

CAS 2025/A/11933 Saudi Climbing and Hiking Federation (SCHF) v. International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) / World Climbing

ARBITRAL AWARD

delivered by the

COURT OF ARBITRATION FOR SPORT

sitting in the following composition:

President: Mr Mario Vigna, Attorney-at-Law in Rome, Italy
Arbitrators: Dr Sultan Fayhan Abaalala, Doctor of Law in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
Prof Dr Christoph Müller, Professor of Law in Neuchâtel, Switzerland

in the arbitration between

Saudi Climbing and Hiking Federation, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

Represented by Ms Yasmin Gahtani, Managing Director of Saudi Climbing and Hiking Federation, Jeddah, Saudi Arabia

- Appellant -

and

International Federation of Sport Climbing / World Climbing, Bern, Switzerland

Represented by Dr Bernhard Berger and Dr Domenic Brand, Attorneys-at-Law at Kellerhals Carrard, Bern, Switzerland

- Respondent -

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I. PARTIES

1. The Saudi Climbing and Hiking Federation (the “SCHF” or the “Appellant”) is the National Federation for the sport of rock climbing and hiking in Saudi Arabia, with headquarters in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia.
2. The International Federation of Sport Climbing (the “IFSC” or the “Respondent”) is an International Federation recognised by the International Olympic Committee as the world governing body for competitive climbing. Since December 2025, the IFSC has been rebranded as World Climbing. It has its seat in Bern, Switzerland.
3. The Appellant and the Respondent shall collectively be referred to as the “Parties”.

II. FACTUAL BACKGROUND

4. The following is a summary of the relevant facts and allegations derived from the Parties’ written submissions, supporting documentation and pleadings adduced at the hearing. Additional facts and allegations may be set out below, where appropriate, in connection with the legal discussion that follows. While the Panel has carefully reviewed all factual, legal and evidentiary submissions, it refers in its Award only to those it considers necessary to explain its reasoning.
5. On 11 July 2024, the Saudi national climbing team held a training camp at the Grimper SA Climbing Gym in Switzerland (the “Training Camp”) in preparation for the IFSC World Cup – Seoul 2024. The Parties agree that the Training Camp was a private event organised by the SCHF and was neither organised, sanctioned, funded, nor otherwise supported or associated with the IFSC.
6. During the Training Camp, Ms Sarah Alqunaybit, a Saudi athlete, suffered a serious fall while engaged in lead climbing on an indoor climbing wall. At a certain point during the climb, she fell directly to the ground, striking the floor at the base of the wall. As a result, she sustained serious injuries, including fractures to both feet and three vertebrae.
7. According to the SCHF, the incident was caused by negligence on the part of a French national and coach, Mr Ludovic Claude Laurence (the “Coach” or “Mr Laurence”), in the course of belaying – a fundamental climbing technique involving the use of ropes and specialised devices to manage a climber’s movement, arrest falls, and control descents – in particular through incorrect use of the belaying device. The Parties agree that at the time of the incident, Mr Laurence held a valid IFSC licence.
8. On 16 April 2025, the SCHF lodged a formal complaint against Mr Laurence before the IFSC Disciplinary Commission. In its complaint, the SCHF requested that Mr Laurence *“not be allowed to participate in any IFSC events and represent any athlete as a registered coach in IFSC events for the safety and wellbeing of all athletes and the reputation of the IFSC”*.

9. On 23 October 2025, following voluntary interviews with representatives of the SCHF and Mr Laurence to clarify certain factual aspects, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission declined to initiate formal disciplinary proceedings (the “Appealed Decision”).
10. The operative part of the Appealed Decision reads as follows:
- “For the foregoing reasons, the Disciplinary Panel decided as follows:*
- *Declined to initiate formal disciplinary proceedings against Respondent.*
 - *To issue a general recommendation directed at National Federations, which is attached to this Decision, related to safety training and requirements for staff of National Federations participating in IFSC events.*
 - *Place a note of record in Respondent’s IFSC License file related to the incident for 5 years from the date hereof.”*
11. In the Appealed Decision, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission found that:
- (i) It lacked jurisdiction to pursue disciplinary proceedings against Mr Laurence as he did not hold a current IFSC licence and had indicated that he had ceased coaching activities;
 - (ii) Having regard to the seriousness of the incident, it was appropriate to issue general recommendations to National Federations concerning safety training and requirements for coaching staff;
 - (iii) A note relating to the incident should be placed in Mr Laurence’s licence file for a period of five years, which may be considered if he applied for an IFSC licence in the future.

