

Pro athletes rejoice: CBD no longer banned by the World Anti-Doping Agency

By: Amanda Siebert

With the news that the World Anti-Doping Agency has removed a major compound in cannabis from its list of prohibited substances, we wonder if we'll start seeing more professional athletes using vape pens at post-game press conferences.

When Nate Diaz boldly used a vaporizer on national television last year following his dramatic rematch loss to Conor McGregor, he put himself at risk of being targeted by USADA, the American branch of the anti-doping agency.

It didn't matter that the compound he was ingesting wasn't making him high—he even told reporters it was helping with his post-fight inflammation.

Lucky for Diaz, WADA announced late last month that as of January 2018, cannabidiol (CBD) would no longer be considered a banned substance.

Unlike the plant's better-known compound, tetrahydrocannabinol (THC), CBD isn't psychoactive; a factor that makes it attractive to athletes who might already be weary of experiencing the side effects that come with other varieties of pain medication.

All other compounds in cannabis including THC remain prohibited, and in its new list, WADA warns athletes that CBD extracted from cannabis plants "may contain varying concentrations of THC", a factor that could result in unknowingly failing a drug test.

(For a substance to be included on WADA's list, two of the following three statements must be true: It has the potential to enhance sport performance, it represents an actual or potential health risk to athletes, or, it violates the spirit of sport.)

While the Schedule 1 classification of cannabis in the United States has made it difficult for researchers to produce double blind placebo-controlled studies on the effects of CBD on the body, preclinical trials suggest that CBD is not only a good pain reliever, but also an effective anti-inflammatory, antioxidant, neuroprotectant, and anxiolytic.

Anecdotal evidence supporting the idea that CBD compliments athletic recovery has become increasingly easy to find, as more and more athletes admit to using it and other compounds in cannabis—but what we find most exciting about the lifting of the ban on this powerful cannabinoid is that it will allow athletes prone to concussions and repeated head traumas an opportunity to try a new method of treatment.

While some professional leagues aren't governed by WADA, the agency's choice to allow it could also have big implications at other organizations.

Former NFL players like Jake Plummer, Eben Britton, and Jim McMahon are just a few that have spoken publicly about their use of CBD—not just as an alternative for pain relief, but also to protect against degenerative brain diseases like chronic traumatic encephalopathy, or CTE. (Animal trials have shown that CBD is neuroprotective, meaning that it has the ability to protect against cell death while increasing the viability of existing cells.)

The disease is most prominent in individuals with history of repetitive brain trauma, and causes irritability, aggression, motor impairment, headaches, and early onset dementia