

BEK KEAT - DRUG CHEAT?

I THINK NOT...

In this month's extended Soapbox feature, Rod Cedaro speaks exclusively to Rebekah Keat.

This issue, you won't find the *Soapbox* in its usual spot, because one page simply wasn't enough to break this sort of story. Towards the end of 2006, TMSM secured an exclusive with Queensland Rebekah Keat. Returning to triathlon this month following a two year ban for testing positive to nandrolone, Keat spoke to Rod about the personal hell she's been through the past 24 months, and the evidence that proves she is not a doped-up drug cheat, as court decisions would have you believe.

It was November 28, 2004 and rookie Ironman competitor Bek Keat rocketed to international multi-sport prominence with a 9:03 first up performance to set a course record at the Busselton Ironman in Western Australia.

Her fame soon turned to infamy when on December 22 of the same year, Keat was contacted by the ASADA (Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority, formerly ASDA) and told that her A sample had returned a positive result for the performance enhancing drug nandrolone.

"I was devastated, I dropped the telephone, and had to get my flatmate to take the call as I collapsed on the floor," recalled Keat. "I'd been tested 12 times before over the years and every time my results had come back negative. I knew I hadn't consciously done anything wrong and couldn't believe I'd gone positive."

Keat immediately requested her B sample be assessed and that too returned a positive test result. Interestingly, the variance between Keat's A and B sample was a whopping 63 per cent (i.e. 7.7ng/ml vs. 12.1ng/ml). One would have thought that this disparity in the analytical results alone would have been grounds for the case against Keat to be thrown out. But apparently the boffins and bureaucrats disagreed, even though an earlier case against Spencer Smith was thrown out on similar grounds. So, Keat's positive finding stood and she had a case to answer.

Keat's legal team initially ran the argument that nandrolone naturally occurs in the body. In men there is a 'grey zone' for endogenous (from within the body) production of this compound. No such 'zone' exists for women. They argued that the extremes of Ironman competition, coupled with dehydration, could have concentrated the compound in her body and as a consequence inadvertently increased the concentration to the 'doping' levels found. (Ed. note: Incidentally, experts agreed that the levels found in Keat's urine would not have produced any performance enhancing effects, but that's another story.)

In order to decide if the nandrolone was endogenous or exogenous (synthetic from an outside source), for the first time in the history of ASADA, the sample was sent to Cologne to be analysed at an expense of

around \$10K. The sample came back and presented a double edge sword for Keat; the news was that her body didn't produce the concentration of nandrolone found in the urine sample. To some extent this was good for Keat, as she was concerned if she raced again she could test positive if her body was producing the hormone in the concentrations found. The downside was that the compound had to come from an exogenous source. She now had to prove where it came from and that she hadn't knowingly ingested it.

"I'd been tested 12 times previously over shorter distances and never returned any adverse findings (positive samples). I knew that the only thing I had changed on race day in Busselton was the introduction of electrolytes, to ensure I didn't cramp," recalled Keat.

Apparently it was very difficult convincing the CAS (Court of Arbitration for Sport) arbitrator and solicitors for Triathlon Australia that a nine hour race was different to a cycling event or a marathon race and that it is absolutely essential that electrolytes are replaced to prevent dehydration, hyponatremia and other ailments. They argued that Keat shouldn't have taken any supplements. This is nonsense considering the potential life threatening ramifications of not ingesting electrolytes when racing at an elite level in heat. This set Keat and her twin sister Simone off on a two year quest that is only

Ready and raring to go... Bek Keat can't wait to get back into triathlon racing



SHELLY BANKER/BLUE SPHERE PHOTOGRAPHY

now coming to an end. In short, Simone put her life on hold and moved to the Gold Coast to support Bek in their quest to find an answer.

On February 4, 2005, CAS moderator David Gray QC acknowledged that Keat had inadvertently ingested something that had caused the positive finding, but still handed down a verdict that Keat be banned from competition for two years. It was the same sort of ban that a self-confessed drug cheat would be handed. Additionally, even though Keat hadn't raced since November 2004, CAS ruled that the ban should commence from the day of the hearing – another inconsistency in matters such as this. This effectively banned Keat from competing for another three months or three, rather than two, domestic seasons.

