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Promotion of Central United FC to LOTTO NRFL Northern Conference

The Sports Tribunal has ordered that Central United Football Club Incorporated (Central) be promoted to the LOTTO NRFL Northern Conference 2023 following a dispute between the club and Northern Region Football (Northern) about the decision not to promote them despite having won the NRF League One competition in 2022.

NRF and NRFL competition regulations provide that the winners of the NRF League One earn automatic promotion to the NRFL competition, but Northern denied Central entry because of a Memorandum of Understanding (MOU) Central had signed with Auckland City FC.

Northern argued that a clause in the MOU provided that Central had relinquished its position in the NRFL leagues to Auckland City, precluding them from being in the NRFL. However, the clause also left the door open for Central to gain entry to the NRFL should it be appropriate and allowed.

During a hearing held on Tuesday, the Tribunal asked Northern to explain the circumstances where it would be appropriate for Central to gain entry and where it would not be allowed. Northern said it would be appropriate if they had earned promotion and it was unable to provide any concrete reasons for Central not being allowed entry.

Given there was provision for Central to enter the NRFL in the MOU and Northern could not provide rational reasons for not allowing entry, the Tribunal concluded that Northern's decision had been unreasonable.

The practical implication of inserting Central into the NRFL was raised by Northern and was explored by the Tribunal. While it was acknowledged that there would be some disruption, the Tribunal was assured that there would not be insurmountable disruption.

Central's promotion is to take effect immediately.

The decision in this case can be found at www.sportstribunal.org.nz

CUFC and NRF ST 02/23.