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PUBLIC REPORT

INVESTIGATION INTO ASTRALIS' EMERGENCY SUBSTITUTION REQUEST FOR ALEXANDER "br0" BRO

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1. INTRODUCTION

1.1 Background on Investigation

The Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC) received a formal request from its member BLAST, to conduct an investigation to identify if any element of the ESIC Integrity Program was breached during the circumstances surrounding Astralis' request for an emergency substitution of Alexander "br0" Bro at the BLAST Premier Fall Final. This request was made on the grounds that the player was allegedly "*unfit to play*", a claim subsequently disputed by br0's agent, Fabian Broich.

1.2 Key Facts

1.2.1 On September 17, 2024, Astralis requested an emergency substitution for Alexander "br0" Bro, citing that Mr. Bro was "*not fit for play*".

1.2.2 The BLAST Premier rulebook provided to teams and the general public stated the following condition should be followed when requesting an emergency substitution; "*However, in some cases it may be necessary for a Team to apply for an emergency replacement after the submission of the Submitted Roster due to issues such as illness, injury, and travel disruption.*" (at 6.9 of the rulebook).

1.2.3 On that basis BLAST required a "*genuine medical reason*" before accepting the emergency substitution. Astralis did not confirm that a "medical reason" was the driver for the request for emergency substitution at any point in the interaction and instead referred to the request as a "*genuine emergency substitution*".

1.2.4 BLAST subsequently accepted this request without requiring further documentation, in line with their "*previous protocol*". This protocol was explained to ESIC as "*The protocol has previously been to reconfirm the request from the team and then accept based on taking the teams request at face value.*"

1.2.5 BLAST proceeded to communicate the emergency substitution of Mr Bro to the teams, citing that the substitution was made on a medical basis.

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1.2.6 On the same day, Alexander “br0” Bro’s agent publicly refuted the notion that Mr. Bro was medically unfit to compete, asserting that his client was “*fully healthy and ready to perform.*”

1.2.7 This contradiction sparked widespread interest and scrutiny from the esports community.

1.2.8 ESIC, following its engagement on 25 September 2024, began its investigation.

2. INVESTIGATION TIMELINE

2.1 On 25 September 2024, ESIC was engaged by BLAST to conduct an investigation of the circumstances surrounding Astralis’ request for an emergency substitution of Alexander “br0” Bro to determine if there was any observable breach of the ESIC Integrity Program.

2.2 On 26 September 2024, ESIC sent out a list of interrogatories (questions of evidence and fact asked in the course of investigation to inform the investigation) to Astralis seeking further and better particulars.

2.3 On 29 September 2024, ESIC sent out a list of interrogatories to Mr Alexander “br0” Bro seeking further and better particulars.

2.4 On 29 September 2024, ESIC sent out a list of interrogatories to Mr Fabian Broich, the agent for Mr Bro, seeking further and better particulars.

2.5 On 2 October 2024, ESIC sent out a list of interrogatories to BLAST seeking further and better particulars.

2.6 By 14 October 2024, ESIC had received responses to the interrogatories issued to all the above respective parties.

2.7 By 21 October 2024, ESIC had completed subsequent clarification follow ups (calls, teleconferences, and written exchanges) with all parties involved.

2.8 By 28 October 2024, ESIC had completed its investigation and began preparing its public report.

2.9 By 10 November 2024, ESIC had completed its draft public report.

2.10 By 20 November 2024, ESIC had completed its final public report.

2.11 Today, 27 November 2024, ESIC publishes its report.

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3. KEY OBSERVATIONS

3.1 Observation 1

3.1.1 Failure in Process

The face value acceptance by BLAST of the emergency substitution request sought by Astralis, without further validation that the substitution was sought on a medical basis, was the result of poor process in place by BLAST. This in turn impacted the subsequent communication issued by BLAST and is most directly observed as the cause of the controversy that followed.

3.1.2 Evidence

It is apparent from the reading of the exchange between Astralis and BLAST, as well as reconciling the initial exchange with the further evidence provided to ESIC by both parties in reply to the interrogatories, that:

a. BLAST communicated to Astralis that an emergency substitution would only be permitted for a "*genuine medical reason*".
b. BLAST provided that the participant rule book made available to teams, sets out the following condition [at 6.9 of the rule book]; "*However, in some cases it may be necessary for a Team to apply for an emergency replacement after the submission of the Submitted Roster due to issues such as illness, injury, and travel disruption."*
c. Astralis replied to this requirement noting that the request was "*a genuine emergency substitution*", further noting that they "*wish[ed] to proceed*".
d. BLAST carried forward the emergency substitution in good faith, and on the understanding that Astralis had agreed to the condition that the emergency substitution was for medical reasons.
e. BLAST did not request nor require any further evidence before processing this substitution. BLAST provide that this was consistent with their previous