However, as one consolation, in light of the scientific evidence Keat's team had produced, the moderator directed ASADA to test all the supplements Keat had ingested on race day.

This was never done. When Keat was finally able to speak to someone at ASADA – nearly two months later – she was informed the testing, which the CAS moderator had expressly directed be done, hadn't been, because the samples provided by Keat weren't sealed.

"I was gutted. I'd pretty much been labelled a drug cheat, no different to anyone who knowingly injects steroids. Not only that, because I'd contested the matter unsuccessfully, I had costs of over \$40K awarded against me. The whole thing destroyed me, both emotionally and financially.

"Luckily, searching through my garage a few months later I came across a few unopened packets of those electrolytes," said Keat. "ASADA were still unable to test the new (sealed) sample because their athletes' testing scheme had finished and WADA (World Anti-Doping Authority) laboratories had been directed not to test supplements for athletes."

As a consequence of ASADA's inability to provide any assistance, Simone began a mission; engaging companies and scientists from all over the world to find an answer to this nightmare and try to find someone willing to test Bek's supplements. Simone finally contacted world-renowned nandrolone expert Professor Ayotte in Montreal, Canada. Professor Ayotte, who consults to WADA (World Anti-Doping Authority), suggested she try another WADA laboratory as a last resort. After more than a year of frustration, they finally located a laboratory that agreed to help and the sealed samples were sent overseas for testing.

Keat and her team could not have imagined the lab's findings. Even though they



Simone (left) and Bek Keat (right) share an inseparable bond

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thought it likely they may find the steroid they were looking for, they actually found a lot more than what they had bargained on.

The sealed samples of the supplements that Keat provided to the lab came back containing a veritable cocktail of banned substances, including DHEA and several other pro-hormones that are precursors to anabolic agents.

"I was at work when I got the call from Sim and I just became hysterical, I was so happy, I was crying. I finally had the answer to my two year long nightmare. People at work were looking at me strangely and were confused because I was sobbing so loudly. After a couple of minutes I realised how dumbfounded I was too," recalls Keat. "The product I had used to help with my cramping issues contained all these banned substances."

Interestingly, Keat only returned a positive for nandrolone, even though the samples she had assessed also contained these other banned substances. So why didn't ASADA's screening process pick her up for these compounds as well?

That's a whole different story and one, in light of Keat's evidence, ASADA should be asking themselves.

"Our legal representatives immediately contacted the Australian distributor of the product and told them of the lab's findings. I was really upset because, like everyone else, they initially labelled me a drug cheat and chastised me for implicating the brand in my positive drug finding. Now that we have irrefutable evidence, their legal team is doing a song and dance in an attempt to limit their liability," said Keat.

When asked why Keat simply didn't go back to CAS with the new evidence and get the matter overturned and her two year ban quashed, Keat commented, "We have only just now been able to categorically stand behind this evidence. If I went back to CAS now it would cost me more money (that I don't have) and the case wouldn't be heard until January 2007 at the earliest because of Christmas, etc. I'm allowed to race as of early February anyway. Also, CAS made it abundantly clear that ultimately athletes are responsible for what they ingest and even though I could possibly prove I wasn't at fault, they may not reduce my ban. In essence, I've served a two year sentence (effectively three domestic seasons) that has cost me potentially hundreds of thousands of dollars in lost income from prize-money, sponsorship and the like, not to mention the emotional heartache and anguish. All I want now is for the company involved to admit their liability and take responsibility for their actions, and give me back my life."

The fact of the matter is the company in question, who cannot be named for legal reasons, quite honestly probably did think their products were 'clean'. In reality, products like these are manufactured in large production houses, literally thousands of supplements for hundreds of different companies are made in some facilities, and what can happen is the effect of cross contamination.

A supplement such as the one Keat ingested could be made in the same vat that had previously been used to produce another type of supplement, containing traces of pro-hormones. If the vat isn't cleaned correctly,

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it's possible that in the next product run, traces of the previous supplement can find their way into that second supplement. Lo and behold, an athlete inadvertently goes positive during a drug test. It only takes microscopic amounts of a metabolite to be ingested to cause a finding above the threshold, especially for nandrolone. (Ed note: This contamination issue is more prevalent with supplements manufactured overseas, such as in the USA, where there is less regulation of the production and marketing of supplements. Hence why imported supplements are considered a major concern by ASADA/AIS. See www.ais.org.au/nutrition/documents/FactDoping.pdf for more on this topic.)

