

NZ distance runner faces 8-year ban for doping

22 March 2023

Distance runner Zane Robertson has been banned from all sport for eight years following a positive test for Erythropoietin (EPO) and providing false documentation in his defence.

Mr Robertson, who trains in Kenya, was tested at the UK's Great Manchester Run in May 2022. His sample returned a positive result for EPO, which was later confirmed through B-sample testing. An additional charge of Tampering with Doping Control was added when documents submitted by Mr Robertson in his defence were found to be fraudulent.

"Doping denies clean athletes the chance to excel on a level playing field," said Drug Free Sport New Zealand Chief Executive Nick Paterson. "Mr Robertson's actions are not just deeply disappointing, but undermine the high levels of sporting integrity we see and expect from athletes who represent our country."

EPO is on the World Anti-Doping Agency's Prohibited List and is banned at all times. It artificially enhances performance in endurance sport by boosting red blood cells. Anti-doping sanctions for the substance are uncommon in New Zealand.

Mr Paterson went on to acknowledge the high-level of international cooperation that had taken place, "This case benefitted hugely from the sharing of key information and the invaluable support of the Athletics Integrity Unit and Anti-Doping Agency of Kenya. Our global partnerships allow us to collaborate across the anti-doping landscape to detect and deter doping and hold dopers to account, wherever they may be."

Athletics NZ Chief Executive Pete Pfitzinger expressed his disappointment and sadness, before reiterating his organisation's commitment to clean sport, "We strongly condemn all forms of doping in our sport and as a supporter of the World Anti-Doping Code and SADR, we reiterate our strict anti-doping stance."

"We provide anti-doping education via our national anti-doping organisation, DFSNZ, and we fully support the testing protocols in our sport to ensure a level playing field for all. As an organisation we take athlete welfare very seriously, so we understand the anxiety and stress that Zane will be experiencing. As soon as he received notification of the positive test for EPO last year, we offered and have provided extensive wellbeing support alongside High Performance Sport New Zealand and we will continue to provide support during this challenging time. We appreciate DFSNZ's consideration of the athlete's wellbeing throughout this process."

Mr Paterson took the opportunity to remind athletes that a ban from sport includes a ban from coaching, "Any athlete who accepts coaching from Mr Robertson during his ban is at risk of a ban themselves."

Drug Free Sport New Zealand encourages anyone with doping concerns to report them in confidence on the Drug Free Sport New Zealand website, by email at intel@drugfreesport.org.nz or by phone on 0800 DRUGFREE (378 437).

Mr Robertson's ban will be backdated from the date of his provisional suspension on 20 September 2022. His result from the Great Manchester Run will be disqualified.

Read the Sports Tribunal of New Zealand decision (PDF) [LINK]

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Notes on EPO

- Erythropoietin (EPO) is a non-specified substance listed under S2.1 Peptide Hormones, Growth Factors, Related Substances and Mimetics in the World Anti-Doping Agency's Prohibited List. It is banned in sport at all times.
- EPO is a prescription-only medication in New Zealand used medically to treat anaemia associated with chronic renal disease or failure and cancer therapy.
- An athlete intending to cheat may inject EPO to artificially boost red blood cell production, improving oxygen transportation and thus allowing muscles to work harder for longer.

About DFSNZ

- DFSNZ is New Zealand's national anti-doping organisation, committed to protecting clean athletes and promoting a culture of clean sport.
- DFSNZ supports athletes, coaches, whānau and support personnel by educating and advocating for athletes, detecting and deterring doping, and engaging sporting communities in the fight for clean sport.
- DFSNZ is a crown entity established under the New Zealand Sports and Drug Agency Act 1994 (replaced by the Sports Anti-Doping Act 2006). The act charges DFSNZ with the responsibility to implement and apply the World Anti-Doping Code in New Zealand. Funded by the New Zealand Government, DFSNZ is accountable to the Minister for Sport and Recreation and the New Zealand Government.

About Athletics New Zealand

- Athletics New Zealand is the national governing body for athletics in New Zealand. Athletics New Zealand's role is to enhance and promote all aspects of athletics activity from grass roots community participation to international high-performance competition.

<http://www.drugfreesport.org.nz>