

AMERICAN RALLY ASSOCIATION NATIONAL APPEALS PANEL

DECISION OF THE APPEALS PANEL

Appeal Reference: ARA-AP-2026-036

Date of Decision: 9 March 2026

Time of Decision: 21:00 PDT

Appeal Submitted: 26 February 2026, 19:45 EST

Decision Appealed: Decision of the ARA Stewards of the Meeting dated 18 February 2026, reducing the penalty imposed upon Competitor No. 367 from exclusion to a three-minute time penalty

Event: 2026 ARA National Championship — Sno*Drift Rally

Appellant: Competitor No. 191 — Alastair Scully (Driver) / Stefan Trajkov (Co-Driver)

Appellant's Representative: John Hall (Team Advisor)

Respondent: ARA Stewards of the Meeting, 2026 Sno*Drift Rally

Subject Competitor: Competitor No. 367

Subject Matter: Appeal against the decision of the Stewards of the Meeting to reduce the penalty imposed upon Competitor No. 367 for a pushing violation within a Parc Fermé control zone from exclusion to a three-minute time penalty

Regulations: ARA General Competition Regulations (GCR), 2026 Edition; ARA Rally Competition Rules (RCR), 2026 Edition

Constituted under: GCR Article 10.6

I. COMPOSITION OF THE PANEL

The Appeals Panel (hereinafter, “the Panel”) was constituted by ARA Competition Director J.B. Niday pursuant to GCR Article 10.6. The Panel is comprised of the following members:

Doug Heredos — a competitor and event organizer with over two decades of rally experience (Presiding Panelist)

Andrew Frick — a competitor and event organizer with over two decades of rally experience (Panelist)

Scot Elkins — an experienced Series Director and Steward with international experience encompassing IMSA, Formula E, and Formula 1 (Panelist)

An online hearing was convened on Monday, 9 March 2026 at 18:00 PDT in accordance with GCR Article 10.6. The following persons were present prior to the closure of proceedings for Panel deliberations:

Members of the Panel as listed above

The Appellants: Alastair Scully and Stefan Trajkov (Crew of Competitor No. 191)

Team Advisor: John Hall

Observer: J.B. Niday, ARA Competition Director (non-voting)

II. SCOPE OF REVIEW

The role of the Panel is to determine whether the Stewards of the Meeting correctly applied the applicable regulations and whether the decision under appeal should be affirmed, modified, or overturned, pursuant to GCR Article 10.7. The Panel does not conduct a full rehearing of the underlying protest but reviews the findings and reasoning of the Stewards in light of the grounds advanced by the Appellant and the evidence placed before it.

III. BACKGROUND AND PROCEDURAL HISTORY

During the 2026 Sno*Drift Rally, the Clerk of the Course observed Competitor No. 367 being pushed out of a regroup control zone — specifically Regroup Out Control TC15B — by three individuals. It was established on the basis of video evidence, frame captures, and witness accounts that there was a person pushing the car that was neither the competing crew (driver and co-driver) nor an event official. The control zone at TC15B constituted a Parc Fermé zone pursuant to RCR Articles 4.12.3(a), 4.8, and 4.8.1.

On the basis of this observation, the Clerk of the Course imposed a penalty of exclusion upon Competitor No. 367 pursuant to RCR Articles 4.12.3 and 4.12.7. Competitor No. 367 subsequently lodged a protest against that exclusion. The protest hearing was held on 13 February 2026. By written decision dated 18 February 2026, the Stewards of the Meeting modified the penalty, reducing it from exclusion to a three-minute time penalty, citing the proportionality of the sanction in light of their finding that the end-of-control signboard had been positioned in a location acknowledged by the Clerk of the Course as potentially causing confusion.

The crew of Competitor No. 191 — Alastair Scully and Stefan Trajkov — were among those who had filed written inquiries regarding the incident. They lodged a formal notice of appeal on 26 February 2026 at 19:45 EST, within the prescribed period. The Panel has jurisdiction to hear and determine this matter.

