

## **A new cautionary tale by Stuart Fuller**

It is fair to say that the new disciplinary rules for cup competitions introduced by the FA last season didn't go down well with Non-League clubs. Rather than simplifying the previously confusing situation, it took the harshness of the sanctions to the extreme. For those not familiar with the rules, let me recap. If any player received two cautions in the FA Cup or Trophy, then he was automatically banned from the next tie.

Lewes's first FA Cup tie last season was away to Molesey. In possibly one of the dullest games we have played in recent years, skipper Lloyd Cotton picked up a second half yellow card. Nothing too unusual about that based on his combative style you may say, but when he then picked up a second yellow in the next round away at Farnborough, in a highly entertaining 2-2 draw, he was suspended for the replayed tie. During that same game Farnborough centre-back Nathaniel Oseni was red-carded for bringing down Billy Medlock as he sped through on goal. Because his was a red-card offence, Oseni was able to play in the replayed tie, whilst Cotton wasn't, because a red card isn't competition specific. Fair? Not really.

By the time Lewes had overcome Farnborough they then faced two games against Kings Langley and then a home tie against Merthyr Town before being drawn at Bath City, their 8<sup>th</sup> game in the competition. Unfortunately, we picked up suspensions for two yellow cards for that game, with first team players James Hammond, Leon Redwood and Nico Cotton all unavailable due to the rule. The ridiculous situation was that after picking up his second competition yellow in the game against Merthyr Town, Hammond could have deliberately got a red and then missed the league game against Haringey Borough, but then been available for the lucrative Bath City game.

As the competition progressed and fewer and fewer Non-League clubs remained, they continued to be disadvantaged by this rule, potentially having to go into their biggest ever games with weakened sides.

The good news is that the FA have changed the rules and for this season. In both the FA Cup and Trophy a player will need to accumulate four cautions before he is suspended from the next relevant cup game. As we dream of a trip to Wembley we can also be comforted by the fact that after the Sixth Round, any previous cautions are wiped from the record.

So, sense has once again prevailed in the main cup competitions. The County Cups are a different story altogether. A suspension in the Sussex Senior Cup does not carry into any other competition, so if a player is dismissed for instance for Serious Foul Play and his team goes on to lose, and then loses in the first round for the next three seasons, it could be four years from the date of the offence before he could be eligible to play again!