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MSA COURT OF ENQUIRY 1268

HEARING WAS HELD VIA ZOOM ON 16 OCTOBER 2023 AT 18H00

Court: Mr Wayne Riddell - Court President

Mrs Carnita Low - Court Member
Ms Samantha van Reenen - Court Member

Attendance: Mr Hannes Scheepers - Respondent – Competitor

Mr Eric Schultz - Respondent – Clerk of the Course

Mr Wayne Robertson - Respondent – VW Challenge – Technical

Consultant

Mr Ian Richards - Respondent – Alternate MSA Steward
Mr Stuart Thompson - Respondent – Alternate Club Steward
Mr Philip Croeser - Respondent – VW Challenge – Chairman

Mr Alistair Pringle - Chief Scrutineer

Mr Deon Holiday - Team Manager – Mr Hannes Scheepers

Mr Raoul Farah - VW Challenge – Manager

Mr Graeme Nathan - VW Challenge – Technical Committee
Mr Lee Thomson - VW Challenge – Technical Committee
Mr Andrea Haupt - VW Challenge – Technical Committee

Mr Wayne Masters - Witness

Mr Vic Maharaj - MSA Sporting Services Manager
Mrs Allison Vogelsang - MSA Circuit Sport Coordinator

EXECUTIVE SUMMARY

Dr Hannes Scheepers' (interchangeably referred to as "**Dr Scheepers**" or "**the Competitor**") vehicle (#27B), participated in the VW Challenge Regional Extreme Festival held on 2 September 2023 at the Aldo Scribante Raceway.

After a technical inspection convened by the VW Technical Committee and executed by the duly appointed Technical Consultant at the aforementioned event, Dr Scheepers' vehicle (#27B) was found to be in technical noncompliance with article 13.24 of the Northern Regions Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship. A recommendation of exclusion from the event was made by the Technical Consultant.

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A series of procedural events followed (the details of which are set out in the body of these findings) culminating in the exclusion being upheld.

Pursuant to the aforementioned events, a Court of Enquiry was convened by Motorsport South Africa ("MSA") to:

- 1. investigate the technical compliance, or otherwise, of Dr Scheepers's race car.
- 2. investigate the procedural correctness, or otherwise, of the way the matter was dealt with by all concerned parties.
- 3. investigate the suitability, or otherwise, of the relevant VW Challenge regulations.
- 4. determine what action to take in response to its findings with regard to items 1, 2 and 3 above.

This Court of Enquiry considered the evidence presented, and concluded as follows:

- On application of the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship and the MSA General Competition Rules, the Clerk of the Course's ("COC") decision that Dr Scheepers' vehicle #27 was not technically compliant, is upheld.
- Procedurally, the protest rights afforded to Dr Scheepers in terms of the MSA General Competition Rules, Article 197 were potentially in conflict with the provisions in the Regional Standing - Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship, which states that decisions of the technical consultants are not protestable. Notwithstanding the aforementioned, the additional rights afforded to Dr Scheepers represented *no procedural* unfairness.

In considering procedural correctness, the Court of Enquiry makes **notable comments regarding the conduct of the VW Technical Committee** in this matter and in this regard, hereby provides the following directives in respect of its findings. That:

- Fifty percent of the protest fee (being R1000) be forfeited by the Competitor; and
- The Competitor be levied a fine of R5000 for the technical non-compliance, and
- In interest of fairness and the mitigating factors considered, that the Race Event results for the weekend, be reinstated and the exclusion set aside.
- Recommendations have also been made that the Northern Regions Regional Standing-Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship be reviewed to clarify various aspects as detailed in the findings to better align to the MSA General Competition Rules, and that MSA must oversee the revision of the Northern Regions Regional Standing-Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge, as detailed in the findings.

BACKGROUND AND PRELIMINARY

- These are the findings of a Court of Enquiry, which was held virtually, using the Zoom platform.
 At the outset of the hearing the parties were asked whether there was any objection to the court as constituted. No such objection was received, and the matter proceeded.
- 2. MSA convened a formal enquiry in terms of the provisions of GCR 211, into an alleged technical non-compliance by Dr Scheepers' vehicle in the VW Challenge at the Regional Extreme Festival held on 2 September 2023 at Aldo Scribante Raceway ("the **Race Event**").

