Doping in Sport
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Doping has existed in athletics since the third century B.C. Athletes have always looked for a “magic pill” to enhance their athletic performance. This is especially true today in the high-stakes world of sport. For the purpose of this paper, doping will be defined as the use of an outside agent, which is potentially dangerous to the athlete's health and is capable of enhancing their performance. Our concerns over drug use in sport are generally based on one or more of the following ethical issues: 1) the athlete may suffer physical or psychological harm as a result of drug use, 2) the use of drugs by one athlete may coerce other athletes to use drugs to maintain parity, 3) the use of drugs in sport is unnatural in that any resulting success is due to external factors, and 4) the athlete who uses drugs has an unfair advantage over athletes who do not use them (Yesalis, 1993). In light of these points, this paper will attempt to tackle several of the issues surrounding the current state of drug use in athletics.

The Win-At-All-Costs Mentality

The importance of winning in sport is at an all time high. Winning is seen as everything and the only thing. With this high value on winning comes a decreased ethical standard on what is acceptable to achieve that goal. Cheating is the result. This can be seen in the unfair play, unsportsmanlike conduct, and blatant disregard for the rules that are so often present in today’s athletics. Doping is a great example of this. Simply put, athletes use illegal performance-enhancing agents to enhance their performances beyond what they would be able to achieve naturally.

Whether due to commercialization, governance, nationalism, science, or the media, the emphasis on winning is at an all-time high. The

This seems to be a problem greater than sports itself. The win-at-all-costs mentality pervades much of our society, and it appears that it is only getting worse.

An Athlete’s Autonomy

Many within sports, believe that athlete’s should have autonomy over their own bodies. These people believe that if they want to put something in their body, no one should have the right to stop them.

Politics of Drug Testing

This past summer, the 2000 Olympic games were shaken by reports of rampant drug use. While this in itself is nothing new, one of the revelations may have been particularly shocking to some. United States Track & Field (USATF) was found to have covered up 10 positive doping cases in recent Olympics (Sulivan, 2000). Rumors of drug cover-ups have existed for as long as drug testing has existed, but actual confirmation of these rumors have never been made public. In light of these discoveries, USATF promised to crack down on drug use and take a harder stance against those who test positive. USATF even sought the aid of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) to run
their drug-testing program as an independent contractor. WADA declined USATF’s bid to have them take over its besieged testing program. WADA instead chose to play an oversight role and is said still to be miffed that USATF has not released details of what the agency says are 10 positive doping cases.

During the past 10 years, less than 3 percent of Olympic and National Football League athletes who were tested were shown to be positive for banned substances (Caitlin and Murray, 1996). These results appear to be at odds with most of the conclusions of investigations conducted by journalists and government organizations.

Sometimes cover-ups are not possible because an independent drug testing organization performs the testing. In cases such as this, when an athlete tests positive, the athlete’s national governing body for the sport often supports the athlete rather than the test results and ruling of the international governing body. This is especially common in track and field. In Cuba, track officials refused to suspend world record-holding high jumper Javier Sotomayor after he tested positive for cocaine, and Jamaican track officials reacted similarly after sprinter Merlene Ottey tested positive for steroids. Similar things have occurred in the cases of Britain’s Linford Christy, and the United States’ Mary Slaney and Dennis Mitchell. All of these athletes tested positive for a performance-enhancing drug, but did not have to complete their suspension because their national governing bodies reinstated them and supported them against the international ban.

The indictment in Salt Lake overshadowed other news from a Denver courtroom that may ultimately prove far more troublesome for the Olympics. In filing a wrongful-termination lawsuit, Dr. Wade Exum, director of the U.S.O.C.’s drug-control unit for nine years before he stepped down under pressure last month, charged among other things that his bosses systematically covered up illicit drug use. "In recent years, absolutely no sanction has been imposed on roughly half of all the American athletes who have treated positive for prohibited substances," Exum alleged. He said that his tests had turned up "scores" of athletes using strength-building testosterone but that no one had been punished. The U.S.O.C. said Exum's charges were hogwash.

Assuming the U.S.O.C. is correct, we might ask, in the interest of Olympic glory, "What do you mean, our guys aren't taking drugs?" Chemistry long ago supplanted Wheaties as the breakfast of champions among elite athletes. Recently an Olympic discus thrower from Australia, Werner Reiterer, who admitted to spending about $12,000 a year on steroids and human-growth hormones during his career, said a majority of Australian athletes used performance enhancers and were encouraged to do so by Olympic officials. In Cuba, track officials refused to suspend world record-holding high jumper Javier Sotomayor after he tested positive for cocaine, and Jamaican track officials reacted similarly after sprinter Merlene Ottey tested positive for steroids.

**Undetectable Drugs**

One particularly daunting problem facing drug-testers is the fact that so many of the performance-enhancing agents which athletes are taking are undetectable by today’s scientific standards. This occurs as a result of two problems. Either the substance itself is naturally undetectable, as is the case with EPO, HCG, and HGH, or the athlete’s
pharmacological team has made minor changes in the chemical structure of a banned substance so as to render it undetectable.

In the case of EPO, HCG, and HGH, there are no known reliable tests for determining whether the athlete is using the substance or not. Athletes take these drugs because they offer great physiological gains without the risk of detection.

EPO is the drug made famous by the Festina cycling team scandal during the 1998 Tour de France. The drug is used to enhance cardiovascular efficiency. The Festina team was expelled from the Tour de France after the team masseur’s car was found to contain a large supply of EPO. If it had not been for the discovery of the drug in the car, the athletes could have continued doping and not been found out because there is no reliable test for the drug.

After further investigation into the Festina scandal, it was found that doping is widespread throughout the sport of cycling, with EPO being the drug of choice. In light of this, and the current undetectable nature of the drug, the International Cycling Union stated that it will preserve urine samples from the 2000 Tour de France, pending a more reliable test for the performance-enhancing hormone EPO. If illegal substances are discovered later, riders could face retroactive sanctions.

Doping threatens the very essence of sport. The question of whether doping bans should exist remains a valid one, but the fact remains that doping is a direct violation against those rules. So when athletes use banned performance-enhancing agents they are cheating, and in so doing undermining the very foundation of sport.

References


