

MEDIA RELEASE

8 February 2010

Sports Tribunal Suspends Rugby League player for Cannabis Violation

The Sports Tribunal has suspended rugby league player, Joshua Poasa, from participating in sport because of an anti-doping violation relating to cannabis. Mr Poasa tested positive to cannabis after playing a representative match for Northern in a national rugby league tournament.

Mr Poasa admitted the violation at the hearing, stated he had made a mistake and expressed remorse. He, and a witness, gave evidence that after playing the last game of the season for his club, several players went to a house warming party where there were also players from other clubs and at the party he shared a cannabis joint with a group of older players. There was some evidence suggesting he may have taken the cannabis due to peer pressure. His evidence was that this use of cannabis was the source of the positive test at the later representative match. The Tribunal accepted that the cannabis was not used for performance enhancing purposes.

The Tribunal noted he was an 18 year old athlete who had made a mistake and there were some mitigating factors. He may have been let down by his environment. The evidence suggested that there may be a culture of cannabis smoking in rugby league in Northland and that there may have been peer pressure brought to bear on an 18 year old. He has been provisionally suspended by the Tribunal since 18 November 2010 and has not been able to play other sports that he would normally take part in during this time and this may also be a mitigating factor.

However, there was the aggravating factor that the week before the party Mr Poasa had attended a training camp during which he received formal anti-doping education, including information about cannabis being a prohibited substance. At the date of the party, when he smoked cannabis, he knew that cannabis was a prohibited substance.

The normal starting point in the Sports Tribunal for penalties for cannabis violations is now four months' suspension (provided the athlete can demonstrate how the cannabis got in their system and that it was not taken for performance enhancing reasons). Aggravating and mitigating factors are then considered in deciding the appropriate penalty. In this case, the Tribunal considered the mitigating factors equated with the aggravating factors. In the circumstances, a suspension from 18 November 2010 (the date of the provisional suspension) until 21 March 2011 was considered appropriate.

The decision in this case will be made available for download from the website of the Sports Tribunal (www.sporttribunal.org.nz). See *Drug Free Sport New Zealand v Joshua Poasa* (ST 21/10). Copies can also be obtained directly from Brent Ellis, Registrar, Sports Tribunal of New Zealand (telephone: 0800 55 66 80; e-mail: info@sporttribunal.org.nz).