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practice, to take at face value, the representations provided by authorised team representatives.

f. BLAST provided that it took the representations by Astralis at face value and did not investigate further until disputing evidence was provided by the player agent.

g. On 25 September 2024, a conference was held between BLAST, Astralis and Mr Broich (the player agent on behalf of Mr Bro). At that conference, BLAST was able to obtain further context into the nature of the dispute and were provided with conflicting evidence.

h. BLAST after realising that there were inconsistent and contradicting facts being presented by both parties, immediately escalated the matter to ESIC and fully cooperated proactively with the ESIC investigation.

i. During that conference evidence provided by Astralis outlined that they did not represent that Mr Bro was medically unfit and informed BLAST that they were "*not allowed to determine the medical circumstances or conditions of an employee*", due to jurisdictional labour laws. Astralis assert that they provided this information to BLAST on at least two occasions.

j. Astralis however did maintain that Mr Bro was *not fit to play*, as a result of what was described as a "*serious and professional assessment"* conducted by Astralis.

k. As a result of this incident, BLAST have accepted that there was a failure in its process, in accepting substitution requests at face value, without seeking further evidence. BLAST have, as a result of this event, committed to changing the process and communicated [this] to all teams on the 3rd October.

3.1.3 Conclusion

It is clear that BLAST's acceptance of the representation for the substitution, at face value, without seeking further evidence, was the the most direct cause of the emergency substitution being permitted.

a. It is clear from the above that the condition provided by BLAST to allow an emergency substitution was that there be a *genuine medical reason*.

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b. Knowing the condition for the emergency substitution, Astralis expressed their desire to proceed with such substitution. Despite Astralis asserting that Mr Bro was *not fit to play*, they did not express that the substitution was on the basis of a *genuine medical reason*.
c. BLAST failed to seek clarity on the basis for the request and, took the representation provided by Astralis, at face value, as confirmation that there was a *genuine medical reason*.
d. A lack of appropriate procedure is most directly the critical cause of this incident.

3.2 Observation 2

3.2.1 Player "medical fitness" for duty

On the evidence provided by the parties, and as a result of the poor process in place (as set out in Observation 1 above), there was an erroneous communication regarding the player, Mr Bro's, purported medical fitness to participate in the BLAST event.

3.2.2 Evidence

While Astralis has maintained their position of br0's lack of fitness to participate in the BLAST event, there was no suggestion (at any time) that Astralis' assessment was provided on a medical basis. Further, it was observed that the player's agent consistently asserted that he was in fact medically fit.

a. Astralis provided that Mr Bro was *not fit to play,* however, it is alleged by Astralis this purported fitness was not due to a medical condition, but rather an observed *"burnout*" of Mr Bro leading up to the BLAST event deduced via a *"serious and professional assessment".*
b. Mr Bro provided ESIC with medical evidence of his fitness to compete both at and following the event.
c. Astralis was at all material times the employer of Mr Bro. Astralis assert that as Mr Bro's employer, they had an obligation to Mr Bro's health and safety and made their determination on that basis. It is noted that ESIC will not comment

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on matters of labour law as they fall outside of the scope of the Commission's integrity program.

d. The assessment made by Astralis was never purported to be a medical assessment, nor did they communicate this to BLAST. However, due to the failure in process (as set out in Observation 1), BLAST proceeded to announce that the emergency substitution was approved on the basis of Mr Bro being unable to participate due to medical reasons.

3.2.3 Conclusion

It is observed that the inclusion of "medical" in the language of the announcement of Mr Bro's emergency substitution was unrelated to the original request sent by Astralis, but was instead the result of a miscommunication. Furthermore, it is observed (on the basis of the evidence provided by Mr Bro, and the absence of evidence in the contrary) that Mr Bro was medically fit for competition at the time of the announcement.

3.3 Observation 3

3.3.1 Astralis benefitting from the miscommunication

ESIC has observed that despite the miscommunication and misunderstanding between Astralis and BLAST, Astralis benefitted from the misunderstanding and failed to correct the communication until after it had received the benefit.

