

Cyclist 'Suspends Himself' After Muddle With SAIDS

Brandon Stewart has suspended himself after a muddle for 11 months with the South African Institute of Drug-Free Sport (SAIDS), according to an announcement by sponsors of the FedGroup Itec Pro Mountain Biking team.

[Cycling South Africa](#) informed the former Absa Cape Epic African jersey leader and SA Cross Country champion in October that he had tested positive for a banned substance after a routine drug test four months earlier. Stewart was told he faced the possibility of a ban from cycling. On the other hand, Stewart's sponsors said the positive drug test was due to the cyclist taking a medically necessary testosterone treatment and Stewart informed SAIDS while applying for a [therapeutic use exemption](#).

Brandon Stewart, one of South Africa's top marathon mountain biking talents and festival regulars, was a part of Team FedGroup-Itec after Team 360Life withdrew their sponsorship of the team after [David George](#) tested positive for Erythropoietin (EPO). The marathon mountain biker received a ban of two years from the South African Institute for Drug-Free Sport and the cyclist was being targeted after his biological passport showed suspicious activity.

FedGroup chief financial officer Scott Field remarked while we fully support initiatives aimed at ensuring that South African sport is drug-free, Stewart's unpleasant experience has resulted in his voluntarily suspending himself and could hold serious negative implications for sport in general. FedGroup remarked the cyclist had consultations with a doctor a year ago after bouts of depression and mood swings and he was told that his levels of testosterone were on the lower side. After this, Brandon Stewart had consultation with the SAIDS exemption liaison official, Anique Coetzee, who advised to go for a testosterone treatment after which the cyclist applied online for an exemption to use the medication. Coetzee told Stewart on phone that he could undergo the treatment and continue to race while waiting for a response to the application, which was confirmed in writing.

In a statement, FedGroup said Stewart received an e-mail two months after making his application telling him that his application had been declined and the e-mail recommended that Stewart have further tests done. The cyclist maintains he stopped taking the testosterone treatment, Nebido, in April. Three months after the first reports by the endocrinologist had been submitted,, Stewart was informed in July that his second exemption application had also been denied. The statement read that two days prior to receipt of this July e-mail, one of the SAIDS's routine drug tests had been done on Stewart and he had been off the Nebido treatment for three months and in October, four months after the drug test in July, Stewart was informed by Cycling SA that he had tested positive for a banned substance. The cyclist appealed against the decision and the FedGroup statement said all of the major sponsors of the team are comfortable that everything Brandon did was above board and Stewart has kept us informed and retains our confidence and trust.

Khalid Galant, the chief executive of SAIDS, remarked a preliminary investigation was under way and a decision on whether or not to charge Stewart with doping would be made the by end of this month.