3. After a technical inspection, convened by the VW Technical Committee and executed by the duly appointed Technical Consultant (Mr Wayne Robertson) at the aforementioned Race Event, Dr Scheepers' vehicle (#27B) was found to be in technical noncompliance with article 13.24 of the Northern Regions Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship, dated 20 June 2023 and which states as follows:

"13.24 Seam welding of front fenders / repairing of wheel arches and fender trays will be allowed only due to damage caused by accidents. Seam welding of the floor pan is prohibited."

A penalty form was issued by the Technical Consultant on 2 September 2023 indicating that:

"The above competitors motor vehicle chassis shows signs of seam welding throughout the entire floor tray and chassis legs (under side of the car). The said vehicle was jacked up and found to have been welded on floor tray-legs welded to tray (floor) ... the [above] vehicle will not be able to be returned to standard form for further competition within the challenge at this stage."

Three (3) seals were placed on said chassis for transportation back to Johannesburg.

- 4. On 5 September 2023, a hearing was held, using the Zoom platform, for the COC (Mr Eric Schultz) to hear the submissions by all parties in respect of the findings of the Technical Consultant. Submissions were made and the COC issued the COC findings on 6 September 2023.
- 5. The COC findings confirmed the Technical Consultant's recommendation that vehicle #27B and driver, Dr Scheepers be excluded from the event as the vehicle presented in *parc fermé* at the Race Event, did not comply with article 13.24 of the Northern Regions Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship. The vehicle was also found to be prohibited from competition in its current form and could be eligible for competition once written approval was provided by the VW Technical Committee in terms of article 6.5 of the Northern Regions Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship.
- 6. On 8 September 2023, Dr Scheepers lodged a protest disputing that he was in breach of Article 13.24 of the Northern Regions Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship and that further, the technical procedure and penalty imposed was unfair and illegal according to GCR 200.
- 7. On 19 September 2023, the MSA Steward (Mr Ian Richards) and the Club Steward (Mr Stuart Thompson) issued findings that the protest lodged by Dr Scheepers was invalid as the technical inspection was not a result of a protest and was in terms of article 5.4 of Northern Regions Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship.
- 8. Pursuant to the aforementioned events, a Court of enquiry was convened by MSA to:
 - 8.1. investigate the technical compliance, or otherwise, of Dr Scheeper's race car.
 - 8.2. investigate the procedural correctness, or otherwise, of the way the matter was dealt with by all concerned parties.
 - 8.3. investigate the suitability, or otherwise, of the relevant VW Challenge regulations.

8.4. determine what action to take in response to its findings with regard to the items above.

TECHNICAL COMPLIANCE OR OTHERWISE OF DR HANNES SCHEEPERS VEHICLE #27B

9. Article 13.24 of the Regulations - Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship states that:

13. BODYWORK AND GENERAL

- 13.24 Seam welding of front fenders / repairing of wheel arches and fender trays will be allowed only due to damage caused by accidents. Seam welding of the floor pan is prohibited.
- 10. It is common case that once the vehicle was jacked up at the Race Event, inspected, and the vehicle was found to have substantial *welding* on the floor plan that was visible to both the Technical Consultant as well as to other technical advisors on the day of the race. This was not challenged on the day of the Race Event by Dr Scheepers.
- 11. The Technical Consultant indicated in the Penalty Form issued by him, that the "vehicle showed signs of seam welding" and further testified at the Court of Enquiry that some ninety-one (91) seam welds were visible by inspection. This was not contradicted, denied or disputed by the Dr Scheepers on the day of the Race Event.
- 12. It is suggested in the COC Findings dated 6 September 2023, this was noted as well as the possibility that Dr Scheepers was unaware that his vehicle had extensive welding or that he had acquired the vehicle from a previous competitor already extensively welded. No evidence was presented to support this.
- 13. Further, the MSA General Competition Rules (GCR) 93 (iii) read with GCR 113 (iv) provides that it is a competitor's responsibility to ensure that the competing vehicle complies with all the regulations and specifications pertaining to an event entered.