So who is responsible in this sort of situation?

Is it the athlete who is offered the supplement and is assured either in person, by a sponsor, by a sales representative, or by an explicit guarantee (labelling or otherwise) that the supplement contains no banned substance, or is it the company who either manufactures or distributes (in some cases, both) the product?

My opinion is that the company who is distributing the product must bear responsibility. After all, it is them who put the labelling on the product stating it didn't contain any illicit compounds. When, as is the case in Keat's circumstances, this claim is found to be unsubstantiated, then they must be held accountable and compensate the athlete for their losses. It is then up to company distributing the product to take it further and go back to the manufacturer and take them to task if their production process is found to be at fault.

At the moment, in this situation, the only person left holding the can is Bek Keat.

"I would really like to settle this matter out of court. I want to be compensated for my financial losses, I want to be vindicated that I'm not a drug cheat and I want the company involved to take responsibility for their actions. To date, I haven't gone public with the evidence, even though I have every right in the world to do so.

"If the company involved continues to procrastinate I've already had discussions with one of the major television networks' current affairs programs, and we'll break the story in the new year (2007). I really don't want to do this, but I feel like I've been backed into a corner," commented Keat during our extended interview.

At the end of the day there is a very strong message here for every elite athlete who will likely be tested at one time or another. Be very careful with what you ingest. As Keat said, "At the Busselton race they were circulating water bottles. Just say I had have dissolved these electrolytes in my race bidons, drank the solution, thrown the bidons off and the next elite athlete through the aid station got my refilled water bottles with traces of the banned substance in them - they too could have gone positive - you can't be too careful!

"Unfortunately some elite triathletes are really naive, I watch them nowadays and a friend, coach or sponsor will give them something, tell them it's good for them and they'll take it without consideration of the possible implications. I didn't do that, I got the product from a reputable source, was told it would help with the cramping problems I'd been experiencing, I saw the explicit guarantee which categorically stated the supplement didn't contain any banned substance. And I got burned."

If this article does nothing more than educate the public and other elite athletes that there are still some major concerns with supplement manufacturing processes, then it has done its job. Let's hope for all concerned it does a little more than that and (a) it helps vindicate an unfortunate (albeit naive) young woman after two years of living hell and (b) compensates her at least for her sizable financial losses. Unfortunately, no action can give her back two of her most



DELLY CARR

competitive years as an elite endurance athlete, nor can it compensate her for the emotional turmoil she's experienced.

At the end of our interview Simone commented, "The remarkable thing throughout this is that Bek has stayed relatively positive. Even after being banned from competition she has continued to train passionately for her sport, with the exception of when she was run over (Ed note: While training in August 2005, Keat was hit by a car, both of her quads were crushed, her right knee was torn apart and she suffered compartment syndrome implications as a consequence of the accident). Given the irrefutable evidence we now have in hand, she is entitled to publicly clear her name, get on with her life and compete once more."

At 28 years of age there is now finally light at the end of the tunnel for the world's fastest-ever female Ironman rookie. Let's hope, in light of the overwhelming body of evidence that has surfaced, that the triathlon fraternity, her peers and the wider community acknowledge the two year hell she has lived and finally allow her to do what she wants to do - be an elite triathlete and chase her dream of competing in, and one day perhaps winning, the Hawaii Ironman.

Given what she's been forced to endure over the last couple of years, no-one could doubt Keat's resolve or fortitude, two attributes that success in Hawaii requires.

In closing, Keat expressly asked me to publicly thank her mum and her twin sister Simone for being her 'rock' during this, the toughest time of her life. "No-one understands our closeness and unless you're a twin you couldn't be expected to. She is my best friend in the world and during this tragedy, without my Simmy, I honestly don't know if I would have coped."

Let's hope, in the interests of common decency, justice will prevail and finally be served in this matter. **TMSM**

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