

2. The IFO must make clear that in investigating this complaint he has received full cooperation from Tottenham Hotspur FC.

The complaint

3. A Tottenham Hotspur supporter complained, on behalf of himself and two friends, that at the home match against Arsenal at Wembley on 2 March 2019, their tickets had not worked and queuing for replacement tickets had caused

them to miss almost 20 minutes of the match, including the first goal. He further complained about the rude and unhelpful behaviour of stewards, and the inability to get anyone at Tottenham to deal effectively with his complaint.

The facts of the case

4. The complainant emailed the club complaining that the biggest game of the season had been ruined by what had happened. He said that his party had arrived early at Wembley and had queued at the turnstiles for 45 minutes. When their tickets had failed to work, they had been abused by those behind for holding up the queue, and the stewards had been rude and unhelpful. They had then gone to the ticket office, not knowing whether they would get into the match. They had eventually got replacement tickets, but missed almost 20 minutes of the match, including the first goal. On 7 and 13 March, at the request of the Club, the complainant provided copies of the tickets. On 19 March the complainant enquired as to what was happening. The Club official replied that she had left the matter with the ticket office, who would contact him. On 5 April the complainant emailed the Club saying that he had spent an hour on hold with the ticket office, only to be cut off. The Club replied that they could see when his tickets had been scanned, and he had not missed the match. The official said that she worked in the Premium Department and did not deal with season tickets; she had passed the matter to the ticket office who would contact him. After a further exchange, the official said that she could see that he had entered the stadium at 12.44 (14 minutes after kick off). She had asked the ticket office to telephone him on 8 April. On 17 April, having received no further contact from the Club, the complainant asked the IFO to investigate his complaint.

Investigation

5. The IFO carefully reviewed the documentation submitted by the complainant. The Deputy IFO telephoned the complainant, who repeated his account of the events on the day. He said that although they may have passed through the turnstiles at 12.44, by the time they had been searched and made their way to their seats they had missed the first goal (at 12.46). He said that he had gone to great lengths to try to get the matter resolved with the Club, but the only person he had managed to contact was the official in the Premium Department. Nobody else had contacted him, undertakings to telephone him had not been kept and he had spent something like 8 – 9 hours in attempting to speak with the Club. He said that he was seeking ticket refunds and compensation for all the time and effort he had expended in trying to get the Club to deal with his complaint.

6. On 20 May the Deputy IFO visited the Club and met with the Supporter Services Manager, and the Interim Supporter Liaison Officer and Disability Access Officer. The officials said that because the complainant had been dealing with the Club through the Premium Department, the matter seemed to have somehow dropped through the net for the ticket office not to have dealt with it. The Club had been going through a particularly onerous period with the planning

for, and opening of, the new stadium and work arising from progress in the Champions' League, coupled with the loss of some staff. The Supporter Liaison Manager readily agreed that the complainant and his friends should receive ticket refunds, subject to the friends providing relevant details. He also agreed that the Club should make goodwill gestures of complimentary stadium tours. The complainant subsequently provided details of his friends which the IFO passed on to the Club. As far as the actions of the stewards were concerned, the officials, while disappointed with the complaint, pointed out that the stewards were employees of Wembley Stadium, for whom Spurs could not be held accountable.

Findings

7. The IFO is satisfied that the complaint was justified, in that the failure of the tickets led to a delay in accessing the stadium and the resulting stress and inconvenience suffered by the party. The IFO was disappointed to find that there had been such a failure in customer service after the complaint had been submitted to the Club. The complainant should not have had to go to such lengths, including reference to the IFO, to get his complaint resolved. The mitigating factors put forward by the Club officials (paragraph 6) explain to some extent, but do not excuse, what happened. The IFO welcomes the offer of refunds and goodwill gestures as a satisfactory outcome to the complaint.

Conclusion

8. The IFO is satisfied that the problem with the complainant's tickets led to an unsatisfactory experience, which was compounded by the Club's failure to deal with the subsequent complaint. Ultimately the Club have acknowledged their shortcomings by agreeing refunds and goodwill gestures, which the IFO welcomes as an appropriate outcome to a justified complaint.

Professor Derek Fraser, Ombudsman

20 June 2019

Alan Watson CBE, Deputy Ombudsman