

MEDIA RELEASE

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Sports Tribunal suspends New Zealand representative basketball player for cannabis violation

The Sports Tribunal has suspended Tall Black basketball player, Corey Webster, from participating in sport because of an anti-doping violation relating to cannabis.

Mr Webster tested positive to cannabis after playing for the Harbour Heat in a National Basketball League match. Upon receiving an urgent application for provisional suspension from Basketball New Zealand, the Tribunal provisionally suspended Mr Webster on 23 June 2010. Drug Free Sport New Zealand subsequently referred the alleged anti-doping violation to the Tribunal to decide. The Tribunal heard the matter and issued its decision on 21 July 2010.

Mr Webster admitted the violation. The Tribunal accepted evidence that the cannabis was not taken for sports performance enhancing purposes but used with a friend in a time of personal stress for Mr Webster.

The criterion to be considered under the rules is the athlete's degree of fault. The Tribunal acknowledged the agreement entered into, and the laudable steps taken, by Mr Webster and the New Zealand Breakers (who he plays for) since the violation. However, these steps do not have a direct bearing on the athlete's degree of fault. The fact that he is an international athlete did not assist his cause. Arguably there is a greater responsibility on an international athlete to comply with anti-doping requirements. The Tribunal took into account that Mr Webster was under stress during the time of use as this was relevant to fault but the Tribunal took the view that this is not a major consideration.

That Mr Webster knowingly used cannabis two days before an important match while having been educated in, and being well aware, of the anti-doping rules and Basketball New Zealand's commitment to them, means he must accept a reasonable degree of fault.

The Tribunal considered an appropriate sanction in the circumstances was two months' suspension and suspended Mr Webster for two months commencing from the date of his provisional suspension on 23 June 2010.

While not applying to the present case, the Tribunal noted it had recently reviewed its approach to sanctions for cannabis violations. The Tribunal will soon formally notify national sports organisations and their members that the starting point for cannabis violations will be increased to four months' suspension before taking into account aggravating and mitigating factors. This will apply to future cannabis cases occurring after the notification has taken place.

The decision in this case will be made available for download from the website of the Sports Tribunal (www.sportstribunal.org.nz). See *Drug Free Sport New Zealand v Corey Webster* (ST 09/10). Copies can also be obtained directly from Brent Ellis, Registrar, Sports Tribunal of New Zealand (telephone: 0800 55 66 80; e-mail: info@sportstribunal.org.nz).