93. DECLARATION/UNDERTAKING TO BE SIGNED BY EVERY COMPETITOR

iii) "I declare that any vehicle/machine entered by me, will comply with all regulations and specifications pertaining to the event entered/category of motorsport concerned. I accept, subject to my rights of protest and appeal, which action will be taken against me as the entrant and/or driver and/or rider, in accordance with the provisions of MSA's regulations, if my vehicle/machine is found not to comply with the relevant regulations and specifications."

113. ENTRANT

iv) before a competition, satisfy themselves as to the eligibility and safety of the vehicle and the competence of its driver(s)/rider(s).

14. Further, Article 1 of the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship provides as follows:

1. VALIDITY OF THESE REGULATIONS

These regulations shall apply for the calendar year of 2023. The championship is held under MSA's general competition rules, standing supplementary regulations for car circuit racing, as well as these regulations.

Although care was taken to cover all possible modifications and allowances, "grey" areas might still appear. The VW Challenge Technical Committee reserves the right to allow, or not allow, such modifications not covered.

- 15. The applicable regulations are applicable to the 2023 calendar year and officials thus cannot consider any events that could or would have taken place or be allowed prior to the commencement of the 2023 calendar year. Accordingly, if Dr Scheepers acquired the vehicle with the modifications already in place, he bears the onus imposed on him by GCR) 93 (iii) read with GCR 113 (iv).
- 16. In a letter submission to the Court of Enquiry, dated 19 September 2023, Mr Wayne Masters indicated that he advised the Technical Consultant at the Race Event that the welding was in his opinion, stitch welding. Mr Masters did not testify at the Court of Enquiry. Additionally, this view was not shared by the Technical Consultant, who issued his findings by way of the Penalty Form, stating that the welding was seam welding and in contravention of Article 13.24. This view was upheld by two subsequent MSA forums that considered the matter. Additionally, Article 1 of the Regulations Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship provides that the VW Technical Committee has complete discretion on all modifications as set out below:

1. VALIDITY OF THESE REGULATIONS

Although care was taken to cover all possible modifications and allowances, "grey" areas might still appear. The VW Challenge Technical Committee reserves the right to allow, or not allow, such modifications not covered.

17. The Regulations - Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship take this step further in Article 6.2 which states that:

6. GENERAL

6.2. What is not specifically mentioned as allowed is expressly forbidden.

The discretion and authority to allow or disallow any modification are extensive as allowed in the regulations for the Race Event in question, which was duly applied by the Technical Committee, the Technical Consultant as well as the COC and Stewards who deliberated on the matter. The VW Technical Committee members testified that they supported the Technical

Consultants' findings that the extensive welding was a modification that they were not inclined to allow.

18. Dr Scheepers proceeded to testify that despite his contentions (subsequent to the Race Event) that the welding was stich welding and not seam welding, and despite the Technical Consultants finding that the "vehicle will not be able to be returned to standard form for further competition within the challenge at this stage...", he has subsequently had the vehicle "repaired". He further testified that the repair modifications have subsequently been inspected and approved by the VW Technical Committee in terms of article 6.5 of the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship:

6. GENERAL

6.5. If there is any uncertainty as to the legality of the modification it is the responsibility of the competitor to seek clarification in writing from the VW Challenge technical committee. This must be done before the vehicle in question is entered in a race.

19. In his Protest, dated 8 September 2023, Dr Scheepers disputed that he was in breach of article 13.24 of the Regional Standing -Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship. This being said, by the date of the Court of Enquiry on 16 October 2023, the vehicle #B27 has already undergone repair modification at Dr Scheepers's election and had been inspected and he had already received clarification in writing from the VW Challenge Technical Committee that the repaired vehicle was now eligible to be entered and compete.