IV. EVIDENCE CONSIDERED

The Panel considered the following evidence in reaching its determination:

1. Oral submissions provided by Alastair Scully, Stefan Trajkov, and John Hall on behalf of Competitor No. 191.

2. The written notice of appeal submitted by Competitor No. 191, dated 26 February 2026 (6 pages, with exhibits).
3. The written decision of the Stewards of the Meeting on the protest lodged by Competitor No. 367, dated 18 February 2026.
4. The written protest submitted by Competitor No. 367.
5. Exhibit-1: Timestamp record of the Clerk of the Course inquiry reply (19:09, 7 February 2026).
6. Exhibit-2: Timestamp record of the protest submission by Competitor No. 367 (14:14, 8 February 2026).
7. Exhibit-3: Correspondence between Competitor No. 191 and the Clerk of the Course dated 9 February 2026 regarding attendance at the protest hearing.
8. Exhibit-5: Video and photographic evidence depicting the end-of-control signboard position and the conduct of Competitor No. 367 at TC15B.
9. The 2026 ARA General Competition Regulations (GCR) and Rally Competition Rules (RCR), as published on the ARA official website.

V. GROUNDS OF APPEAL AND FINDINGS OF THE PANEL

The Appellant advances six grounds of appeal. The Panel addresses each in turn below.

Ground 1 — Violation of RCR Articles 4.12.3 and 4.12.7; Mandatory Penalty of Exclusion

The Appellant contends that the conduct of Competitor No. 367 constituted a violation of both RCR Article 4.12.3 (Assistance Forbidden in Parc Fermé) and RCR Article 4.12.7 (Pushing Vehicles in Parc Fermé), and that both provisions prescribe exclusion as the mandatory penalty, leaving no discretion to the Stewards to impose a lesser sanction.

The Appellant notes, and the Panel accepts, that the Stewards themselves found Competitor No. 367 to be in breach of both RCR Article 4.12.3 and RCR Article 4.12.7. The relevant passage from the Stewards' decision states:

“Car 367 was in technical breach of RCR 4.12.3 and RCR 4.12.7, in that a third person provided outside assistance in pushing the car while still within the control zone, prior to passing the end-of-control signboard.”

Having found breaches of both provisions, the Stewards nonetheless exercised discretion under RCR Article 6.4.6 and GCR Article 7.4 to reduce the penalty from exclusion to a three-minute time penalty. The Appellant submits that this was impermissible, as the mandatory sanction of exclusion prescribed in both RCR Articles 4.12.3 and 4.12.7 admits of no such discretion.

The Panel has carefully considered the relationship between RCR Articles 4.12.3 and 4.12.7. RCR Article 4.12.7 specifically and expressly governs the pushing of vehicles within control zones. As a matter of regulatory construction, a specific provision governing a defined type of conduct takes precedence over a general provision that might otherwise be read to encompass the same conduct. Were the act of pushing a vehicle to constitute “assistance” within the meaning of RCR Article 4.12.3 in every case, RCR Article 4.12.7 would be rendered entirely redundant as a separate provision. The Panel declines to adopt an interpretation producing that result.

The Panel therefore finds that the conduct of Competitor No. 367 is properly characterized as a violation of RCR Article 4.12.7, and that RCR Article 4.12.3 is not additionally engaged by the same conduct. The Panel acknowledges that this is a point on which reasonable minds may differ, and that the Appellant’s position has force; however, the Panel is persuaded that the more specific provision governs.

Notwithstanding this finding on the applicable provision, the Panel addresses the adequacy of the penalty separately under Ground 3 below.

Ground 1 is dismissed in part: the Panel finds a violation of RCR Article 4.12.7 only. The mandatory exclusion under RCR Article 4.12.3 is not applicable on the Panel’s construction of the regulations.

Ground 2 — Irrelevance of End-of-Control Sign Placement

The Appellant contends that the Stewards’ reliance upon the alleged misplacement of the end-of-control signboard as a mitigating factor in their proportionality assessment was misplaced and should have been given no weight.

The Appellant submits — and the Panel agrees — that end-of-control sign locations are not specified in routebooks and are placed at the discretion of the event organizer in response to local conditions. Competitors are obligated to observe and comply with official signage as physically deployed on the road. They have neither the means nor the authority to assess whether signage has been placed in its “intended” position. The Stewards’ framing that “competitors are entitled to rely on the official signage as displayed” is, if anything, supportive of the Appellant’s position: Competitor No. 367 was bound to treat the sign as positioned as the operative boundary of the control zone.

Furthermore, the Panel notes the specific factual submission made by the Appellant, supported by Exhibit-5: video evidence clearly shows the end-of-control signboard positioned approximately 40 meters beyond the red Stop Control sign and fully visible to the crew of Competitor No. 367. Critically, the behavior of the crew of Competitor No. 367 is itself demonstrative of their awareness of the sign’s location — they ceased pushing the vehicle and opened the boot only upon passing the end-of-control signboard. This conduct is entirely consistent with the crew of Competitor No. 367 having identified and acknowledged the sign and is inconsistent with any genuine claim of confusion as to its position.

