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Rugby League coach suspended for 12 months for playing a banned player

The Sports Tribunal has suspended Taranaki rugby league coach Nohorua Parata for assisting Travell Ngatoko to play a game of rugby league last year while Mr Ngatoko was serving a ban for a previous anti-doping violation.

In February 2017 Mr Ngatoko was suspended from all involvement in the sport for six months effective until 3 May 2017. On 18 March 2017 Mr Ngatoko played a pre-season game for the Coastal Cobras at Okato in Taranaki. Mr Parata was the coach of the Cobras team and, despite knowing Mr Ngatoko was still banned, he allowed him to play and entered Mr Ngatoko on the team card under another name.

Assisting, encouraging or helping a player participate in a sport while they are banned is in breach of Rule 2.9 under the Sports Anti-Doping Rules (SADR). Mr Parata admitted the violation but asked to be heard as to the appropriate sanction, which under the SADR 10.3.4 is a period of ineligibility of between two and four years, subject to the person's degree of fault.

The mandatory minimum period of two years was adopted as the starting point and then reduced to 12 months for timely admission. The period of suspension commenced on 28 February 2018. The Tribunal considered that Mr Parata was also entitled to be credited for the three months' period of provisional suspension that he had already served. Consequently, he is ineligible to participate in rugby league or any other sport until 30 November 2018.

The Tribunal noted that while Mr Parata may have only been trying to pull together a side to play a visiting team in a pre-season game, he was still in breach of the high obligation placed on all sports participants and officials not to in any way encourage or facilitate the breaching of a period of ineligibility by allowing a banned player to take part in competitive sport.