

Ethiopian marathon runner Mesfin banned for three years for blood doping

4 SEPTEMBER 2026, MONACO: Rising marathon talent Tiruye Mesfin has been banned for three years by the Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) after admitting to an Anti-Doping Rule Violation (ADRV) arising from abnormalities detected in her Athlete Biological Passport (ABP).

The 23-year-old Ethiopian, previously ranked in the top 20 of the women's marathon world rankings, was found to have breached Rule 2.2 ADR "Use or Attempted Use by an Athlete of a Prohibited Substance or a Prohibited Method", after abnormal values in her passport were detected. An Expert Panel unanimously concluded that it was highly likely that a Prohibited Substance or Method had been used and highly unlikely to be the result of any other cause.

Based on the Expert Panel's conclusion that Mesfin's explanations failed to explain the haematological abnormalities, the AIU considered that there was "clear evidence" the athlete had committed an ADRV. She faced a four-year ban but received a one-year reduction for her early admission and acceptance of the sanction.

"There has been significant progress in the fight against doping in the marathon in the last six to seven years, but there is still a long way to go. There are some top-ranking athletes who engage in doping that is not easily detectable, and this case highlights the need to use sophisticated methods and a high volume of tests to catch them. In this case, thanks to the Athlete Biological Passport, seventeen samples collected over almost three years enabled independent experts to identify a clear pattern that could not be explained by normal physiology or a medical condition," said Head of the AIU, Brett Clothier.

Mesfin's case was established through the AIU's ABP programme, which monitors selected biological markers over time to identify the effects of doping. Seventeen valid blood samples were collected from Mesfin between 2 December 2022 and 28 November 2025 and analysed by World Anti-Doping Agency-accredited laboratories to create her longitudinal profile of haematological values.

The Expert Panel identified a pattern indicative of blood doping in four samples collected between the end of June and the end of August 2025 - just prior to the Sydney Marathon in which Mesfin was entered but ultimately did not compete. The pattern included an increased haemoglobin concentration, in combination with the lowest value for reticulocytes (new red blood cells) in the athlete's 17 samples - described by the Expert Panel as a "stimulation/suppression" pattern.

The Expert Panel concluded that this pattern was highly likely to have been caused by an artificial increase in red blood cell mass resulting from the use and then discontinuation of an erythropoiesis stimulating agent (such as erythropoietin) or a recent blood transfusion.

The AIU notified Mesfin of the Adverse Passport Finding and opinion of the Expert Panel on 30 April 2026 and conducted a remote interview in the presence of her appointed legal representative on the same date. Following interview, Mesfin was invited to provide a full written explanation for the abnormalities along with any supporting documents.

After considering Mesfin's explanation, the Expert Panel reaffirmed their unanimous opinion that the "likelihood that the Passport is the result of the Use of a Prohibited Substance or Prohibited Method outweighed the likelihood that the Passport is the result of a normal physiological or pathological condition."

The AIU formally charged Mesfin with an ADRV on 10 August 2026 and imposed an immediate Provisional Suspension. The athlete responded with a signed Admission of ADRV and Acceptance of Consequences Form on 24 August 2026. In addition to her three-year ban, Mesfin's results are disqualified on and since 25 June 2025 - the date the Expert Panel determined as corresponding to the first evidence of her ADRV.

Mesfin, whose ban runs from 10 August 2026 until 9 August 2029, recorded her marathon personal best of two hours, 18:35 minutes when finishing third at the 2024 Valencia Marathon - a World Athletics Platinum Label road race. Earlier this year she finished fifth in the Seoul Marathon and also recorded third place finishes at last year's Shanghai Marathon and Meishan Renshou Half Marathon - all also Platinum Label road races. She was also second at the 2023 Hamburg Marathon and ninth at the 2024 Boston Marathon.

ABOUT THE ROAD RUNNING INTEGRITY PROGRAMME

The Athletics Integrity Unit runs an extensive anti-doping programme covering up to 300 professional road runners; 150 men and 150 women. The programme's activities of testing, intelligence, investigation, prosecution and education are funded entirely through contributions from World Athletics, Abbott World Marathon Majors, World Athletics Label Road Races, Athletes and their Athlete Representatives, and running shoe companies: adidas, ASICS, Nike and On.

ABOUT THE ATHLETICS INTEGRITY UNIT

The Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) is the independent body created by 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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