

OKAGBARE'S FURTHER BAN DISQUALIFIES NIGERIA'S 4X100 RELAY SQUAD'S QUALIFYING TIME FOR THE WORLD CHAMPIONSHIPS

27 JUNE 2022, MONACO: Head of the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU), Brett Clothier, is encouraging athletes and entourage to report suspected doping, noting the unscrupulous behaviour of dopers could have damning repercussions for their team-mates and country.

His comments come in the wake of already-banned Nigerian sprinter Blessing Okagbare being found to have committed additional anti-doping rule violations - specifically Evading Sample Collection, and Tampering or Attempted Tampering with the Doping Control process.

While Okagbare has had her current 10-year ban from athletics extended by one year (now 11 years in total), another significant consequence of this decision against her is that Nigeria has lost its potential qualification place for the women's 4x100-metre relay at next month's World Athletics Championships in the USA. This is because six days after Ms Okagbare evaded sample collection (June 13, 2021), she competed in the 4x100m relay event at the Nigeria Olympic Trials, with her relay squad qualifying for this year's World Championships. All individual and relay results involving Okagbare, from June 13, 2021, are now disqualified under the Rules.

"Over the years, we have repeatedly seen how one person's actions adversely affect team-mates who have trained hard and worked honestly for their results," noted Clothier.

"In a relay team, if one member violates the anti-doping rules, everyone bears the brunt of results being expunged. They all pay the price. In this instance, Nigeria has lost an important qualification spot. Those are the rules and we will not compromise on integrity."

On 14 February, 2022, the Disciplinary Tribunal banned Okagbare for 10 years; consecutive five-year bans for the presence and use of multiple prohibited substances, and for her refusal to co-operate with the AIU's investigation into her case. The prohibited substances were human Growth Hormone (hGH) and recombinant erythropoietin (EPO). This decision stemmed from charges which the AIU brought against Ms Okagbare on 07 October, 2021. Details can be read [here](#).

On 10 June, 2022, the AIU further charged Ms Okagbare with Evading Sample Collection, and Tampering or Attempted Tampering with the Doping Control process. These charges related to the circumstances of the athlete's Whereabouts Failure on 13 June, 2021, and were pursued based on information in a criminal charge, brought against US-based "naturopathic" therapist Eric Lira, on 12 January, 2022, by the United States Department of Justice under the Rodchenkov Act. Mr Lira is alleged to have supplied performance-enhancing drugs to athletes before the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games (delayed until summer 2021 because of the Covid-19 pandemic).

The complaint against Mr Lira provides specific information of his interaction with a person named 'Athlete 1', including a written exchange on or around 13 June, 2021, demonstrating that 'Athlete 1' knowingly and deliberately avoided testing by a Doping

Control Officer in Jacksonville, Florida. There was also other pertinent information about 'Athlete 1' in the criminal complaint which led the AIU Disciplinary Tribunal's sole arbitrator to be "comfortably satisfied" that 'Athlete 1' is Blessing Okagbare, including text conversations imaged from Ms Okagbare's mobile phone by the Federal Bureau of Investigation (FBI).

Ms Okagbare failed to respond to the charges by the extended deadline (21 June, 2022) and is therefore deemed to have admitted the anti-doping rule violations (under Rule 2.3 and Rule 2.5 of the World Athletics Anti-Doping Rules) and to have accepted the consequences.

The reasoned decision can be accessed [here](#).

About the Athletics Integrity Unit

The Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) is the independent body created by the World Athletics that manages all integrity issues - both doping and non-doping - for the sport of athletics. The remit of the AIU includes anti-doping, the pursuit of individuals engaged in age or competition results manipulation, investigating fraudulent behaviour with regards to transfers of allegiance, and detecting other misconduct including bribery and breaches of betting rules. It is the AIU's role to drive cheats out of our sport, and to do everything within its power to support honest athletes around the world who dedicate their lives to reaching their sporting goals through dedication and hard work.

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