

**MEDIA RELEASE 16 March 2018**

**Rugby League player suspended for further four months for playing while banned**

The Sports Tribunal has suspended rugby league player Travell Ngatoko for a further four months for playing in a rugby league game last year while serving a ban for a previous anti-doping violation. In February 2017 Mr Ngatoko was suspended from all involvement in the sport until 3 May 2017. On 18 March 2017 he took part in a pre-season game for the Coastal Cobras at Okato in Taranaki. Playing while banned is an offence under the Sports Anti-Doping Rules (SADR) 10.12.1.

Mr Ngatoko admitted the violation but asked to be heard as to the appropriate sanction, which under the SADR is a further suspension equal in length to the one imposed earlier. This may be adjusted based on the player's degree of fault and other circumstances of the case.

Mr Ngatoko said he knew he was banned at the time, but he was encouraged to play the match by his coach and he was assured by a Taranaki Rugby League Board member on the day that it would be ok to play. Mr Ngatoko said he had never been advised what he could and could not do while banned. He stated that had he known he could not play in a pre-season game he would not have done so.

The Tribunal said that athletes have "personal responsibilities to make themselves aware of their obligations in relation to the anti-drug regime, particularly where (as in Mr Ngatoko's case) he has already been found to have infringed the rules." The Tribunal said Mr Ngatoko should have taken steps and requested information to ensure he understood the effect of the ban. After taking account of the evidence presented at the hearing, the Tribunal decided that the mandatory period of ineligibility of six months prescribed by Rule 10.12.3 would be reduced to four months, operative from 28 February 2018. Mr Ngatoko was credited for his early admission of fault and co-operation.

Further, the Tribunal considered the fact the season comprises of two halves, the second of which are representative games with selection based on performance in the first half of the season. The Tribunal concluded it would be "disproportionate and unfair" if because of the timing of the proceedings Mr Ngatoko missed the opportunity to obtain representative selection.

Mr Ngatoko was given credit for having already served three months' provisional suspension from 29 November 2017 to 28 February 2018. The Tribunal concluded that the four months period of ineligibility would enable Mr Ngatoko to begin playing from the beginning of the season in April and ensure Mr Ngatoko would have the opportunity to be considered for selection for the representative matches in the second half of the season. Accordingly, Mr Ngatoko will remain ineligible from all competitive sport for a further period of one month until 31 March 2018.