III. PROCEEDINGS BEFORE THE COURT OF ARBITRATION FOR SPORT

12. On 6 November 2025, the Appellant filed a Statement of Appeal with the Court of Arbitration for Sport (the “CAS”) against the Respondent with respect to the Appealed Decision, in accordance with Articles R47 and R48 of the Code of Sports-related Arbitration (2025 edition) (the “CAS Code”). In its Statement of Appeal, the Appellant requested the CAS to stay the Appealed Decision, in accordance with Article R37 of the CAS Code, in order to “*prevent irreversible procedural consequences and ensure that the matter can be properly reviewed by CAS before enforcement of an erroneous decision*”.
13. On 8 November 2025, the Appellant nominated Dr Sultan Fayhan Abaalala as arbitrator.
14. On 20 November 2025, in accordance with Article R51 of the CAS Code, the Appellant informed the CAS Court Office that its Statement of Appeal was to be considered as the Appeal Brief.
15. On 21 November 2025, the Respondent nominated Prof Dr Christoph Müller as arbitrator.

16. On 10 December 2025, the Respondent filed its Answer in accordance with Article R55 of the CAS Code.
17. On the same day, the CAS Court Office invited the Parties to *inter alia* indicate their preference as to whether they wished a hearing and/or a case management conference to be held or whether they preferred the Panel to issue an award based solely on the Parties' written submissions.
18. On 16 December 2025, the Respondent requested that the matter be decided solely on the basis of the Parties' written submissions and that no case management conference be held.
19. On 17 December 2025, the Appellant requested a hearing to be held via videoconference, and that no case management conference be held.
20. On 15 January 2026, the CAS Court Office informed the Parties that the Panel appointed to adjudicate the matter was constituted as follows:

President: Mr Mario Vigna, Attorney-at-Law in Rome, Italy

Arbitrators: Dr Sultan Fayhan Abaalala, Doctor of Law in Jeddah, Saudi Arabia
Prof Dr Christoph Müller, Professor of Law in Neuchâtel, Switzerland
21. On 23 January 2026, the CAS Court Office informed the Parties that the Panel had decided to hold a hearing by videoconference and invited the Respondent to submit its position on the Appellant's request for a stay of the Appealed Decision.
22. On 26 January 2026, the Respondent filed its comments on the Appellant's request for a stay, in accordance with Article R37 of the CAS Code. In particular, it submitted that the request was "*unclear and unspecific*" and that it was unable to understand what the Appellant sought to achieve by way of such request.
23. On 28 January 2026, on behalf of the Panel, the Parties were advised that the Appellant's request for a stay of the Appealed Decision was rejected as the "*cumulative conditions set out in Article R37 of the CAS Code are not met*", with reasons to be provided in the final Award.
24. On 5 February 2026, the CAS Court Office issued the Order of Procedure, which was duly signed and returned by the Parties on 6 February 2026 (Respondent) and 9 February 2026 (Appellant).
25. On 9 February 2026, on behalf of the Panel, the Parties were provided with the hearing schedule.
26. On 10 February 2026, the Respondent sent a letter to the CAS Court Office, objecting to the participation of certain individuals proposed by the Appellant for the hearing. In particular, the Respondent objected to:

- (i) The participation of Mr Stephen Keith Long as an expert witness, on the basis that his testimony would be irrelevant to the issues in dispute;
 - (ii) The attendance of Mr Salman Binjulayyil, Mr Ahmed Alhishwan, and Ms Norah Aldawsari as observers, as their names had not previously been disclosed, nor had the Appellant provided any explanation as to their connection to the dispute or the capacity in which they were to attend the hearing.
27. On 12 February 2026, the Appellant informed the CAS Court Office that it withdrew the participation of Mr Stephen Keith Long as expert witness. In the same correspondence, it clarified that Mr Salman Binjulayyil, Mr Ahmed Alhishwan, and Ms Norah Aldawsari are members of the SCHF's legal advisory team and would attend the hearing strictly in the capacity of observers, without any active participation.
28. On 13 February 2026, on behalf of the Panel, the Parties were provided with the revised hearing schedule.
29. On the same day, a hearing was held via videoconference. In addition to the Panel and Mr Fabien Cagneux, CAS Managing Counsel, the following individuals were in attendance:
- (i) For the Appellant:
 - Ms Yasmin Gahtani, Managing Director of the Appellant;
 - Mr Nasser Alzuhufi, Climbing Sport Director of the Appellant;
 - Ms Norah Aldawsari, legal advisor (in attendance as observer);
 - (ii) For the Respondent:
 - Dr Bernhard Berger, legal counsel;
 - Dr Domenic Brand, legal counsel;
 - Mr Piero Rebaudengo, Secretary General of the Respondent;
 - Ms Erica Ricci, Head of General Affairs of the Respondent.
30. After their closing pleadings and before the conclusion of the hearing, both Parties confirmed their satisfaction with the manner in which the Panel had conducted the hearing and raised no procedural objections.

IV. SUBMISSIONS OF THE PARTIES

31. The following summary of the Parties' respective positions is illustrative and does not necessarily comprise every argument advanced by the Parties. However, the Panel has carefully considered all submissions put forward, even if there is no explicit reference to them in the following discussion.