The Panel accordingly finds that the positioning of the end-of-control signboard, and any discussion between the Stewards and the Clerk of the Course regarding the appropriateness of its placement, was irrelevant to the question of whether a violation occurred and should not have been treated as a mitigating factor in the proportionality assessment.

Ground 2 is upheld.

Ground 3 — Competitive Prejudice and Adequacy of the Penalty

The Appellant contends that the three-minute time penalty imposed by the Stewards failed to reflect the material competitive prejudice suffered by Competitor No. 191 as a consequence of the decision, and that a proportionate assessment must have regard to the interests of all affected competitors — not merely the interests of Competitor No. 367.

The Appellant has provided detailed submissions on the championship points consequences of the Stewards' decision, which the Panel accepts as accurate and which are summarized as follows:

- (a) ARA National Championship: The reduction of the penalty cost Competitor No. 191 a net three National Championship points (two position points plus one Power Stage point), representing a swing from sixteen points to thirteen points for Competitor No. 191, and a corresponding award of sixteen points to Competitor No. 367 from zero, producing an overall differential of nineteen championship points attributable to this decision.
- (b) RC2 Championship: The reduction of the penalty cost Competitor No. 191 a net eight RC2 Championship points, transforming what would have been a twenty-five point lead into an eight-point deficit — a total swing of thirty-three championship points.
- (c) Service Time: The Appellant further notes that the involvement of an unauthorized third party in pushing Competitor No. 367 provided a tangible practical advantage by potentially reducing the time taken to exit the control zone, thereby preserving additional minutes of the competitor's twenty-minute service allocation for vehicle repairs.

The Stewards' decision stated that the pushing "conferred no competitive advantage beyond restoring movement." The Panel does not accept this characterization. The presence of an unauthorized third party in a control zone to assist in the movement of a competing vehicle in Parc Fermé conditions is inherently capable of conferring competitive advantage, whether through the speed of egress from the control zone, the preservation of service time, or the associated championship points consequences. The Panel finds the Stewards' assessment of competitive neutrality to be unsupported on the facts.

The Panel concurs with the Appellant that a three-minute time penalty is inadequate to reflect the seriousness of the violation and its consequences. The Panel finds that a substantially higher time penalty is warranted and is within the Panel's authority to impose pursuant to GCR Article 10.7.

Ground 3 is upheld. The Panel modifies the penalty imposed upon Competitor No. 367.

Ground 4 — Conscious Deviation from Regulations; Good Faith Assessment

The Appellant contends that the Stewards' characterization of the violation as "not undertaken in bad faith" was inconsistent with the available evidence. The Appellant draws the Panel's attention to a statement made by Competitor No. 367 in the course of the protest proceedings, in which the

crew expressly stated that “their interpretation required them to proceed under their own power to the end-of-control signboard before accepting any assistance.”

The Panel finds that this statement is of considerable significance. It establishes that the crew of Competitor No. 367 had a clear and conscious understanding that they were required to reach the end-of-control signboard under their own power before accepting any assistance. Their decision to accept the pushing of the vehicle from a third party prior to passing that signboard therefore cannot be characterized as an inadvertent or unwitting breach. The crew had identified the applicable rule, understood its requirements, and nonetheless deviated from it.

The Panel finds that the Stewards’ conclusion that the violation was “not undertaken in bad faith” is difficult to reconcile with this evidence. At minimum, the conduct constituted a knowing deviation from a rule that the crew themselves had articulated. The Panel does not make a positive finding of deliberate bad faith, but it finds that the good faith characterization adopted by the Stewards was not warranted by the evidence and should not have been accorded mitigating weight in the penalty assessment.

Ground 4 is upheld.

Ground 5 — Procedural Irregularities in the Protest Proceedings (GCR Article 9.5)

The Appellant raises four distinct procedural breaches in connection with the protest lodged by Competitor No. 367 and the conduct of the protest proceedings:

