



Issued Decision

Rugby Football Union and Luke Sharpley

Disciplinary Proceedings under Regulation 20 of the Rugby Football Union

This is an Issued Decision made by the Rugby Football Union ('RFU') pursuant to the Anti-Doping Rules ('ADR') of the RFU. It concerns Anti-Doping Rule Violations ('ADRVs') committed by Mr Luke Sharpley contrary to the ADR and records the applicable Consequences.

Capitalised terms used in this Decision shall have the meaning given to them in the ADR unless otherwise indicated.

Background and Facts

1. The RFU is the National Governing Body ('NGB') for rugby union in England. UK Anti-Doping ('UKAD') is the National Anti-Doping Organisation ('NADO') in the United Kingdom. Pursuant to RFU Regulation 20, the RFU has adopted, as its own ADR, the UK Anti-Doping Rules in relation to all anti-doping activities carried out by UKAD.
2. Mr Sharpley is a 25-year-old rugby union player for Oundle Rugby Club. At all material times in this matter, Mr Sharpley was subject to the jurisdiction of the RFU and bound to comply with the ADR. Pursuant to ADR Article 1.3.4(e), for the purposes of this case, UKAD has delegated Results Management responsibility to the RFU.
3. In September 2023, UKAD became aware (through media coverage) that Mr Sharpley had received criminal convictions for the offences of being concerned in

the supply of cocaine, a controlled drug of Class A, and two counts of possession with intent to supply cannabis (one relating to cannabis edibles), a controlled drug of Class B. These offences were committed on or before 27 March 2021.

4. Cocaine is listed under section S6A of the WADA 2021 Prohibited List as a Stimulant. It is a non-Specified Substance that is prohibited In-Competition only.
5. Cannabis is listed under section S8 of the WADA 2021 Prohibited List as a Cannabinoid. It is a Specified Substance that is prohibited In-Competition only.
6. Following the discovery of Mr Sharpley's criminal convictions, UKAD commenced an investigation and established the following facts:
 - i. Mr Sharpley was registered as a player with the RFU in March 2021.
 - ii. In relation to the criminal charges, on 27 March 2021, Mr Sharpley was approached by Northamptonshire Police ('Police') at a carpark on Occupation Road, Oundle, adjacent to Oundle Rugby Football Club. Police had intelligence to suggest that Mr Sharpley and his vehicle were involved in the supply of drugs. During the stop, Mr Sharpley was found in possession of approximately 64 grams of cannabis and 1,158 grams of cannabis edibles. The manner in which the cannabis was packaged was indicative of supply. The total value of the drugs seized was between £1,340 and £1,740.
 - iii. An examination of the content of the two mobile phones seized from Mr Sharpley indicated that he had been supplying cocaine in one-gram deals.
 - iv. On 6 March 2023, at Northampton Crown Court, Mr Sharpley entered guilty pleas to the following criminal offences:
 - a. Being concerned in the supply of a Class A drug (cocaine);
 - b. Possession with intent to supply a Class B drug (cannabis); and
 - c. Possession with intent to supply a Class B drug (cannabis edibles)

- v. Mr Sharpley advanced a basis of plea in respect of the offences. In summary, the basis of his guilty plea asserted that he only supplied cannabis to his friends, rather than the public at large. It also stated that he bought the cannabis from his own supplier and said that this arrangement would also sometimes involve him supplying cocaine.
 - vi. This basis of plea was not accepted by the prosecution. However, Recorder Maclynn KC concluded that even if Mr Sharpley were supplying drugs to friends rather than the public at large, he was still involved in dealing activity.
 - vii. Mr Sharpley was sentenced to 18-months imprisonment for the offence of being concerned in the supply of cocaine. He was sentenced to eight months imprisonment on each count of possession with intent to supply a Class B drug, with the sentences to be served concurrently. The overall sentence of 18-months was suspended for 24 months, and he was also ordered to complete 150 hours of unpaid work.
7. On 20 March 2024, Mr Sharpey, his mother and his legal representative attended an interview with UKAD in respect of these matters. In summary, Mr Sharpley did not dispute the details of the convictions in respect of cocaine and cannabis, but he did clarify he was never found with cocaine in his possession. He also denied ever supplying drugs to members of Oundle Rugby Football Club.
8. On 23 July 2024, UKAD sent Mr Sharpley a notification letter (the 'Notice Letter'). The Notice Letter confirmed the imposition of a Provisional Suspension and formally notified Mr Sharpley, in accordance with ADR Article 7.8.1, that he may have committed ADRVs pursuant to ADR Article 2.7 (Trafficking or Attempted Trafficking of Prohibited Substances), for both cocaine and cannabis.
9. On 31 July 2024, Mr Sharpley provided UKAD with a response to the Notice Letter in which he accepted committing the alleged ADRVs. In his response, Mr Sharpley also put forward several matters of mitigation for UKAD to consider, including, that:

- i. his conviction has no direct or indirect connection to his rugby playing or membership of a rugby club, and that
 - ii. the offence took place almost four years ago.
10. On 5 August 2024, UKAD provided the RFU with a Notification of Case to Answer providing the RFU with the authority to charge Mr Sharpley with ADRVs pursuant to ADR Article 2.7, in accordance with ADR Article 7.11 and RFU Regulation 20.13.4.
11. On 3 October 2024, the RFU proceeded to issue Mr Sharpley with a Charge Letter in accordance with ADR Article 7.11.2. The Charge Letter asserted the commission of ADRVs pursuant to ADR Article 2.7 (Trafficking or Attempted Trafficking of Prohibited Substances), for both cocaine, and cannabis.
12. On 23 October 2024, Mr Sharpley responded to the Charge Letter. He repeated his admissions to the ADRVs and again outlined the matters of mitigation mentioned in his response to the Notice Letter.

