

## Late Rules Change Irks Lions, Barbarians

Written by Alex Goff

Thursday, 21 April 2011 09:42

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USA Rugby's Club Strategic Committee put in place a new rule effective April 8, that states that:

*Any player on these two clubs who has started two or more RSL matches this season are not eligible to play in the Div. 1 Round of 32.*

The purpose of this rule was to cover a perceived loophole caused by the Super League season ending earlier than usual. With the Super League playoffs reduced to semifinals and a final (no quarterfinals), teams might have finished their season or be out of the playoffs once the DI playoffs start.

Super League players could then play down to help their DI clubs. Two clubs are affected by this rule, the Denver Barbarians, and the Chicago Lions. The Barbarians, in response, forfeited their final DI league match and pulled out of the DI playoffs. The Lions have appealed the ruling.

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Denver Barbarians Head Coach Jason Kelly took issue with the fact that the ruling was installed mid-season.

"The timing of the season just ridiculous I thought," Kelly said. "I don't know if other teams were complaining, I don't know. The make that decision before our last game was pretty ridiculous."

Kelly said some Super League players were expected to play DI - the players who had committed to the fall season.

"They put in the time and the effort in the fall," he said. "[Ben] Haapapuro, Max [de Achaval] and Taylor [Howden] played all the games in the fall. It's not like they just show up at the end, and now why do they not get the chance to contribute. The players are losing out. I would be furious if I was a player."

The Chicago Lions have also been affected, and club president Keith Brown told RUGBYMag.com that the club didn't find out about the rule until April 11, and was not given a heads up by the Super League rep on the Club Strategic Committee, Tim Zern.

The Lions have filed an appeal.

"We have always been a club that followed the rules, and had we know this rule was going to go into effect, we would have done things differently," said Brown. "We started a couple of guys this Super League season - you have injuries, guys getting married, things like that - and at the time that wasn't going to affect their ability to play for the DI team."

Now, after the fact, those players have learned they will be barred from rejoining their DI teammates.

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"You can't change rules like that two-thirds of the way through the season," said Brown.

Asked if instead of a blanket rule, the Club Strategic Committee could have asked to see the Denver and Chicago DI rosters and discussed any potentially problematic selections, Brown and Kelly both said that would have been preferable.

"Now players who we thought would be eligible to play, won't be able to play," said Brown.

USA Rugby has changed eligibility rules in the middle of season before, and clubs have always complained saying the integrity of a competition is hurt when some games are played under one set of rules, and some games under another.

The Club Strategic Committee is:

Alan Sharpley (Chair)

Matt Trenary (USA Rugby)

Tam Breckenridge

Steve Compo

Adrian Gannon

Martin Gardner

Lisa Gartner

Jessa Giordano

Dre Khoury

Gary Lobaugh

Keith MacNeal

Tim Zern

Of this group, only one (Alan Sharpley) is associated with a club that plays in DI. Only one other (Tim Zern) is associated with a Super League club. Sharpley's club, Austin, competes in DI and DIII. No other member of the committee has any current experience with the issue at hand.