

## Changing attitudes towards Marijuana



The NCAA has implemented many changes over the years regarding the use of THC.

### LOUIS WALKER

#### SPECIAL TO THE HERALD

Drug testing takes place across the sporting world from those competing on the grandest stages of international competition to the athletes of tomorrow that compete in college gyms.

While some substances take the spotlight for their ability to enhance performance, the rules around marijuana have been less straightforward. Every league has their own policy that has seen numerous changes from the 1980's to the present day.

The safe barometer for testing on an international level has always been the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). It was founded in 1999 after the International Olympic Committee had the first world conference on doping in Lausanne, Switzerland.

The conference itself only took place after the cycling world was shocked with the doping scandal at the 1998 Tour De France.

But why is this relevant to marijuana? In 2004 marijuana was placed on the World Anti-Doping code's list of banned substances.

It was this policy that was

brought into the spotlight in 2021 when U.S. sprinter Sha'Carri Richardson was banned from competing at the Tokyo Summer Olympics after her positive test.

The conviction did come from the United States Anti-Doping Agency but they do operate in compliance with international athletics rules.

Richardson's positive test removed her time of 10.86 that was the fastest of the U.S. qualifiers in the 100m. It was the completion of a counseling program that reduced her punishment to a 30 day ban but this still meant she missed her event.

However, the decision received vast criticism, especially with some states having already legalized marijuana to some degree.

Along with stakeholder criticism, WADA is now conducting a scientific review on marijuana which could impact the status of the drug that does remain on the list of prohibited substances.

Although their policy drew criticism, WADA were ahead of other leagues with their policy. In 2013 the level of THC from a blood test had to be at 150 ng/mL to cause a positive test.

It took until the off season

in 2019 for Major League Baseball to remove marijuana from its banned substances list but players can still be disciplined for possession or while performing their job.

The National Football League took until 2020 to raise their testing threshold to match WADA at 150 ng/mL, with theirs being stricter at 35 ng/mL. However, the NFL took a different approach to punishments with suspensions being replaced with fines up to three week's pay.

The association that was the most behind in 2013 was the NCAA who reduced their positive test threshold from 15 to 5ng/mL, which was the first of four changes so far to the test level. In 2017 it was raised back to the original 15, 2019 it was raised to 35 before in 2022 the threshold reached 150 ng/mL, just nine years after WADA originally approved this level.

Testing in the NCAA had objections from the start. Drug testing was originally enacted in the fall of 1986 and produced a lawsuit in 1987 when a Stanford University Diver called the testing an obtrusive and unconstitutional invasion of privacy.

The NCAA has also seen

some of the harshest penalties as originally a single positive test could lose an athlete a season of eligibility, which with such a limited time frame at the collegiate level this could be a big blow to those wanting a career in the majors.

The changes in 2022 to the NCAA policy have shifted away from strict punishments to education of student athletes. A positive test will require athletes to enroll in a management program and it's only if this is ignored can a second or third result mean a suspension from the regular season. These latest rules give athletes a chance instead of removing time from their career after a single positive test, which would also be a lot easier to obtain at the lower thresholds.

Although drug testing will continue it's clear the approach to marijuana has eased, with some athletes even turning towards CBD to aid in managing their active lifestyles. If historic policies have shown anything it's that more research in the sporting field is required and the rules towards marijuana will continually change for years to come.

### Athletes who have been penalized:



PHOTO COURTESY OF ESQUIRE

**Michael Phelps:** In February 2009 a photo of Phelps with a bong went viral. It resulted in a three-month suspension by USA Swimming and the loss of his sponsorship with Kellogg's. The three-month suspension did not stop him competing at the 2009 World Championships as it took place five months before.



PHOTO COURTESY OF VANITY FAIR

**Sha'Carri Richardson:** On June 20 Richardson ran a 10.86 in the women's 100m, which was the fastest at the U.S. qualifiers. Her roster spot for the Tokyo Olympics was all but confirmed until July 1 when the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency announced that Richardson tested positive for marijuana. Using the substance before the Olympic trials meant that Richardson's time was invalidated, and she did not qualify for the Tokyo Olympics and was subject to a 30-day suspension.

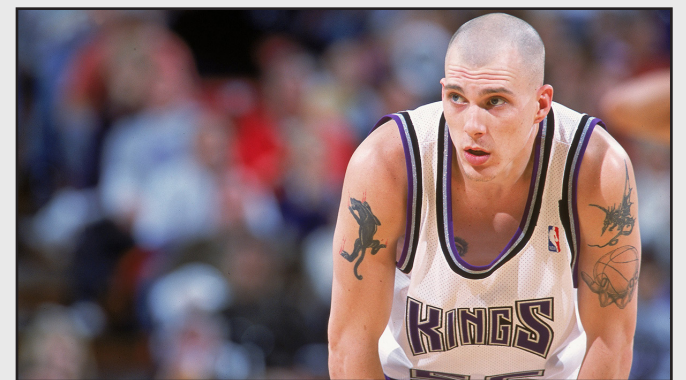


PHOTO COURTESY OF FOX NEWS

**Jason Williams:** The former Miami Heat point guard first got in trouble for marijuana at college when he was kicked off the team at the University of Florida as a sophomore in 1998. It ended his NCAA career but his skills still meant he was drafted to the Sacramento Kings in 2000, where he suffered another suspension in his rookie year for cannabis.



PHOTO COURTESY OF THE BLACK WALL STREET TIMES

**Kareem Abdul-Jabbar:** The six-time NBA champion has been arrested twice for drug related charges, with the first in Toronto for having six grams of marijuana. Now, in California he has a prescription for medical marijuana to aid against migraines.

## Famous Athletes endorsing CBD products:



PHOTOS 1, 4, 6, 7 & 8 COURTESY OF WIKIPEDIA; PHOTO 2 COURTESY OF THE SUN; PHOTO 5 COURTESY OF SPORTS ILLUSTRATED

**Megan Rapinoe:** In 2021 Rapinoe signed on as an athlete ambassador to the company her sister, Rachael Rapinoe, helped co-found, Mendi CBD. The mission of Mendi is to offer a natural solution to recovery in pro sports. This could include managing pain, stress and sleep.

**Nick & Nate Diaz:** In 2018 the UFC fighters and brothers founded Game Up Nutrition. The CBD company offers vegan friendly products that are sustainably produced across the USA. This includes CBD Oil and pre-rolls.

**Kevin Durant:** In August 2021, Durant announced a sponsorship deal with Weedmaps, which guides users to dispensaries. Durant had previously been an advocate for the benefits of marijuana and wants to use this platform to address the stigmas around cannabis in the sports world.

**Klay Thompson, Alex Morgan, Travis Pastrana & Paul Rodriguez:** This group of athletes came together to found their own CBD brand, Just Live. Their product line includes a roll on, capsules, soft gels and vitamin C gummies, with the aim being to give people with an active lifestyle an alternative to traditional pharmaceutical painkillers.