A. The Appellant

32. The Appellant, in its Statement of Appeal, requested that the CAS:

- “Annul the IFSC Disciplinary Panel decision declining to initiate formal disciplinary proceedings against the Respondent.
- Declare that the IFSC Disciplinary Panel had jurisdiction *ratione temporis* to hear and determine the case regardless of the Respondent’s license status at the time of the decision.
- Order the IFSC to open formal disciplinary proceedings, or alternatively remit the matter to the IFSC Disciplinary Commission for reconsideration under the correct legal principles.
- Order that the Respondent bear the costs of this arbitration in accordance with Article R64.4 of the CAS Code.”

33. The Appellant’s submissions, in essence, may be summarised as follows:

- (i) The IFSC Disciplinary Commission erred in law by declining jurisdiction:
 - (a) The fact that the Coach did not hold a current IFSC licence at the time of the decision and had ceased his professional activities does not constitute a valid basis for the IFSC Disciplinary Commission to decline jurisdiction.
 - (b) The jurisdiction of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission must be assessed *ratione temporis*, i.e. by reference to the rules applicable at the time of the events giving rise to the dispute, rather than at the time of adjudication. This approach is consistent with the principle of *tempus regit actum*, pursuant to which substantive matters are governed by the law in force at the time the relevant acts occurred, while procedural matters – including questions of jurisdiction – are governed by the procedural rules in force at the time the proceedings are initiated.
 - (c) Accordingly, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission retained authority to review the Coach’s conduct, which occurred at a time when he held a valid IFSC licence. By declining to proceed on the basis of his subsequent lack of licence, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission committed an error of law and improperly deprived the matter of disciplinary review.

B. The Respondent

34. The Respondent, in its Answer, requested the following relief:

- “1. The Appeal is dismissed in its entirety.
2. The costs of the arbitration are borne by the Appellant.
3. The Appellant is ordered to compensate the Respondent for all of its legal and other costs incurred for the conduct of the arbitration.”

35. The Respondent’s submissions, in essence, may be summarised as follows:

- (i) The IFSC Disciplinary Commission correctly declined jurisdiction:
 - (a) The IFSC Disciplinary Commission’s jurisdiction is limited to incidents occurring during or in connection with IFSC-sanctioned events. This follows

from the reading of the following provisions of the IFSC Statutes and IFSC Disciplinary Rules, which are designed to regulate conduct within the framework of IFSC competitions and activities:

- Article 14.4 of the IFSC Statutes, which grants the IFSC Disciplinary Commission jurisdiction to investigate and adjudicate breaches of IFSC rules and regulations or misconduct reported to the IFSC, in accordance with the IFSC Disciplinary Rules;
 - The Executive Summary to the IFSC Disciplinary Rules states its purpose as maintaining the integrity, fairness, and professionalism of climbing competitions governed by the IFSC;
 - Article 1.3 of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules, which limits disciplinary proceedings to the offences listed therein and defines such proceedings as relating to formal complaints under the IFSC regulatory framework;
 - Part 2 of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules, which governs proceedings against athletes holding a valid international licence for actions occurring “*during or resulting from IFSC competitions*”;
 - Part 3 of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules, which extends jurisdiction to other persons, including coaches, only when they carry out their function “*in relation to IFSC*” activities;
 - Appendix 2 (Terms of Reference), in particular Article 5.1, which confines the IFSC Disciplinary Commission’s jurisdiction to athletes and team officials participating in IFSC-sanctioned events.
- (b) The incident of 11 July 2024 occurred during a private training camp organised by the SCHF, which was neither sanctioned, approved, nor otherwise associated with the IFSC. Accordingly, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission lacked jurisdiction *ratione materiae* from the outset.
- (c) In light of the lack of jurisdiction, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission correctly declined to initiate formal disciplinary proceedings against the Coach.
- (ii) Any alleged deficiencies in the reasoning of the Appealed Decision do not justify its annulment:
- (a) Even if the IFSC Disciplinary Commission’s reasoning did not explicitly refer to its lack of jurisdiction, this does not affect the correctness of the outcome.
 - (b) In the event of annulment and remittal, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission would necessarily reach the same conclusion, namely that it lacks jurisdiction over the incident.
 - (c) The Appellant’s reliance on *ratione temporis* considerations is misplaced, as the absence of jurisdiction *ratione materiae* constitutes a fundamental and insurmountable obstacle, irrespective of the Coach’s licence status at any relevant time.
- (iii) In any event, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission acted appropriately and responsibly:

- (a) Despite lacking jurisdiction to initiate formal disciplinary proceedings, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission took into account the seriousness of the incident and issued recommendations to National Federations concerning safety and training standards.
- (b) The IFSC Disciplinary Commission further decided to place a note on record in the Coach’s licence file for a period of five years, to be considered in the event of any future licence application.
- (c) These measures demonstrate that the IFSC Disciplinary Commission adequately addressed the incident within the limits of its competence.