Consequences

13. ADR Article 2.7 provides that the following is an ADRV:

2.7 Trafficking or Attempted Trafficking in any Prohibited Substances or Prohibited Method.

14. 'Trafficking' is defined within the ADR as follows:

Selling, giving, transporting, sending, delivering or distributing (or possessing for and such purpose) a Prohibited Substance or Prohibited Method (either physically or by any electronic or other means) by an Athlete, Athlete Support Person or any other Person subject to the jurisdiction of an Anti-Doping Organisation to any third party; provided, however, that this definition shall not include (a) the actions of bona fide medical personnel involving a Prohibited Substance used for genuine and legal therapeutic purposes or other acceptable justification; or (b) actions involving Prohibited Substances which are not prohibited in Out-of-Competition Testing unless the circumstances as a whole demonstrate

that such Prohibited Substances were not intended for genuine and legal therapeutic purposes or are intended to enhance sport performance.

15. ADR Article 10.3.3 provides as follows:

10.3.3 *For an Anti-Doping Rule Violation under Article 2.7 or 2.8 that is the Athlete's or other Person's first anti-doping offence, the period of Ineligibility shall be a minimum of four years up to a lifetime Ineligibility, depending on the seriousness of the violation [...]*

16. Having considered the seriousness of Mr Sharpley's ADRV, the RFU considers the applicable period of Ineligibility to be four (4) years.

Application of ADR Article 10.8.1

17. ADR Article 10.8.1 provides:

10.8.1 One (1) year reduction for certain Anti-Doping Rule Violations based on early admission and acceptance of sanction:

Where UKAD sends an Athlete or other Person a Charge Letter for an Anti-Doping Rule Violation that carries an asserted period of Ineligibility of four (4) or more years (including any period of Ineligibility asserted under Article 10.4), if the Athlete or other Person admits the violation and accepts the asserted period of Ineligibility no later than twenty (20) days after receiving the Charge Letter, they shall receive a one (1) year reduction in the period of Ineligibility asserted by UKAD. Where the Athlete or other Person receives the one (1) year reduction in the asserted period of Ineligibility under this Article 10.8.1, no further reduction in the asserted period of Ineligibility shall be allowed under any other Article.

18. Mr Sharpley admitted the ADRVs and accepted the asserted period of Ineligibility for four (4) years on 23 October 2024 (having been sent the Charge Letter on 3 October 2024). Accordingly, ADR Article 10.8.1 applies and Mr Sharpley shall receive a one (1) year reduction to the period of Ineligibility of four (4) years. The period of Ineligibility to be imposed is therefore three (3) years.

Commencement of period of Ineligibility

19. ADR Article 10.13 requires that the period of Ineligibility starts on the date Ineligibility is accepted or otherwise imposed where there is no hearing.
20. However, ADR Article 10.13.2 allows for credit to be given against the total period of Ineligibility to be served where an Athlete has been provisionally suspended and has respected the terms of that Provisional Suspension.
21. Mr Sharpley has been subject to a Provisional Suspension since the date of the Notice, i.e. since 23 July 2024 and as far as the RFU is aware, he has respected the terms of that Provisional Suspension. Therefore, affording Mr Sharpley credit for the time he has spent provisionally suspended, his period of Ineligibility is deemed to have commenced on 23 July 2024 and will end at 23:59pm on 22 July 2027.

Status during Ineligibility

22. During the period of Ineligibility, in accordance with ADR Article 10.14.1, Mr Sharpley shall not be permitted to participate in any capacity (or assist any Athlete participating in any capacity) in a Competition, Event or other activity (other than authorised anti-doping education or rehabilitation programmes) organised, convened, authorised or recognised by:
 - a) The RFU or any body that is a member of, or affiliated to, or licensed by the RFU;
 - b) Any Signatory;
 - c) Any club or other body that is a member of, or affiliated to, or licensed by, a Signatory or a Signatory's member organisation;
 - d) Any professional league or any international or national-level Event organisation; or
 - e) Any elite or national-level sporting activity funded by a governmental agency.

23. Mr Sharpley may return to train with a team or to use the facilities of an RFU club or a Signatory's member organisation during the last two months of his period of Ineligibility (i.e., from 11.59pm on 22 May 2027) pursuant to ADR Article 10.14.4(b).

Summary

24. For the reasons given above, the RFU has issued this Decision in accordance with ADR Article 7.12.2, and records that:

- a) Mr Sharpley has committed ADRVs pursuant to ADR Article 2.7;
- b) A period of Ineligibility of four (4) years is imposed pursuant to ADR Article 10.3.3;
- c) In accordance with ADR Article 10.8.1, Mr Sharpley is entitled to a one (1) year reduction to the asserted period of Ineligibility of four (4) years. A period of Ineligibility of three (3) years is therefore imposed;
- d) Acknowledging Mr Sharpley's Provisional Suspension, the period of Ineligibility is deemed to have commenced on 23 July 2024 and will expire at 11:59pm on 22 July 2027; and
- e) Mr Sharpley's status during the period of Ineligibility shall be as detailed in ADR Article 10.14.

25. Mr Sharpley, UKAD, World Rugby, and WADA have a right to appeal against this Decision or any part of it in accordance with ADR Article 13.4.

26. A Decision will be publicly announced via the RFU & UKAD's website in accordance with ADR Article 8.5.3 and ADR Article 10.15.

14 January 2025