FINDINGS - TECHNICAL COMPLIANCE OR OTHERWISE OF DR HANNES SCHEEPERS CAR

- 20. Dr Scheepers's vehicle was found to have extensive welds on the floor pan of the vehicle. This was never disputed, and the only issue disputed was whether it was seam welding as specifically prohibited or stitch welding, which is not specifically prohibited. Evidence in this regard was contradictory with views in favour of both types of welding being given and presented.
- 21. The requirement to determine whether the welding was stitch or seam welding becomes moot if one considers that the VW Technical committee has the wide discretion to allow or disallow any form of modification in terms of Articles 1 and 6.2 of the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship. The Technical Committee members testified that they were not inclined to allow the extensive modifications on vehicle #27B as no specific evidence, only speculations, were provided to justify the substantial number of welds on said vehicle's floor tray and chassis legs.
- 22. The Court of Enquiry had the benefit of hearing from and questioning an extensive group of expert technical motorsport specialist in one (virtual) room, including *inter alia* Mr Graham Nathan, Mr Lee Thompson, Mr Andrea Haupt and Mr Deon Holiday. Despite this, and extensive interrogation by the Court of Enquiry, no consensus or evidence could be provided among them as to whether there was an advantage gained by the extensive welds, or not. Further, there were some amongst these specialists who did not think that the welding that some refer to, was in fact correct either. On a balance of probabilities, it must therefore be concluded that in the absence of any conclusive evidence to the contrary, that no competitive advantage was gained.

- 23. Further, the principle of evidence provides that while admissions may be made verbally or in writing, they may also be inferred from conduct. In this instance, despite Dr Scheepers dispute that his vehicle was in contravention of article 13.24 of the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship, his actions to remedy the *contravention* and effect repairs, have the vehicle inspected and cleared by the VW Technical Committee contradicts his dispute.
- **24.** This Court of Enquiry finds that on application of the Regulations being the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship and the MSA General Competition Rules, that the Clerk of the Course's decision that Dr Scheepers vehicle #27 was not technically compliant at the Race Event, is upheld.

PROCEDURAL CORRECTNESS

- 25. The VW Technical Committee requested the inspection of the vehicle based on an allegation made that vehicles that were not complaint with article 13.24 were being permitted to race. The allegation referred specifically to the vehicle of Dr Scheepers, being vehicle #27B and one other. Messrs Nathan, Thomas and Haupt being members of the VW Technical Committee, testified that they viewed allegations of this nature as serious and unanimously agreed to the inspections. The allegation was made by a non-competitor at the Race Event.
- 26. The inspection was requested by the VW Technical Committee and conducted by the Technical Consultant at the Race Event after Race 2, in terms of article 5.4 of the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship:

5. ELIGIBILITY OF CARS

- 5.4. The VW Challenge Committee reserves the right to have racing cars inspected at random.
- 27. The Technical Consultant, issued his findings by way of a Penalty Form, followed by COC's hearing on 5 September 2023 via the Zoom platform. After hearing submissions, the COC upheld the Technical Consultant's recommendation for exclusion from the Race Event, consequent to a breach of article 13.24.
- 28. At this stage, no protest had been lodged by any competitor or race official at the Race Event against Dr Scheepers or vehicle #27B and the inspection took place in terms of Article 5.4 as stated above. The inspection occurred based on the codified authority of the VW Technical Committee in the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship.
- 29. GCR 200 deals with Time Limits for Protests, but this was not the article applied as no protest was being considered. The authority to do an inspection derived from a different regulatory provision.

