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**Rugby League player suspended for six months for anti-doping rule violation**

The Sports Tribunal has suspended rugby league player Travell Ngatoko for six months for the presence of a metabolite of cannabis in a concentration higher than that permitted under WADA's Prohibited List in a sample taken from him in competition.

Mr Ngatoko plays rugby league at provincial level for the Taranaki Sharks. He tested positive for cannabis in a concentration of 189ng/ml in a sample he provided following a New Zealand Rugby League National Championship game on 17 September 2016. The limit for cannabis was increased by WADA in 2012 to 180ng/ml. This is the first charge that has come before the Tribunal for cannabis use since the level was increased.

Mr Ngatoko was provisionally suspended without opposition on 13 December 2016. He admitted the violation but asked to be heard as to the appropriate sanction. DFSNZ did not assert that Mr Ngatoko's cannabis use was taken to enhance his sporting performance and accepted that Mr Ngatoko could establish no significant fault on his part for the recreational use of cannabis. Accordingly, the Tribunal was asked to assess Mr Ngatoko's degree of fault in deciding on a period of ineligibility between a reprimand and two years.

The Tribunal decided that six months suspension was appropriate having regard to the relevant facts. The mitigating factors the Tribunal took into account were the low cannabis reading, the fact that Mr Ngatoko had smoked cannabis for his recreational use rather than for any performance enhancing reasons, the declaration that he had smoked cannabis on his doping control form and his co-operation after being advised of the positive test. Conversely, the Tribunal re-iterated that the onus under the Sports Anti-Doping Rules falls squarely on the athlete to avoid a breach regardless of whether he or she had attended specific anti-doping education. A reasonable athlete should have known that smoking cannabis risks breaching the sports rules. Experienced players such as Mr Ngatoko have a responsibility to act as role models for others within their sport including passing on the message that sport and cannabis do not mix.

Mr Ngatoko's suspension of six months from participating in sport is backdated to 3 November 2016 in light of his immediate acknowledgment of the breach and total cooperation throughout the proceedings. The period of suspension will end on 2 May 2017.

The decision in this case is available for download from the website of the Sports Tribunal ([www.sportstribunal.org.nz](http://www.sportstribunal.org.nz)). See *Drug Free Sport New Zealand v Travell Ngatoko* (ST 17/16). Copies can also be obtained directly from the Registrar, Sports Tribunal of New Zealand (telephone: 0800 55 66 80; e-mail: info@sportstribunal.org.nz).