V. JURISDICTION

36. Article R47 (1) of the CAS Code reads as follows:

“An appeal against the decision of a federation, association or sports-related body may be filed with CAS if the statutes or regulations of the said body so provide or if the parties have concluded a specific arbitration agreement and if the Appellant has exhausted the legal remedies available to it prior to the appeal, in accordance with the statutes or regulations of that body.”

37. Article 24 (“Appeals”) of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules *inter alia* provides that:

“24.1 Any decision made by the Panel may be submitted exclusively by way of appeal to the Court of Arbitration for Sport (‘CAS’) in Lausanne, Switzerland, which will resolve the dispute definitively in accordance with Articles R47 et seq. of the Code of Sports-Related Arbitration.”

38. The Respondent does not contest the jurisdiction of CAS on the basis of the above provision and has also confirmed it by signing the Order of Procedure.

39. Accordingly, on the basis of Article R47 of the CAS Code and Article 24 of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules, and in the absence of any jurisdictional objection, the Panel finds that CAS has jurisdiction to decide the present dispute.

VI. ADMISSIBILITY

40. Article R49 of the CAS Code reads, *inter alia*, as follows:

“In the absence of a time limit set in the statutes or regulations of the federation, association or sports-related body concerned, or in a previous agreement, the time limit for appeal shall be twenty-one days from the receipt of the decision appealed against. The Division President shall not initiate a procedure if the statement of appeal is, on its face, late and shall so notify the person who filed the document.”

41. In the present case, the Panel observes that Article 24.2 of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules sets out the applicable time limit for assessing the timeliness of the appeal, as follows:

“24.2 All appeals must be filed in accordance with Articles R47 et seq. of the Code of Sports-Related Arbitration, applicable to appeals procedures. The time limit to submit an appeal is twenty-one (21) days after the receipt of the decision under appeal.”

42. In this context, the Panel notes that the Appealed Decision was notified to the Appellant on 23 October 2025 (see *supra* para. 9). Accordingly, the Statement of Appeal, filed on 6 November 2025 (see *supra* para. 12), was submitted within the 21-day time limit prescribed by Article 24.2 of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules.
43. Moreover, the appeal complied with the procedural requirements of Articles R48, R49 and R51 of the CAS Code.
44. The Respondent does not dispute the admissibility of this appeal.
45. It follows that the appeal is admissible within the meaning of Article R49 of the CAS Code.

VII. APPLICABLE LAW

46. Article R58 of the CAS Code reads as follows:

“The Panel shall decide the dispute according to the applicable regulations and, subsidiarily, to the rules of law chosen by the parties or, in the absence of such a choice, according to the law of the country in which the federation, association or sports-related body which has issued the challenged decision is domiciled or according to the rules of law that the Panel deems appropriate. In the latter case, the Panel shall give reasons for its decision”.

47. In the present case, the “applicable regulations” are primarily the applicable rules and regulations of the IFSC, in particular, the IFSC Statutes, IFSC Disciplinary Rules and the IFSC Safeguarding Policy.
48. Furthermore, in their respective submissions, neither Party has indicated the law that should apply on a subsidiary basis. Accordingly, absent any express choice of law by the Parties, the Panel finds that Swiss law shall apply subsidiarily, as the law of the country in which the IFSC is domiciled.
49. Accordingly, the Panel shall decide the dispute pursuant to the IFSC regulations, in particular the IFSC Statutes, IFSC Disciplinary Rules and the IFSC Safeguarding Policy, with Swiss law applying subsidiarily.

VIII. PRELIMINARY ISSUE: THE APPELLANT’S REQUEST FOR PROVISIONAL MEASURES

50. The Panel recalls that the Appellant requested the CAS to stay the execution of the Appealed Decision in order to “*prevent irreversible procedural consequences and ensure that the matter can be properly reviewed by CAS before enforcement of an erroneous decision*” (see *supra* para. 12).

51. The Respondent argued against granting said request, submitting that the request was “*unclear and unspecific*” and that it was unable to understand what the Appellant sought to achieve by way of such request (see *supra* para. 22).
52. Subsequently, the CAS Court Office, on behalf of the Panel, informed the Parties that the Appellant’s request for a stay of the Appealed Decision was rejected as the cumulative conditions set out in Article R37 of the CAS Code are not met, for the reasons set out below (see *supra* para. 23).

A. The Legal Framework

53. Pursuant to Article 183 of the Swiss Private International Law Act, an arbitral tribunal seated in Switzerland has the power to order provisional or conservatory measures upon application by one party.
54. The same power is confirmed under Article R37 of the CAS Code that *inter alia* states the following:

“The President of the relevant Division, prior to the transfer of the file to the Panel, or thereafter, the Panel may, upon application by a party, make an order for provisional or conservatory measures”.