- (a) GCR Article 9.5(a) / GCR Article 9.2(a) — Timeliness of the Protest. The Appellant submits that the written protest submitted by Competitor No. 367 bore a timestamp of 14:14 on 8 February 2026, being approximately 19 hours and 5 minutes after the posting of the Clerk of the Course inquiry reply at 19:09 on 7 February 2026, in clear excess of the time limit prescribed by GCR Article 9.2(a). The Appellant further notes that the written protest document itself was dated 11 February 2026, four days after the inquiry reply. The Panel acknowledges these facts. However, the Panel notes that oral and contemporaneous evidence indicates that the crew of Competitor No. 367 verbally declared an intention to protest to ARA Competition Director J.B. Niday, Clerk of the Course Bob Martin, and Steward Alan Perry within the prescribed timeframe. The Panel accepts that it is established common practice within ARA competition for a verbal declaration of intent to constitute a timely lodgment, with the written protest to follow. The Panel finds that the protest was, in substance, timely. That said, the Panel observes that this practice, whilst accepted as customary, is not formalized in the current regulations, and the inconsistency between the verbal declaration and the written submission timestamp creates precisely the kind of procedural ambiguity that the present case illustrates. The Panel addresses this under the Non-Binding Observations below.
- (b) GCR Article 9.5(b) — Failure to Post Notice of Protest Hearing. The Appellant submits that notice of the protest hearing was not posted within 30 minutes of the lodgment of the protest as required. The Panel finds that this represents a procedural shortcoming on the part of the Clerk of the Course and notes its concern. However, the Panel does

not find that this failure was of a character or degree sufficient to invalidate the protest, as it did not prevent the substantive determination of the matter by the Stewards.

- (c) GCR Article 9.5(d) — Failure to Invite Affected Parties to the Protest Hearing. The Appellant submits, and it is not in dispute, that neither the crew of Competitor No. 191 nor the crew of Competitor No. 126 — both of whom had filed written inquiries regarding the incident and had a direct interest in the outcome of the protest proceedings — were invited to attend the protest hearing. The Appellant further submits that the crew of Competitor No. 191 had been informed by the Clerk of the Course on 9 February 2026 that they should be available to attend the hearing via Microsoft Teams, creating a reasonable expectation that an invitation would follow. No such invitation was issued. The Panel regards this as a serious procedural failing. GCR Article 9.5(d) exists to protect the right of interested parties to be heard. The failure to extend that right to the crew of Competitor No. 191 — notwithstanding the Clerk’s own indication that they would be included — is not procedurally acceptable. The Panel is satisfied that the absence of the crew of Competitor No. 191 from the protest hearing did not materially alter the factual findings of the Stewards, as the primary facts were not in dispute. However, the Panel records its strong concern about this failing and addresses it further under the Non-Binding Observations below.
- (d) GCR Article 9.5(h) — Failure to Verify Proper Submission of the Protest. Given the Panel’s finding that the verbal declaration of intent to protest is accepted as satisfying the timeliness requirement under established practice, the Panel finds no independent basis upon which to invalidate the protest on this ground. However, the Panel notes that the absence of a clear and documented procedure for accepting verbal declarations, and the resulting discrepancy between the verbal declaration and the written submission, creates a structural weakness in the verification process that warrants regulatory attention.

The Panel also notes the Appellant’s submission that a request was made to ARA Competition Director J.B. Niday on 25 February 2026 at 13:18 EST for a video recording or written minutes of the protest hearing, and that this request was not acknowledged or responded to. The Panel considers this to be contrary to the principles of procedural transparency and the rights of affected competitors to understand the basis upon which decisions affecting their sporting interests were made. The Panel addresses this under the Non-Binding Observations below.

Ground 5 is upheld in part. The procedural irregularities identified, whilst serious, are not of a character sufficient to invalidate the protest. The Panel records its strong concern regarding the failure to invite Competitor No. 191 to the protest hearing and the non-response to the request for hearing records.

Ground 6 — Alleged Breach of RCR Article 4.1.4(a) (Illegal Service)

The Appellant notes that both the inquiry filed by Competitor No. 191 and the inquiry filed by Competitor No. 126 cited an alleged breach of RCR Article 4.1.4(a), governing illegal service, and that this allegation was not addressed in either the Clerk of the Course’s inquiry reply or in the Stewards’ protest decision.

The Panel has considered whether the conduct of Competitor No. 367 at TC15B additionally constitutes a breach of RCR Article 4.1.4(a). The Panel finds that it does not. The incident at issue — the pushing of Competitor No. 367 by an unauthorized third party within a Parc Fermé control zone — is properly and entirely governed by RCR Article 4.12.7, which specifically regulates the pushing of vehicles in such zones. The conduct in question does not, in the Panel’s view, constitute “service” within the meaning of RCR Article 4.1.4(a). Pushing a vehicle within a control zone pending its exit under Parc Fermé conditions is a distinct category of conduct from the provision of service, repair, or refueling assistance, which is the mischief that RCR Article 4.1.4(a) is designed to address.

