

## ALBANIAN ATHLETICS FEDERATION PRESIDENT AND GENERAL SECRETARY BANNED FOR COMPETITION MANIPULATION

**26 APRIL 2023, MONACO:** “These sanctions are very important for the future of the sport - athletics - and are a warning for those who govern athletics globally. They carry a weighty significance, signalling the Athletics Integrity Unit is serious about prosecuting federation officials who breach integrity standards.”

This statement by Athletics Integrity Unit (AIU) Chair David Howman, following the announcement of international athletics bans for the President (Gjergj Ruli; banned five years) and General Secretary (Nikolin Dionisi; banned four years) of the Albanian Athletics Federation (AAF), has underlined the AIU’s commitment to pursuing competition manipulation and other non-doping allegations against athletics personnel.

“Federation officials are supposed to uphold fair play and clean sport, and we will hold them accountable for their actions, should evidence show they are doing otherwise,” added Howman.

The decisions against the Albanians confirm violations of the World Athletics’ Integrity Code of Conduct (the Code), between May-July 2021, relating to the submission to World Athletics of a competition result for Albanian long jumper, Izmir Smajlaj, at the Dita E Kërcimeve Competition held on 8 May 2021 in Tirana, Albania. Smajlaj, placed first in the Competition with a national record and personal best distance of 8.16 metres and this result contributed to him securing a universality place to participate in the Tokyo 2020 Olympic Games (held in summer 2021). Ruli was Smajlaj’s coach and travelled to Tokyo with him.

The AIU had alleged that Ruli, Dionisi and Smajlaj conspired together and submitted falsified wind measurement readings relating to the Competition to World Athletics, and when requested for proof of wind measurement equipment being used at the competition, also submitted a falsified photograph to the AIU. The falsified photo showed Smajlaj standing at the long jump track in front of wind measuring equipment but Ruli, Dionisi and Smajlaj all ultimately admitted there was in fact no wind measuring equipment at the relevant Competition and that this photo was taken on a different day. They could not explain the basis for the wind measurement readings that were sent to World Athletics.

The three individuals were charged with breaches of the following Integrity Standards in the Code: Honesty (Rule 3.3.1), Maintain Integrity of Competition

(Rule 3.3.4), Failure to Report (Rule 3.3.15); as well as Complicity under Rule 4.4 of the Code. Dionisi admitted all charges and accepted a lesser period of ineligibility of four years from 9 December 2022 to 8 December 2026. However, Ruli contested the charges before the Disciplinary Tribunal which ruled it was “comfortably satisfied” that the AAF President was knowingly involved in the falsification of the wind measurement readings and knowingly involved in the submission of a falsified photograph to the AIU and that, as a result, he had acted in violation of the Code. Ruli’s sanction is a period of ineligibility of five years from 6 April 2023 to 5 April 2028.

The Tribunal found that the charges against the athlete, Smajlaj, were not established as it was not comfortably satisfied that he was knowingly involved in the conspiracy to submit the false information. His provisional suspension has therefore been lifted.

Details here: <https://bit.ly/Ruli-and-Smajlaj-Decision>

Details here: <https://bit.ly/dionisi-decision>

## 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.

### Athletics Integrity Unit

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