3.3.2 Evidence

The effect of the poor process led to the announcement by BLAST that the substitution was the result of medical reasons (see Observation 1), something which Astralis should have known was factually incorrect.

a. BLAST after having misunderstood the basis for the emergency substitution sought by Astralis, proceeded to communicate that the substitution of Mr Bro was for medical reasons.
b. Although Astralis, at no point communicated to BLAST that the emergency substitution, was for a medical reason, they:

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i. When receiving an email providing the criteria for emergency substitution would only be approved on a medical basis, Astralis replied stating that the request was a *genuine emergency substitution*, further noting that they *"wish[ed] to proceed".*

ii. Provided that the substitution was following "*serious and professional assessment*".

c. Albeit that the assessment conducted by Astralis, may well have been serious and professional, it was not medical. Astralis' communication was ambiguous and unclear and was a primary contributor to the misunderstanding by BLAST.

d. At worst, Astralis, following the announcement by BLAST on the same day, 17th September 2024, would have known that the basis of the substitution had been incorrectly communicated by BLAST.

e. Astralis benefitted from the ambiguity and on the evidence available to ESIC, did not correct the misunderstanding held by BLAST until 23 September 2024, well after the emergency substitution had been approved and announced.

3.3.3 Conclusion

Astralis having gained a benefit from the misunderstanding held by BLAST and Astralis' failure to take proactive steps to correct that misunderstanding in a timely manner, are inconsistent with the obligations and expectations placed on top tier professional esports teams and accordingly, are in breach of the ESIC Integrity Program (detailed in section 4 below).

i. Astralis benefitted from the ambiguity created by the miscommunication. On the evidence available to ESIC, Astralis did not correct the false presumption held by BLAST until 23 September 2024, after the substitution had been permitted and announced.

ii. Astralis failed to be proactive and reactive in correcting the misunderstanding to its benefit and to the detriment of Mr Bro and BLAST.

iii. This observation concludes that, in failing to appropriately consider and act upon the undue benefit that it received, Astralis violated ESIC's Integrity Program.

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3.4 Observation 4

3.4.1 Event Impact

The incident had no material impact on the outcome of the BLAST tournament. There is no evidence that the incident improved Astralis' position or impacted performance to the detriment of other competing teams.

3.4.2 Evidence

Astralis failed to qualify beyond the group matches during their participation of the BLAST event.

a. Astralis were placed in Group B of the BLAST event, along with Team Vitality, Team Liquid and Team Spirit.
b. Astralis played 2 matches against Team Vitality and Team Spirit respectively. Astralis lost both matches 2-0 and 2-1.
c. Astralis did not qualify for the quarterfinals and did not proceed beyond the group stage.

3.4.3 Conclusion

Due to Astralis' failure to win a single match during the BLAST event, it cannot be said that the emergency substitution provided any material advantage to Astralis and therefore had no impact on the outcome of the BLAST event.

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4. CONCLUSION OF INVESTIGATION

Based on the information gathered and analysed during the course of this investigation, the Esports Integrity Commission (ESIC) finds that Astralis' handling of the emergency substitution request lacked the transparency and proactive integrity expected within the esports industry. By failing to clarify the ambiguous nature of their request and allowing BLAST's misinterpretation of the situation to stand, Astralis gained an advantage through the substitution of Mr. Alexander "br0" Bro. This conduct, however unintentional, ultimately brought disrepute to the BLAST event, compromising the standards set forth in Section 2.1.5 of the ESIC Code of Conduct, which states:

> *"Where the facts of the alleged incident are not adequately or clearly covered by any of the above offences, conduct that brings Esports, the Game, Event, ESIC, Member, Event, Tournament Host, Tournament Organizer, or Tournament Sponsor into disrepute."*

ESIC recognises that BLAST has proactively committed to refining its processes for handling emergency substitution requests, thereby enhancing its protocols to prevent similar misunderstandings in future tournaments. ESIC acknowledges and welcomes this constructive step towards improved governance within the esports ecosystem.

In light of these findings, ESIC has engaged with Astralis to address the lack of integrity in their conduct and has sought penalties, including the forfeiture of the monetary reward received by Astralis for their participation in the BLAST tournament, as well as an additional financial penalty of $15,000 USD. The sum of $15,000 USD related to this sanction, is to be donated to a not-for-profit charity nominated by Astralis and approved by ESIC. This penalty reflects the importance of maintaining high standards of honesty, transparency, and integrity within esports.

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While the actions of Astralis did not ultimately impact the competitive outcomes of the BLAST Premier Fall Final, as they did not advance past the group stage, the circumstances surrounding this substitution request and the delay in providing clarity necessitate this response to uphold the reputation and standards of competitive esports.

5. CLOSING REMARKS

ESIC remains committed to fostering a fair and transparent competitive environment for all stakeholders and will continue to work with tournament organizers, teams, and players to reinforce these standards.

We thank BLAST, Astralis, Alexander "br0" Bro, and his agent for their cooperation throughout this investigation. ESIC will continue to work with all parties to ensure fair and transparent practices in future competitions.

To report suspicion of cheating or match fixing, please contact the Esports Integrity Commission via https://esic.gg/report-cheating-match-fixing/.

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