30. Article 6.9 of the Regional Standing-Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship applicable at the time off the Race Event further stipulates that:

6 GENERAL

- 6.9. When the TC is called upon to inspect a competitor's vehicle or any component thereof at either an official race day or at a technical inspection, the TC's decision on the legality of the vehicle or component will be final and his decision will not be protestable.
- 31. Notwithstanding that the applicable regulations indicated that the Technical Consultants decision is not protestable, a protest in respect of the Clerk of the Course findings was submitted to MSA on 8 September 2023. Dr Scheepers does not indicate the article or regulation applicable to his own protest submission. We can only presume it must be in terms of Article 200 (viii):

200. TIME LIMITS FOR PROTESTS

- viii) A protest concerning the results of a competition within 30 minutes of the publication of provisional results or, if results are published in accordance with GCR 141 (x) (c), within 7 working days of the date of electronic publication (normally via email or publication on the MSA website).
- 32. Notwithstanding that these findings were in terms of a regulation that was not protestable at the time (Article 6.9), MSA accepted receipt of the protest and called a Court of Enquiry to consider the procedural fairness and events of the matter which were all well-ventilated at the Court of Enquiry.

FINDINGS - PROCEDURAL CORRECTNESSGS

- 33. The Technical Consultants inspection was procedurally permissible at the request of the VW Technical Committee and conducted in terms of articles 1, 5.4 and 6 of the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship.
- 34. The Technical Consultant, informed by other Technical Consultants as well as the VW Technical Committee's views, made a finding in terms of Article 13.24 of non-compliance. A penalty recommendation was issued for exclusion to the COC.
- 35. At a hearing via the Zoom Platform on 5 September 2023 ventilated and considered the matter, and the COC upheld the Technical Consultants findings, issuing a penalty of exclusion. The COC in his findings reminded the forum of the competitor rights in terms of the MSA General Competition Rules, Article 197 and advised that despite Article 6.9 in the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship that findings of the Technical Consultant are non-protestable, competitors are allowed to use the rights afforded to them in terms of MSA General Competition Rules if they are aggrieved by any decision, act or omission of an organiser, official, competitor, driver or other person connected with any competition in which he/she is or has been taking part/officiated in.
- 36. The COC in his finding, thus recommended that the right to protest be allowable. A protest was then lodged, and receipt accepted from Dr Scheepers by MSA, evidencing an extension of procedural fairness in Dr Scheepers favour, amidst a possible conflict of whether a protest is

allowable in terms of Regional Standing-Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship and the MSA General Competition Rules. The protest was considered, and a finding issued on 19 September 2023.

37. This Court of Enquiry found no procedural unfairness in respect of the application of the Regulations contained in the Regional Standing - Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship. The protest rights afforded to Dr Scheepers in terms of the MSA General Competition Rules, Article 197, although extended to him in potential conflict with the provisions in the Regional Standing - Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship that decisions of the technical consultants are not protestable, was an allowance to his benefit. This right was afforded to Dr Scheepers as an additional avenue, to ventilate his concerns about the noncompliance as well as procedural matters, and thus cannot simultaneously be unfair to him.

38. Additional Comments: The Court of Enquiry wishes to note the following in this regard in respect of the VW Technical Committee conduct in this matter:

- 38.1. While compliance can be assessed applying the "letter of the regulations," the "spirit and intension" of the application need to be ventilated as well. This bears the question as to whether the VW Technical Committee" in this instance, acted in the best general interest and spirit of motorsport.
- 38.2. More than a month before the Race Event, the "VW Technical Committee were aware of a possible non-compliance of vehicle #27B.
- 38.3. Notwithstanding this knowledge, no approach or notification was provided to the competitor informing him, or advising him about the concerns, or even requesting an inspection. Article 5.4 of the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship provides for *inspections at random* implying that an inspection could be requested at any time not only at a race event. This being said, another opportunity arose at the start of the Race Event to request an inspection, but the competitor was only approached on day two (2) of the Race Event after Race 2.
- 38.4. Dr Scheepers incurred the expense of attending the Race Event, certainly with the intension to compete. On a balance of probabilities, the Court of Enquiry is inclined to believe that Dr Scheepers acted in good faith for the following reasons:
 - 38.4.1. Questions were raised about the possibility of the weld modifications having been made before acquisition of the vehicle #27B by Dr Scheepers; and
 - 38.4.2. It is common cause that the vehicle #27B had undergone, an inspection in terms of Article 5.2 of the Regional Standing Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship. While members of the VW Technical Committee testified that these inspections are primarily safety related, it is very plausible that Dr Scheepers considered this as sufficient confirmation of the eligibility of vehicle #27B.
 - 38.4.3. Dr Scheepers attempted to remedy any alleged contravention, effect repairs and

have the vehicle inspected and cleared by the VW technical committee for eligibility after the concern was raised. This displays his good faith and intension to compete compliantly.