55. In this regard, Article R37 of the CAS Code does not restrict the Panel’s ability to address requests for provisional measures filed before its receipt of the case file. Once constituted, the Panel assumes responsibility for any outstanding applications (see CAS 2025/A/11161, Order on Provisional Measures).
56. That said, under Article R37 of the CAS Code and constant CAS jurisprudence (see *ex multis* CAS 2013/A/3052; CAS 2006/A/1088; CAS 2003/O/486; CAS 2002/A/378; CAS 2001/A/324), when deciding whether an application for a stay should be ordered, the Panel should consider the following factors:
 - (i) Whether the stay requested is necessary to protect the applicant from irreparable harm (“*irreparable harm*” test): the applicant must demonstrate that the requested stay is necessary to protect its position from damage or risks that would be impossible, or very difficult, to remedy or cancel at a later stage;
 - (ii) Whether the applicant has reasonable chances to succeed on the merits (“*likelihood of success*” test): the applicant must demonstrate that its position is not groundless and that it has reasonable chances to eventually win the case;
 - (iii) Whether the interests of the applicant outweigh those of the opposite parties and of third parties (“*balance of interests*” test): the applicant must demonstrate that the harm or inconvenience it would suffer from the refusal of the requested stay would be comparatively greater than the harm or inconvenience other parties would suffer from the granting of the provisional measures.
57. The Panel recalls that the three aforementioned requirements must be cumulatively satisfied (CAS 2010/A/2071; CAS 2007/A/1403). Where one of them is not met, the application must fail.

B. Analysis of the Request for stay

58. In light of the foregoing, the Panel must assess whether the Appellant has demonstrated that the conditions set out under Article R37 of the CAS Code are met.
59. In the present case, the Panel observes that the Appellant has not engaged with the three-prong test applicable to request for provisional measures, nor has it demonstrated that the cumulative requirements are satisfied. In particular, the Appellant has neither addressed nor substantiated any alleged irreparable harm, likelihood of success on the merits, or balance of interests. The request is therefore insufficiently reasoned.
60. Moreover, the Appellant has not identified any concrete or practical effect that would result from the requested stay of the Appealed Decision. In the absence of any substantiated arguments addressing the relevant criteria, the request remains vague, unsubstantiated and insufficiently reasoned.
61. Given the cumulative nature of the requirements under Article R37 of the CAS Code and in the interest of procedural economy, the Panel does not deem it necessary to conduct a detailed examination of each of the criteria. Indeed, the failure to satisfy any of the cumulative requirements is, in itself, sufficient to dismiss the request.
62. The request for provisional measures must therefore be dismissed.

IX. MERITS

63. The Appellant requests that the Appealed Decision be “*annulled*”. In essence, it submits that the IFSC Disciplinary Commission erred in declining jurisdiction to hear the dispute. In support of its position, the Appellant argues that the IFSC Disciplinary Commission’s jurisdiction must be assessed *ratione temporis*, and that the Coach’s lack of a valid IFSC licence at the time of the decision as well as his cessation of coaching activities, do not constitute valid grounds to decline jurisdiction. According to the Appellant, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission retained authority to review conduct that occurred while the Coach held a valid licence.
64. The Respondent, for its part, requests that the appeal be dismissed and that the Appealed Decision be upheld. It submits that the IFSC Disciplinary Commission correctly found that it lacked jurisdiction, as its competence is limited to conduct occurring during or in connection with IFSC-sanctioned events. Since the incident occurred during a private training camp organised by the SCHF, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission lacked jurisdiction *ratione materiae*. The Respondent further contends that any deficiencies in the reasoning do not affect the correctness of the outcome and that, in any event, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission appropriately addressed the incident.
65. The Panel notes at the outset that the Appellant challenges the correctness of the Appealed Decision on the basis of the reasoning adopted by the IFSC Disciplinary Commission, whereas the Respondent seeks to uphold the same decision on different grounds, namely a lack of jurisdiction *ratione materiae*. In this respect, pursuant to Article R57 of the CAS

Code, the Panel has full power to review the facts and the law and must determine whether the Appealed Decision is correct in its outcome, irrespective of whether the reasoning adopted by the IFSC Disciplinary Commission can be upheld.

66. The Panel preliminarily notes that the Parties agree on the following circumstances:
- (i) The incident of 11 July 2024 occurred during the Training Camp organised by the SCHF;
 - (ii) The Training Camp was a private event and was neither organised, sanctioned, nor otherwise associated with the IFSC;
 - (iii) The alleged conduct of the Coach giving rise to the dispute took place in that context.
67. In light of the foregoing, the Panel will therefore address the following issues:
- (i) Whether the jurisdiction of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission is limited to conduct occurring during or in connection with IFSC-sanctioned events;
 - (ii) Whether the IFSC Disciplinary Commission had jurisdiction to initiate disciplinary proceedings in relation to the incident of 11 July 2024.

