

MEDIA RELEASE

7 December 2007

Sports Tribunal bans national league basketball player but ban will be suspended if player participates in a drug education programme

The Sports Tribunal has banned Hawks national league basketball player Kareem Johnson from competing in any competitions or events conducted by Basketball New Zealand between 15 February 2008 and 21 March 2008 (which covers the pre-season matches and the first three games of the national basketball league season).

However, the ban will be suspended if Mr. Johnson participates in conducting a suitable drug education programme designed to educate other athletes about doping in sports.

Mr. Johnson is a professional basketball player from the USA who has played for the Hawks for the last two seasons. He tested positive for cannabis while competing in the semi-final of the national league competition on 24 June 2007. Cannabis is a prohibited substance under the Prohibited List of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA).

Mr. Johnson admitted the violation and explained he had used cannabis a week before the match during a momentary lapse on a night out. The Tribunal accepted that Mr. Johnson did not use cannabis with the intention of enhancing his sports performance.

The Tribunal stated it had recently banned athletes for between one and two months for cannabis violations and noted that in this case such a ban would have harsh consequences for Mr. Johnson as the basketball season only lasts for three months and is shorter than many other sports. Such a ban would effectively ban him for the season and may affect whether he would be offered a future contract with the Hawks.

Mr Johnson offered to help other athletes under a drug education programme. While the Tribunal considered a ban was appropriate, it was prepared in the particular circumstances of this case to suspend the ban so long as Mr. Johnson participated in a suitable drug education programme for not less than one month. To obtain the suspension of the ban, Mr. Johnson will also be required to satisfy Drug Free Sport New Zealand of his suitability and commitment to such a programme and that the programme will be of benefit to Drug Free Sport New Zealand.

The decision in this case is available for download from the website of the Sports Tribunal (www.sporttribunal.org.nz). See *Basketball New Zealand v Kareem Johnson* (ST 16/07). Copies of the decision 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).