

Horse Trainers Plead Not Guilty To Cobalt Doping Charges

Horse trainers Lee and Shannon Hope have pleaded not guilty to doping their horses with the banned supplement cobalt.

The father-son duo recently faced a Racing Appeals and Disciplinary Board Hearing. This was after three of their horses returned cobalt readings over the legal limit. The board heard three of the Hopes' horses returned readings of 510 micrograms, 440 micrograms, and 290 micrograms in June and July last year while the threshold for the performance-enhancing drug is 200 micrograms per liter of urine.

[Racing Victoria](#), in April last year, introduced a cobalt threshold of 200 micrograms per liter of urine. Chief steward Terry Bailey described the level at that time as generous.

Robert Stitt QC, the barrister for Lee and Shannon Hope, told the hearing that horses of his clients had a regular feed and a veterinarian oversees [medical supplement](#) regime. In reply, Jeff Gleeson QC, acting for Racing Victoria's stewards, remarked the chances of those levels of cobalt occurring with a "regular diet" were more than one in a million according to experts. Gleeson added the only possibility could be that someone had administered the horses with a high level of cobalt the day before a race or a low level on the day. Stitt, in defense of his clients, said the question is how and when did cobalt become present in the three horses and added the stewards searched their stables and home garage and found no evidence at all of illegal cobalt. Stitt also added that his clients were different to the other trainers of the 'Cobalt Five', who he said had admitted to administering cobalt to their horses.

In humans, cobalt has same effects as the endurance drug [Erythropoietin](#) and is toxic at high dosages.

The hearing was the first for the so-called Cobalt Five, a group of five trainers, including Peter Moody, Danny O'Brien and Mark Kavanagh, who are charged with doping. Moody will face hearings in December and O'Brien and Kavanagh will front the board in November. The trio is allowed to participate in major meetings in the lead up but their winnings, if any, would be frozen until the hearing is held.

Last month New South Wales trainer Sam Kavanagh received a disqualification for nine years and three months after he was found guilty of 23 cobalt-related offences. Kavanagh was found guilty at the end of the long-running inquiry into cobalt found in Midsummer Sun after he won the Gosford Cup in January. The trainer was found guilty of 23 offences relating to cobalt and race-day drenches administered to different horses in his stable. Initially, he received a ban of 18 years and three months by Racing NSW but later his penalty was reduced by nine years.

Dr Tom Brennan, the vet of Sam Kavanagh, was also charged and found guilty of 12 charges, including lying to the original inquiry. Brennan was named by Kavanagh as the principal of the Flemington Equine Clinic that was the source of a substance called Vitamin Complex. This substance was found to contain 175 times the amount of cobalt usually found in a supplement.