39. This Court of Enquiry finds that the VW Technical Committee could have managed the matter in a manner that better accords with the spirit of a series of this nature. This, together with a level of transparency could have enhanced the competitor experience in resolving any non-compliance and uphold series spirit.

40. COMPETITOR FEE AND COURT OF ENQUIRY DIRECTIVES

Based on the aforementioned considerations, the Court of Enquiry directs that

- fifty percent of the protest fee (being R1000) be forfeited by the competitor; and
- The Competitor be levied a fine of R5000 for the technical non-compliance; and
- In interest of fairness and the mitigating factors considered, that the Race Event results for the weekend, be reinstated and the exclusion set aside.

SUITABILITY OR OTHERWISE OF THE RELEVANT VW TECHNICAL CHALLENGE REGULATIONS

41. The Northern Regions Regional Standing-Supplementary Regulations for the VW Challenge Championship are found to be extremely specific on certain elements but not on others. In this regard, we have the following general principal comments:

41.1. Wide Regulatory Discretion

The ability to exercise discretionary power can be seen throughout the VW Challenge regulations. There is extensive discretionary power built into the regulations and placed in the hands of the VW Technical Committee. While it is imperative that discretion is necessarily required in all elements that require judgement, discretionary authority, if unfettered or regulatorily managed, could reduce the ability that this power must be exercised "reasonably," i.e., not arbitrarily and capriciously.

Discretion must be exercised in a manner consistent with the purposes for which it was granted, and the rules are silent on what reasonable application would be. This should be linked to the purpose of the discretion, which should be linked to the purpose of the regulations.

One can never regulate for absolutely every instance or incident that could occur at a race event, but rails on how the exercise of discretion should be applied, will assist in consistent application, and provide credible outcomes for competitors and officials as well as reasonable decisions on penalties.

41.2. Regulatory Structure

The regulations are specific on technical requirements for the VW Challenge – which is deemed necessary and reasonable. However, the regulations should be better aligned with the MSA General Competition Rules and ensure that conflicts and procedural elements of dispute resolution are coherent and fair.

This will avoid any conflict between the two sets of regulations. The VW Challenge regulations should be clear on dispute resolution mechanisms and much of this is already incorporated in instances from the VW Technical Committee's perspective. The remedial paths available for competitors are not as clearly set out.

Additionally, the regulations were found to be set out in a counterintuitive order, which could result in confusing competitors who have to navigate through the full set of regulations to find a provision that would be expected to be under a heading that relates to all matters on a particular issue. Considering the time periods for protests – this should be considered when competitors need to look at rules to establish possible noncompliance or otherwise, in an abbreviated period of time.

41.3. Competitive Advantage

Where technical specifications are clarified as far as possible, there are also a number of non-specified technical elements that could be uncovered. The application of guided discretion as well as a clear guideline on what constitutes competitive advantage is required. The principles of what constitutes a competitive advantage, are presumably relatively well known to the VW Technical Committee and some of these can be codified for obvious clarity while others could be left to guided discretionary use.

While the list above is not exhaustive, it will assist with providing some cohesion on the application of discretion in instances not codified, as well as linked to the purpose of the regulations and technical discretion.

RECOMMENDATION

The Northern Regions Regional Standing-Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge Championship be reviewed to clarify the above and better align to the MSA General Competition Rules with respect to competitor rights and remedial actions.

MSA must oversee the revision of the Northern Regions Regional Standing-Supplementary Regulations for The VW Challenge set to ensure that articles that are vague or give overarching authority against the interest of motorsport, be amended within 30 business days of these findings.

The parties are reminded of their rights as per GCR 212 B.

The findings are issued via email on the 10th of November of 2023

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