

**Following a new application for interim measures, the Belgian Competition Authority suspends the introduction of a quota of U23 teams in Challenger Pro League (CPL) with the effect of retaining RWDM in CPL while relegating Club NEXT in amateur league**

On 8 May 2026, the Belgian Competition Authority ("BCA") decided to grant the application for interim measures filed by four professional football clubs of the Challenger Pro League (Royal Francs Borains, Koninklijke Sporting Club Lokeren, Royal Football Club Seraing and Racing White Daring Molenbeek Future (RWDM)). These clubs requested, from the 2025-2026 season on, the suspension of the introduction by the Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA) of a quota of at least four U23 teams in the Challenger Pro League (the "Quota"). This decision adopted today by the BCA entails that, given the final ranking of the season 2025-2026, the RWDM (at 13th position) will be retained in Challenger Pro League while by application of the Quota it would have been relegated to the amateur league. The decision also implies that the last two clubs in the ranking, namely the Royal Olympic of Charleroi (17th) and Club NXT (16th), will be relegated to the amateur league.

On 4 July 2025, the BCA opened an investigation following a complaint filed by three of the applicant clubs alleging that the introduction of the Quota and its effect on promotion/relegation rules constituted an infringement of applicable competition rules, in particular Article 101 TFEU and Article IV.1 of the Belgian Code of Economic Law. This investigation is still ongoing.

When assessing an application for interim measures, the BCA must determine, on the one hand, whether it is not manifestly unreasonable to consider that the contested practice could constitute an infringement of competition rules ("prima facie infringement") and, on the other hand, whether there is an urgent need to prevent a serious, imminent and irreparable harm.

The BCA had already received an application for interim measures in July 2025 aiming to suspend the decision of the Royal Belgian Football Association (RBFA) to introduce the Quota. On 1 August 2025, the Authority had decided to reject the interim measures that were requested. In its decision, the BCA held that the introduction of a quota of at least four U23 teams in Challenger Pro League also led to the introduction of promotion/relegation rules specific to U23 teams that are less stringent than those applying to other clubs participating in the Challenger Pro League. This discrimination could affect the integrity of the competition. The BCA also noted that this discrimination could weaken the incentives for U23 teams to field competitive teams in games with lower stakes. Accordingly, the BCA found that it is not manifestly unreasonable to consider that this discrimination would create an illegal distortion of competition in the market for the supply of football sport entertainment and, furthermore, that competition concerns arise from the possibility for parent clubs in the Jupiler Pro League to switch players between their first league and U23 teams.

However, in its decision of last August, the BCA decided to reject the requested preliminary measures because, at the time, there was no urgency to prevent a serious, imminent and irreparable harm. The BCA found that the effects of the Quota would not be felt immediately but only develop over the course of the season and possibly materialize only at the end of the season.

In its decision of 8 May 2026, the BCA first confirms its decision of 1 August 2025 to the effect that it is not manifestly unreasonable to consider that the Quota constitutes an infringement of competition rules. The BCA finds however, that, unlike the situation on 1 August 2025, there is now urgency to prevent a serious, imminent and irreparable harm. Indeed, the distortion of competition anticipated by the BCA, i.e., that a classic club is relegated even though it is better ranked than a U23 team, has now materialized at the end of the season, causing harm to (at least) the RWDM. The immediate suspension of the Quota is required to avoid such harm as well as harm to classic clubs participating in the 2025-2026 season and in subsequent seasons whose integrity would be compromised.

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The Belgian Competition Authority (BCA) is an independent administrative authority that contributes to the definition and implementation of competition policy in Belgium. Concretely, the BCA pursues anti-competitive practices, such as cartels and abuses of a dominant position, and reviews the main merger operations. The BCA cooperates with the other competition authorities of the member states of the European Union and the European Commission within the European Competition Network (ECN)