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Testosterone rules for female athletes

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The **Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS)** dismissed an appeal by Olympic 800-metres champion Caster Semenya against the introduction of regulations to restrict testosterone levels in female athletes.

Court of Arbitration for Sport (CAS) judgement

The court ruled the regulations were needed for athletes with differences in sexual development (DSDs) to ensure fair competition. The rules cover events ranging from 400-metres to a mile.

What are disorder/differences in sexual development (DSDs)?

- People with a DSD do not develop along typical gender lines.
- Their hormones, genes, reproductive organs may be a mix of male and female characteristics, which can lead to higher levels of testosterone - a hormone that increases muscle mass, strength and haemoglobin, which affects endurance.

Disorders of sex development (DSDs) are a group of rare conditions where the reproductive organs and genitals don't develop as expected.

In DSD, a mix of male and female sexual characteristics are present. The person may have sex chromosomes (bundles of genes) normally associated with being female (XX chromosomes) or male (XY chromosomes), but reproductive organs and genitals may be:

- of the opposite sex
- not clearly male or female (ambiguous or atypical)
- a mixture of male and female

What are the guidelines?

The IAAF new Eligibility Regulations requires an athlete to meet the following criteria to be eligible to compete in Restricted Events in an International Competition:

1. she must be recognised at law either as female or as intersex (or equivalent).
2. she must reduce her blood testosterone level to below 5 nmol/L for a continuous period of at least six months (e.g., by use of hormonal contraceptives).
3. thereafter she must maintain her blood testosterone level below 5 nmol/L continuously for so long as she wishes to remain eligible.

How scientific are these guidelines?

- Athletes with differences of sexual development (DSD) have higher levels of natural testosterone, which the IAAF believes gives them a competitive advantage.
- However, according to British Medical Journal, the new guidelines are setting an unscientific precedent for other cases of genetic advantage. Additionally, the medical profession does not define biological sex or physical function by serum testosterone levels alone.

The contrived confusion of gender

- The Universal Declaration of Player Rights, which deals with the intersection of sport and human rights, reminds that an athlete's right to participate in sport cannot be limited by gender (or any other identity-related factor, including sex).
- Just because regulations exist does not mean that they are evidence based, ethical, or even effective. This kind of regulation has its legacy in the long and problematic history of "sex testing" women athletes. It is no accident that the vast majority of athletes affected by these regulations are black women and women of colour from the global south who do not conform to Western ideals of femininity.
- Such type of artificial segregation can start witch-hunting and marginalization of not only athletes but also of normal citizen per se, as there is a big crossover between men and women, with 16% of men classified as having low testosterone and 14% of women having high, according to some definitions.

The Court of Arbitration for Sport

The Court of Arbitration for Sport is an international quasi-judicial body established to settle disputes related to sport through arbitration. Its headquarters are in Lausanne (Switzerland) and its courts are located in New York City, Sydney and Lausanne. Temporary courts are established in current Olympic host cities.