University of Birmingham – Position Statement on Supplement Use

A supplement is considered to be a product that an athlete uses alongside their diet to enhance their general health and wellbeing, or their performance. It is important that University of Birmingham athletes understand the key facts and risks associated with the use of supplements so that they can make informed decisions on whether to use them or not.

This statement details the University of Birmingham’s position on the use of supplements, providing a clear guide on everything an athlete should consider prior to supplement use. In addition, it gives information on how athletes can reduce the risk of inadvertent doping from the use of supplements.

Step 1: The University of Birmingham places a high emphasis on a ‘food first’ approach. This means that all athletes should first assess whether they are getting all of the nutrients that they require through their diet. They should also assess whether they are optimally implementing the basics around training and competing e.g. fuelling well beforehand and recovering well afterwards. Athletes should contact the Lead Nutritionist if they need any guidance on this. If athletes are following a balanced diet, incorporating all of the main food groups in appropriate quantities, then there often will not be a need to supplement. However, if after reviewing the decision is made that supplementation is still necessary because there is clear evidence that it will benefit health and/or performance, then there are a few more important steps that athletes need to take prior to supplement use.

Step 2: The athlete should understand the risks that are associated with supplementation use. There are no guarantees that any supplement is safe from contaminated substances. Athletes must follow the principle of strict reliability, meaning that they are solely responsible for the presence of a prohibited substance in their body. This is regardless of how it got there, even if unknowingly or unintentionally. If a prohibited substance is found in a sample, then this will likely lead to a ban from the athlete’s respective sport for a period of time.

Step 3: If after following steps 1 and 2 the athlete still believes that supplementation is necessary and they understand the risks associated with supplement use, then they should only use supplements that have been batch tested as part of the Informed Sport programme (www.informed-sport.com). These are clear to identify because they will have the Informed Sport logo on the product, and a batch test certificate can be obtained from the supplier. Using Informed Sport tested products does not provide 100% guarantee that any supplement is free from prohibited substances, it only minimises the risk. Athletes should use the Informed Sport website to search for the product and specific batch number, and keep a record of the search for future reference. Athletes should understand that if a prohibited substance was to be found in their sample from the use of an Informed Sport product, then they would still be liable.