

MEDIA RELEASE

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Sports Disputes Tribunal suspends rugby league player for 2 months for cannabis violation

The Sports Disputes Tribunal has suspended Canterbury Bulls player Blake Milner for 2 months for committing an anti-doping violation involving cannabis.

Mr. Milner tested positive for cannabis while competing in the final of the Bartercard Cup competition on 25 October 2006. Cannabis is a prohibited substance under the Prohibited List of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

The Tribunal accepted that Mr. Milner did not use cannabis with the intention of enhancing his sports performance. Mr. Milner testified that he had been dropped from the team and had not expected to be re-selected at the time of the cannabis use, which was in a social setting three weeks before the game.

Principles applied

The Tribunal has recently reviewed its policy regarding penalties in cases of cannabis and will shortly distribute this to national sports organisations. However, as this has not yet been made available to these organisations and their athletes, the Tribunal applied the same principle in this case that it has consistently applied in all its cannabis cases over the last two years. This was that a warning and reprimand will normally be the appropriate penalty if the cannabis was not used for performance enhancing purposes, represented no dangers to others and there were no other aggravating circumstances. If there were aggravating circumstances, then a suspension would be the likely penalty.

The Tribunal's conclusions

Applying these principles, the Tribunal concluded that there was an aggravating circumstance justifying a suspension. This was that Mr. Milner had signed a declaration acknowledging that he was aware of New Zealand Rugby League's anti-doping policy.

That Mr. Milner had been dropped from the team at the time of the cannabis use, and that he states he has since taken steps to stop the habit of smoking cannabis, was relevant to the length of suspension imposed.

A suspension of 2 months was appropriate in the circumstances. While the suspension would finish before the official start of the rugby league season next year, it meant that during these 2 months he was unable to participate in rugby league in any capacity, such as training with the Canterbury Bulls or playing pre-season games. Mr. Milner also plays Touch and the suspension applies to that sport as well.

The full decision in this case is available for download from the website of the Sports Disputes Tribunal (www.sportstribunal.org.nz). See *NZ Rugby League v Blake Milner* (SDT 20/06). Copies of the decision can also be obtained directly from Brent Ellis, Registrar, Sports Disputes Tribunal of New Zealand (telephone: 0800 55 66 80; e-mail: info@sportstribunal.org.nz).