

# Gatorade leaves a banned teenaged sprinter to take the heat

Who can anti-doping bureaucrats trust, 19-year-old Issam Asinga or the makers of Gatorade?



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First off, you should probably spit out Gatorade just on general principle — you can't ever forget it's sold by the same folks who make Doritos. It's got more sugar than a Snickers and pronounced links to obesity, and let's not talk about the color dyes. Second, the company deserves to be boycotted based on its dealings with Issam Asinga, the teenage sprinter who alleges his Gatorade gummies were tainted with a banned substance, earning him a four-year ban from track and field after picograms of something called GW1516 were detected in his urine. If it's a contest between the word of a 19-year-old runner and the junkfooder that managed to allow festering salmonella into its granola bar facilities, I'm backing the kid.

A picogram is a trillionth of a gram. Start there with the absurdity of Asinga's case. Further outrage against the inflexible statist ideology of the world anti-doping bureaucracy is useless. The regime's circular Monty Pythonian "if she burns, she must be a witch" logic dooms the accused individual every time. Unless the athlete happens to belong to a notoriously human-rights-violating *state*, in which case whole fleets of Chinese swimmers, 23 of them at a time, will be (secretly) cleared by WADA despite testing positive for trimetazidine, on the excuse that it somehow leached off the sportswashed plates in a hotel kitchen. If the IOC's ally Xi Jinping says it's an innocent mistake, it must be.

But you can feel plenty of fresh spanking outrage at Gatorade, and you certainly will, when you read the civil case filed this month by Asinga's attorneys against the sports drink and its parent, PepsiCo, for negligence and product liability. A Texas A&M freshman who competes for Suriname and runs like a flash, Asinga was barred from the Paris Olympics after GW1516 (or cardarine) was detected in a drug test. Cardarine is a metabolic-burner compound originally developed by Big Pharma as a possible treatment for obesity that never made it to the market over cancer-causing results. It's illegal as well as banned, but has made its way into dietary supplements anyway, especially in weight loss products, and the U.S. Anti-Doping Agency has warned to beware of it in supplements.

When Asinga received notice that he had failed a urine test, the suit says, he turned over everything he consumed to a sanctioned lab for testing — including some Airborne, melatonin, and two jars of berry flavored Gatorade "recovery" gummies gifted to him by the company. Surely the Gatorade test was a silly formality, because the renowned product came with a stamp promising it had been "NSF certified for Sport," meaning checked out by a lab as safely clean of any mystery ingredient.

But of all things, it was the *Gatorade gummies* that came back with a preliminary positive for trace picograms of GW1516.

Could Asinga have doctored the gummies himself? Perhaps. The more reasonable assumption here is that the gummies were contaminated in an understandably messy manufacturing environment. Anyone who's taken a CBD chew knows that raw ingredients are heated and stirred into a slurry, flavored and infused, and poured into molds, such an uneven process that one gummy can leave you unmoved while another makes you think you're hang gliding.

But reasonable is not good enough in the famously draco-governed anti-doping system. Asinga was required to submit an unopened, *sealed* bottle of the Gatorade gummies from the very same manufacturing lot as his, No. 22092117150234, for further testing, to compare results and try to ascertain who was at fault.

Gatorade declined to provide it.

When Asinga asked Gatorade to send him a sealed bottle of gummies from the same lot for drug testing, this is what he got back:

“Okay so bad news, turns out we discontinued the gummies so we don't have any more!” a company rep texted him, according to his suit. “ ... They may come back but sound[s] like we've had manufacturing issues!”

Manufacturing issues.

Stay with me now. It gets even stenchier.

Companies are required by the FDA to preserve portions of lots and to code them, in case things like say, poisonings, occur and the ingredients need to be traced. But somehow Gatorade just couldn't find a companion bottle from this same lot.

It turned out Gatorade had farmed out manufacturing of these “recovery gummies” to a smaller company called Better Nutritionals, a firm that was deep in debt, and shade. In 2019 its manufacturing facility was cited by the FDA for not doing a proper check of ingredients. In 2023 it was on the verge of bankruptcy, after going partners with another supplement company called Goli, which also made gummies, including ones that purported to support weight loss and metabolism burn.

Instead, Gatorade offered up a bottle from a different lot altogether. Amazingly, it tested clean!

From there the case reads as the same old story of bureaucratic persecution of an athlete simply for swallowing, with the usual censorious talk of “strict liability.” The naked hostility of the World Athletics anti-doping authorities against Asinga merely for bringing an appeal is hard to comprehend.

“The panel is not convinced by the Athlete’s argument that Better Nutritionals is a ‘shady third-party company,’” the ban reads. “Although this does not mean that no contamination could have taken place in the Gardena [Calif.] facilities, credible evidence would be required to prove this beyond mere speculation.”

The doping authorities acknowledge that Gatorade’s conduct was “odd at best” and that “there may have been something to hide.” But in the next breath they pronounce these factors “inconsequential” and blithely accept the assertions of two witnesses from Better Nutritionals that they didn’t use GW1516. As if they’d have admitted it.

Here you have the world of Kafka: anti-doping authorities constantly warn athletes against using dietary supplements. Yet, they accept the word of two supplement makers as more credible than that of the 19-year-old athlete.

Asinga will now sit out for an Olympic cycle. Meanwhile, the politicized travesty that is the anti-doping system will grind on, issuing nonsensical results that only create questions instead of fair results. Such as, why is four years the right suspension, when the more uncooperative party was the *supplement* provider, not the athlete?

Is it possible Asinga contaminated his gift gummies? Maybe. But surely the more likely suspect is the company that markets drinks as “born in the lab,” and colors them with Red 40, Blue 1, and Yellow 5. You don’t have to test that stuff to know it’s probably not something you should swallow. All you have to do is really look at it — and how they treated Asinga.

