

Finnish Cross-Country Skier Tests Positive For EPO

Cross-country skier Tero Similä has tested positive for the banned blood booster EPO, according to an announcement by the Finnish Ski Association.

Mika Kulmala, executive director of the Finnish Ski Association, said both "A" and "B" blood samples provided by the 34-year-old were positive. The skier remarked he has no comment on the doping charges and he will retire from skiing. Similä has not represented the Nordic country this year and was not a member of the Finnish team at the Sochi Olympics. His best international placing was 13th in Nordic combined at a World Cup race in 2005. Similä has represented Finland in the Winter Olympics in Turin and in four world championship competitions.

The four-time Finnish cross country skiing champion tested positive during a Posio test that was administered on March 9 in a non-competition setting and the sample was tested first in Finland by the Finnish Anti-Doping Agency and was later checked by overseas experts.

[Doping in skiing](#) has remained a controversial issue in Finland. Last year, a troika of former athletes received suspended six-month prison sentences for perjury relating to their use of performance enhancing substances. It was found by the Helsinki District Court that Janne Immonen, Jari Isometsä, and Harri Kirvesniemi lied about using prohibited substances and the manipulation of hemoglobin levels besides claiming innocence on [doping in Finnish skiing](#). Trial duration of the three skiers ends in May 2015 and they were asked to reimburse the state for court costs amounting to 330 euros.

The former head coach of the Finnish National Ski Team, Kari-Pekka Kyrö, had remarked in the perjury trial of ex-skiers Janne Immonen, Harri Kirvesniemi and Jari Isometsä that he ran into doping in the team as early as in 1993. The ex-coach disclosed that he first came into contact with EPO (glycoprotein hormone [erythropoietin](#)) and growth hormones in the national team in November 1993 and added he as the then B-team coach noticed major changes in the hemoglobin values of skiers during squad training in Italy. Kyrö added he believes that doping was already a cause of concern in Finnish skiing before he took over the team in 1998. The former coach however denied systematically offering EPO hormone to athletes and pointed to former national team coach Pekka Vähäsöyrinki as the principal influence behind the systematic use of doping.

Former top cross-country skier Janne Immonen admitted to making use of EPO during this athletic career and lying about the matter in the court.

In the past, Cross-country skier and Olympic gold medalist Mika Myllylä had testified in court about his use of EPO hormone between the years of 1993 and 1998. This disclosure was made during the case during the late 1990s when STT (Finnish News Agency) and an STT reporter were taken to court and found guilty of libel after a story using unnamed sources was written about doping within the Finnish Ski Association. Myllylä revealed that he told Pekka

Vähäsöyrinki and Antti Leppävuori, two defendants in the case, about his use of the performance enhancing drug EPO.