The Panel accordingly finds no breach of RCR Article 4.1.4(a) and considers this matter closed.

Ground 6: No breach of RCR Article 4.1.4(a) is found. The matter is closed.

VI. DECISION OF THE PANEL

Having considered all grounds of appeal, the evidence placed before it, and the submissions of the parties, and acting pursuant to the authority conferred by GCR Article 10.7, the Panel decides as follows:

1. The Panel finds that Competitor No. 367 committed a violation of RCR Article 4.12.7 (Pushing Vehicles in Parc Fermé) within a control zone at the 2026 Sno*Drift Rally. On the Panel’s construction of the regulations, RCR Article 4.12.3 is not additionally engaged by the same conduct.
2. The Panel modifies the penalty imposed upon Competitor No. 367 from a three-minute time penalty to a five-minute time penalty. The Panel finds that a three-minute penalty is disproportionately lenient given the nature of the violation, the potential competitive advantage conferred upon Competitor No. 367 through the involvement of an unauthorized third party, the material championship points consequences for Competitor No. 191, and the Panel’s finding that the crew of Competitor No. 367 had a conscious understanding of the applicable requirements at the time of the breach. The official results of the 2026 Sno*Drift Rally shall be amended accordingly.
3. The appeal fee paid by the crew of Competitor No. 191 shall be returned in accordance with the applicable provisions of the ARA General Competition Regulations.
4. The Panel finds no breach of RCR Article 4.1.4(a) in connection with the conduct of Competitor No. 367 at TC15B. The conduct in question is properly governed by RCR Article 4.12.7 and does not constitute illegal service within the meaning of RCR Article 4.1.4(a). This matter is closed.

VII. NON-BINDING OBSERVATIONS OF THE PANEL

In addition to its binding decision above, the Panel offers the following observations to the ARA for consideration in the development of the regulatory and procedural framework. These observations are non-binding in character.

1. Clarification of “Assistance” under RCR Article 4.12.3. The Panel recommends that the ARA review and more precisely define the scope of the term “assistance” as it appears in RCR Article 4.12.3 so as to clearly delineate the boundary between that provision and the more specific provisions of RCR Article 4.12.7. Greater definitional clarity will reduce ambiguity in the application of mandatory versus discretionary penalties in future cases.
2. Formalization of the Verbal Protest Declaration Procedure. The Panel observes that the accepted practice of treating a verbal declaration of intent to protest as satisfying the timeliness requirement under GCR Article 9.2(a) is not currently codified in the regulations. This creates procedural uncertainty and the potential for inconsistent application across events. The Panel recommends that the ARA formalize this practice in writing, with clear requirements as to who may receive such a declaration, how it must be recorded, and within what timeframe the written protest must follow.
3. Rights of Affected Parties at Protest Hearings. The Panel records its strong concern regarding the failure to invite Competitor No. 191 to the protest hearing, notwithstanding the Clerk of the Course’s own communication indicating that their attendance was anticipated. The Panel recommends that the ARA issue guidance to Clerks of the Course and Stewards affirming that all parties with a direct sporting interest in the outcome of a protest — including those who have filed related inquiries — must be formally notified of the hearing date, time, and format, and afforded the opportunity to attend and present evidence.
4. Access to Protest Hearing Records. The Panel notes that a request by Competitor No. 191 for a video recording or written minutes of the protest hearing was submitted to the Competition Director and was not responded to. The Panel recommends that the ARA establish a clear policy governing the recording, retention, and accessibility of protest hearing records to affected parties upon request, consistent with the principles of procedural fairness and transparency.
5. Establishment of a Penalty Guidelines Framework. The Panel recommends that the ARA consider developing published guidelines or a structured rubric to assist Stewards in the calibration of time penalties exercised under discretionary authority pursuant to GCR Article 7.4. Such a framework should take into account relevant factors including the safety implications of the conduct, the degree of competitive advantage conferred, sportsmanship considerations, and the broader interests of competition integrity.
6. Training for Stewards on Protest Procedures. The Panel recommends that the ARA implement structured training for Stewards with respect to protest procedures, including timeliness requirements, notification obligations, verification of submissions, and the procedural rights of all affected parties.

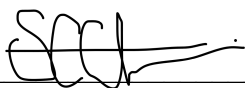
This Decision is issued by the Panel on the date first written above and shall be binding upon all parties in accordance with the ARA General Competition Regulations.



Doug Heredos, Presiding Panelist — ARA National Appeals Panel



Andrew Frick, Panelist



Scot Elkins, Panelist