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

The Sports Tribunal has suspended rugby league player Stacey Mikara 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 Mikara plays rugby league at provincial level for the Southland Rams. He tested positive for cannabis in a concentration of 269ng/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.

Mr Mikara was provisionally suspended without opposition on 18 January 2017. He admitted the violation but asked to be heard as to the appropriate sanction. DFSNZ did not assert that Mr Mikara's cannabis use was taken to enhance his sporting performance and accepted that Mr Mikara could establish no significant fault on his part for the presence of the drug during competition that resulted from the recreational use of cannabis. Accordingly, the Tribunal was asked to assess Mr Mikara's degree of fault in deciding on a period of ineligibility between a reprimand and two years.

In line with its recent decision in *Drug Free Sport New Zealand v Travell Ngatoko* (ST17/17, 3 February 2017) which involved very similar circumstances, the Tribunal decided that six months suspension was appropriate. The Tribunal exercised its discretion to backdate the start of the ineligibility period to the date of provisional suspension which means that Mr Mikara will be ineligible to participate in any competitive sport until 17 July 2017.

The Tribunal was encouraged by Mr Mikara's remarks that he would be "putting league ahead of marijuana" and is hopeful that this "will provide a good example for other athletes who may be of the view that sport can accommodate the recreational use of cannabis."