A. Whether the jurisdiction of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission is limited to conduct occurring during or in connection with IFSC-sanctioned events

68. As a preliminary remark, the Panel notes that, for a disciplinary body to validly exercise jurisdiction, the dispute must fall within the scope of its competence both *ratione materiae* and *ratione personae*, as defined by the applicable regulatory framework (see generally, e.g. CAS 2017/A/5131, para. 42; CAS 2019/A/6274, para. 61).
69. In the present case, the dispute concerns the jurisdiction *ratione materiae* of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission, i.e. whether the Coach's alleged conduct falls within the material scope of the IFSC disciplinary framework. In this regard, the Appellant submits that the IFSC Disciplinary Commission's jurisdiction extends to conduct occurring outside IFSC-sanctioned events, in particular under the IFSC Safeguarding Policy, whereas the Respondent contends that such jurisdiction is limited to conduct occurring during or in connection with IFSC-sanctioned activities.
70. In order to determine the scope of such jurisdiction, the Panel must interpret the relevant provisions of the applicable IFSC regulatory framework, namely the IFSC Statutes, the IFSC Disciplinary Rules, and the IFSC Safeguarding Policy (see *supra* para. 49).
71. In order to clarify this issue, the Panel refers to the generally recognised principles of interpretation, pursuant to which the statutes and regulations of international sports federations are to be interpreted according to the principles applicable to the interpretation of law rather than those applicable to contracts, as follows:

“The interpretation of the statutes and rules of a sport association has to be rather objective and always to start with the wording of the rule, which falls to be

interpreted. The adjudicating body will have to consider the meaning of the rule, looking at the language used, and the appropriate grammar and syntax. In its search, the adjudicating body will have further to identify the intentions (objectively construed) of the association which drafted the rule, and such body may also take account of any relevant historical background which illuminates its derivation, as well as the [sic] entirely regulatory context in which the particular rule is located” (ex multis, CAS 2025/A/11213, para. 77; CAS 2010/A/2071, para. 46; see also CAS 2020/A/7008-7009, paras. 61-62).

72. Applying these principles, the Panel observes that the IFSC Statutes designate the IFSC as the world governing body for climbing competitions and grant it authority in matters connected with its competitions, including the organisation and regulation of “IFSC Events”, defined as the “*totality of all IFSC approved events, including IFSC Competitions, conventions, ceremonies, seminars and other educational or training events*”. “IFSC Competitions” are, in turn, defined as competitions “*in one of the IFSC Disciplines acknowledged, sanctioned, organised or sponsored by the IFSC*”. This confirms that the IFSC’s regulatory and disciplinary powers are institutionally linked to its role in governing its international competitions and related activities.
73. As to the scope of powers of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission, Article 14.4 of the IFSC Statutes provides that it “*shall investigate, adjudicate, and take appropriate action following any complaint concerning a breach of the IFSC Rules and Regulations or misconduct reported to the IFSC*”, in accordance with the IFSC Disciplinary Rules.
74. Turning to the IFSC Disciplinary Rules, the Panel notes that Appendix 2 (“*Terms of Reference of the Disciplinary Commission*”), read together with Article 14.4 of the IFSC Statutes confirms that the IFSC Disciplinary Commission does not enjoy a free-standing or open-ended disciplinary competence, but only such competence as is conferred upon it by the IFSC regulatory framework. In particular, the Panel notes that, according to the Terms of Reference, the jurisdiction of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission extends, *inter alia*, to “*Athletes and Team Officials participating in IFSC-sanctioned events at all levels*”.
75. This interpretation is further supported by the structure and content of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules, which establish a regulatory framework aimed at safeguarding the integrity of IFSC competitions and activities.
76. In particular, the definitions section provides that an “*Athlete*” is an individual holding a valid IFSC licence and “*participating in IFSC-sanctioned events*”, and defines an “*IFSC-Sanctioned Competition or Event*” as “[a]ny competition or event officially recognised and governed by the IFSC”. Furthermore, Part 2 of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules expressly provides that disciplinary proceedings against athletes’ concern actions and/or events “*occurred during or resulting from a competition*”.
77. Notably, Part 3 of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules extends the disciplinary regime to other persons, including coaches, while they “*carry out their function in relation to IFSC*”. The Panel considers such phrase cannot be read in isolation but must be interpreted in light of the IFSC Statutes, the definitions contained in the IFSC Disciplinary Rules, and the Terms

of Reference of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission. Read in that context, the expression “*in relation to IFSC*” refers to functions performed within the IFSC’s institutional and regulatory sphere, i.e. in the context of IFSC-sanctioned events or activities formally recognised, governed, organised or otherwise falling under the authority of the IFSC. In other words, the required connection must be institutional rather than merely functional.

78. This interpretation is confirmed by the general scope and purpose of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules, which apply to individuals bound by the IFSC regulatory framework, including athletes and officials participating in IFSC-sanctioned competitions and persons affiliated with IFSC activities. The Panel considers that the repeated reference to IFSC competitions and activities indicates that disciplinary jurisdiction is intrinsically linked to the IFSC’s regulatory sphere.
79. Now, turning to the IFSC Safeguarding Policy, the Panel notes that the Appellant characterises the Coach’s conduct as negligent in nature. In this respect, said policy defines “*harassment and abuse*” in a broad manner, including forms of “neglect” (i.e. “[t]he failure of a coach or another person with a duty of care towards the athlete or non-athlete to provide a minimum level of care, which results in causing harm, allowing harm to be caused, or creating an imminent danger of harm”).
80. Although the alleged conduct could, in principle, fall within the notion of “*neglect*” and thus potentially constitute a breach of the IFSC Safeguarding Policy – which is listed under Appendix 1 (“*Schedule of Offences and Sanctions*”) of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules as a disciplinary offence – the Panel considers that this qualification is not determinative for the purposes of establishing jurisdiction. Rather, the decisive issue is whether such conduct falls within the scope of application of the IFSC regulatory framework.
81. In this regard, the Panel notes that pursuant to Article 3.1 of the IFSC Safeguarding Policy, the policy applies “*to all individuals involved with IFSC*”. Furthermore, Article 3.3 provides that the policy applies to harassment and abuse occurring between participants “*during IFSC activities and events*”. Read together, these provisions indicate that the primary scope of application of the IFSC Safeguarding Policy is conduct occurring within the framework of IFSC-regulated activities and involving individuals acting in that context.
82. In this context, the Panel acknowledges that Article 3.3 of the IFSC Safeguarding Policy further provides that the IFSC Safeguarding Policy may, under certain conditions, apply to conduct occurring “*outside IFSC activities and events, where such harassment and abuse [sic] impact the IFSC work and sport environment*”. However, the Panel considers that this constitutes a limited extension of the policy’s scope, which presupposes the existence of a sufficient and concrete nexus between the conduct at issue and the IFSC’s regulatory sphere.
83. In any event, the Panel considers that Article 3.3 of the IFSC Safeguarding Policy cannot be interpreted as extending, in itself, the jurisdiction of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission beyond the limits established in the IFSC Statutes and the IFSC Disciplinary Rules. Indeed, the IFSC Safeguarding Policy defines standards of conduct and establishes reporting and protective mechanisms, but it does not constitute an autonomous source of

disciplinary jurisdiction. Any referral to, or action by, the IFSC Disciplinary Commission must therefore remain subject to the jurisdictional limits laid down in the IFSC Statutes and the IFSC Disciplinary Rules.

84. Moreover, Article 4.2 of the IFSC Safeguarding Policy expressly recognises the role of National Federations in implementing and enforcing safeguarding measures at the domestic level, thereby confirming that incidents occurring outside IFSC-sanctioned activities may fall primarily within the competence of the relevant National Federation.
85. Accordingly, even if the conduct alleged by the Appellant could, in principle, fall within the material scope of the IFSC Safeguarding Policy, this does not suffice to establish jurisdiction of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission in the absence of a sufficient nexus with IFSC-sanctioned events. To hold otherwise would unduly extend the disciplinary jurisdiction of the IFSC to private or domestic training environments merely because such activities are functionally linked to future IFSC competitions, thereby blurring the allocation of responsibilities between the International Federation and its member federations.

B. Whether the IFSC Disciplinary Commission had jurisdiction to initiate disciplinary proceedings in relation to the incident of 11 July 2024

86. Having established the scope of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission’s jurisdiction, the Panel must now determine whether the incident of 11 July 2024 falls within that scope.
87. In this respect, the Panel notes that it is undisputed between the Parties that the incident occurred during the Training Camp organised by the SCHF and that such Training Camp was neither organised, sanctioned, funded, nor otherwise associated with the IFSC.
88. The Panel further observes that there is no evidence on file indicating any involvement, endorsement, or recognition of the Training Camp by the IFSC. In particular, the Training Camp cannot be characterised as an IFSC-sanctioned event or otherwise considered to fall within the scope of IFSC-regulated activities within the meaning of the IFSC regulations.
89. Additionally, the Panel notes that the IFSC regulatory framework does not contain any provision extending its disciplinary jurisdiction to preparatory activities or private training camps conducted independently of IFSC-sanctioned events. Notably, Appendix 1 (“*Schedule of Offences and Sanctions*”) of the IFSC Disciplinary Rules reflects a competition-centric design, referring to: (i) offences in the “Field of Play” or adjacent sport areas; (ii) offences in public or competition venue areas; and (iii) other misconduct or breaches of the Code of Conduct. The structure therefore presupposes a competition environment and there is no express contemplation of private training activities unrelated to an IFSC-sanctioned event.
90. To include such preparatory activities or private training camps would amount to an unduly expansive interpretation of the IFSC’s disciplinary jurisdiction. In particular, it would imply that any training activity undertaken in preparation for an IFSC competition – regardless of whether it is organised, supervised, endorsed by, or even known to the

IFSC – could fall within its jurisdiction, thereby effectively extending its regulatory reach to domestic training environments worldwide. Such an outcome is not supported by the wording or structure of the applicable regulations.

91. In these circumstances, the Panel finds that the alleged conduct occurred outside the scope of IFSC competitions and activities and, therefore, falls outside the *ratione materiae* jurisdiction of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission.
92. With respect to whether Mr Laurence held a valid IFSC licence, the Panel notes that, during the hearing, the Respondent submitted that the IFSC does not issue a separate licence but rather endorses licences issued by National Federations for participation in IFSC events. However, this position is not fully aligned with the IFSC Disciplinary Rules, pursuant to which an “IFSC licence” is defined as “[t]he annual licence issued by the IFSC and granting Athletes and Team Officials access to IFSC competitions”. In fact, the Panel has neither been provided with Mr Laurence’s (then) IFSC licence nor any national licence issued by the relevant National Federation.
93. That said, even assuming that Mr Laurence held a valid IFSC licence at the time of the incident, this would not suffice to establish jurisdiction in the absence of a sufficient nexus between the conduct and IFSC-regulated activities. In this respect, the Panel therefore considers that the reasoning adopted in the Appealed Decision cannot be upheld insofar as it was based on the absence of a current IFSC licence and the cessation of coaching activities; however, the Panel finds that the Appealed Decision must nevertheless be upheld in its outcome on the distinct ground that the IFSC Disciplinary Commission lacked jurisdiction *ratione materiae*.
94. The Panel further notes that the Appealed Decision provides for the placement of a note in Mr Laurence’s IFSC licence file for a period of five years (see *supra* para. 11(iii)). While reference was made during the hearing to the potential practical implications of such a measure, the Parties did not challenge the IFSC’s authority to impose such a measure or its practical scope. Accordingly, the Panel does not consider it necessary to examine this aspect further.
95. For the sake of completeness, the Panel points out that the absence of jurisdiction of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission does not preclude the possibility of the conduct being examined by other competent bodies. In particular, such matters may fall within the jurisdiction of the relevant National Federation(s), which are in a position to assess and, where appropriate, sanction conduct that took place within their respective regulatory frameworks.
96. More generally, the Panel observes that, as a matter of regulatory structure in international sport, conduct occurring in the context of national training activities, such as training camps organised independently of International Federations, typically falls within the competence of the relevant National Federation under its own rules and disciplinary framework. This reflects the division of regulatory responsibilities between International Federations, which govern international competitions and related activities, and National Federations, which retain authority over domestic sporting activities.

97. This allocation is also reflected in Article 4.2 of the IFSC Safeguarding Policy, which provides that National Federations are responsible, *inter alia*, for drawing up their own safeguarding policies and procedures, managing reports of alleged incidents and imposing disciplinary sanctions at national level, while informing the IFSC of such measures.
98. Lastly, the Panel recalls that, during the hearing, reference was made to the possibility of initiating civil proceedings for damages in relation to the incident. However, the Panel considers that such matters are not relevant for the determination of the present dispute, which is limited to assessing the jurisdiction of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission under the applicable regulatory framework.
99. The Panel therefore concludes that the IFSC Disciplinary Commission did not have jurisdiction to initiate disciplinary proceedings in relation to the incident of 11 July 2024.

X. CONCLUSIONS

100. In view of all the above and having considered all the evidence and submissions of the Parties, the Panel concludes that:
 - (i) The jurisdiction of the IFSC Disciplinary Commission is limited to conduct occurring during or in connection with IFSC-sanctioned events;
 - (ii) The IFSC Disciplinary Commission did not have jurisdiction *ratione materiae* to initiate disciplinary proceedings in relation to the incident of 11 July 2024;
 - (iii) Although the Appealed Decision was based on a reasoning which the Panel does not endorse, its operative outcome must be upheld on the basis of the lack of jurisdiction *ratione materiae*.
101. All other or further claims or requests submitted by the Parties are hereby dismissed.

XI. COSTS

(...)

ON THESE GROUNDS

The Court of Arbitration for Sport rules that:

1. The appeal filed by the Saudi Climbing and Hiking Federation on 6 November 2025 against the decision rendered by the Disciplinary Commission of the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) / World Climbing on 23 October 2025 is dismissed.
2. The decision rendered by the Disciplinary Commission of the International Federation of Sport Climbing (IFSC) / World Climbing on 23 October 2025 is confirmed.
3. (...).
4. (...).
5. All other requests for relief are dismissed.

Seat of arbitration: Lausanne, Switzerland

Date: 26 May 2026

THE COURT OF ARBITRATION FOR SPORT

Mario Vigna
President of the Panel

Sultan Fayhan Abaalala
Arbitrator

Christoph Müller
Arbitrator