

Should performance-enhancing drugs be made legal in the athletic field?

1. Introduction

The painstaking and aggressive nature of sports of our time and society's ceaseless demands for excellence resulted in athletes to seek performance-enhancing drugs to synthetically improve their capability and widen their competitive advantage. However, several organizations in sports banned the use of these drugs and established a testing program penalizing athletes being caught using these substances. The uses of performance-enhancing drugs are not easy to monitor or prevent since not all of these drugs are illegal. Others believe that helpful substances like these that improve performance and help athlete to gain advantage over their opponent should be legalized in sports. In the war against performance enhancing drugs in sports, the lines of legality and fairness are increasingly blurred. Therefore, we should give light and answer the question: should performance-enhancing drugs be made legal in the athletic field?

2. Doping and Performance-Enhancing Drugs

In the athletic field or sports, the word *dope* was first used to describe the unlawful drugging of racehorses in the 20th century (Mehlman 2005, p.1). It is a deliberate application of chemical substances to alter performance (Fricker, 2000, p.76). Drugs and other means to enhance performance are not new and as reported, stimulants such as strychnine were used by the Greek gladiators to increase their fighting ability. Coca plants were used by the Incas to increase attentiveness and stamina of their soldiers (McCloskey et.al. 2005, p.81). For athletes, the ancient Egyptians were reported using powdered rear hooves of an Abyssinian

ass combined with rose petals to give them super human power and early Olympians even went as far as swallowing sheep testicles just to improve their abilities (Stewart, 1998, p.8).

The medical or scientific development of *anabolic steroids* actually began in Paris in 1889. It was initiated by Charles Edouard Brown-Sequard, a well-known physiologist and neurologist who addressed the Society of Biology and reported that he had self-administered ten subcutaneous injections that contained combinations of dog's blood from testicular veins, semen, and juice extracted from a testicle. He claimed that his experiment brought him significant improvements in physical and mental energy for a month. Most experts in the following years agrees with Sequard's hormonal replacements and various medical laboratories in the Unites States and Europe began producing testicular extracts for rejuvenation and to treat wide variety of sickness (Yesalis and Bahrke, 2005, p.434-436).

Recreational drugs like Cannabinoids is not included in the UK's 2007 Prohibited list since its use is in social context and not considered as performance-enhancing drug (UK Sport, International Standard for Prohibited List, 2007).

3. Application of Performance-Enhancing Drugs

Today, there are several of ways of doping being used by athletes, one of them but less popular is *homologous hemoglobin* or *blood doping*. *Anabolic steroids* and *human growth hormone* treatment is probably the most popular. It helps athletes not only to improve their performance but also to enhance their skeletal muscles (NIDA, 2005, p.1). *Stimulants* on the other hand as many of us are familiar with, can augment cognitive functions and controls fatigue (Mehlman 2005, p.1). Back in 1996, study shows that men who used steroids for ten weeks gain 13 pounds of muscle and can bench press an additional 48 pounds (McCloskey, 2005, p.67).

Steroid seems to be common in athletes and patients in this day and age considering the fact that during the 1984 Olympic game in Los Angeles, 70 doctors were found to have prescribed steroids to at least 20 winning athletes. Moreover, according to the National Institute of Drug Abuse, one million high school athletes are using steroids (McCloskey et. al., 2005, p.8).

In general, anabolic steroids are widely accepted and being use for medical care. It has been used to treat various medical problems such as breast cancer, reproduction disorder, trauma, anaemia, and even AIDS (McCloskey et.al, 2005, p.84). Another universally known type of natural supplement is the Human Growth Hormone. The hormone is naturally concealed by the body and provides growth to roughly all organ and tissue of the body. There is no known drug test that can successfully spot HGH and as a result, it is now the preferred choice among athletes (Taxin, 2004, p.834).

Adolescence use drugs like some of the athletes because they want to imitate them (McCloskey et.al., 2005, p.55). Three groups of athletes use anabolic steroids: those who wish to be stronger, those who want a trimmed body mass, and those who crave for speed. Baseball was reported to have some of the highest drug use in athletics. About 80% of the Major League Baseball players are using steroids. Drug testing and efforts to thwart athletes using steroids have expanded considerably. Stories in the news, TV or print often expose prestigious athletes and amateurs caught using steroids. However, inaccurate tests, evasive moves by athletes, new designer drugs, and uncertainty in determining the substances that complicates effective determination are equally problematic. Eliminating these drugs is not easy due to the will of an athlete to do anything that enhance their competitive edge, the

undetectable designer drugs, and continuous disagreement about levels of naturally occurring chemicals in the body (McCloskey et. al., 2005, 73-85).

4. Negative effects of performance-enhancing drugs

The National Institute on Drug Abuse recently validated the major side effects from abusing anabolic steroids. For men, this can include liver tumours and cancer, increase blood pressure, “myocardial infarction and strokes” (Kicman and James, 2004, p.9-10), and build up of bad cholesterol (Serota, 1999, p.6). Some gender specific side effects such as shrinking of the testicles, sperm count reduction, sterility or “impotence” (Worth, 2005, p.5), loss of hair, growth of breast, and increased possibility of acquiring prostate cancer or enlargement of the glands (Serota, 1999, p.6.).

In women, undesirable physical changes may occur such as growth of facial hair, male-pattern baldness, changes in or cessation of the menstrual cycle or irregularities (Serota, 1999, p.6), swelling of the clitoris and deepening of voice. Anabolic steroids may also prematurely halt growth in adolescents before the typical adolescent growth spurt. Furthermore, scientific research reveals that anabolic steroid users may experience aggressiveness, behavioural disorders (Serota, 1999, p.6) and psychiatric problems such as sudden change of mood, extreme paranoia, bad temper, delusion, and prejudicial judgement. It can also have undesirable effects on every organ of the body and a host of various liver diseases (Serota, 1999, p.6).

Most of all, the occurrence of sudden depression in users who stop taking the drugs apparently indicates dependency or addiction. For instance, abuse in amphetamine (stimulant) was reported the cause of a cyclist death in Australia in 1960 (Fricker, 2000, p.76).

5. The Legality of Performance-Enhancing Drugs in the Athletic Field

There is a big difference between performance-enhancing drugs use in medical care and sports. Although less publicized and probably we are not so familiar with it, these drugs are generally consumed in our society for cosmetic benefits and they affective treatment for various diseases. The problem with these drugs is the potential serious unwanted effects when abuse. Athletes oftentimes disregard these possibilities because they think that the benefit is worth the risk. They think that the danger of being caught is worth the gains of using performance-enhancing drugs (McCloskey et. al., 2005, p.53). Anabolic steroids for instance, are often administered in athletes with much higher dose than the level specified for legitimate treatment causing liver damage and cardiovascular defects (Kicman and James, 2004, p.9-10).

In the athletic field, the legality of taking performance-enhancing drugs is not just a question of athlete's physical and emotional injuries but also on the virtue of equality and fair play. The confine of ethics and sportsmanship in sports is as important as saving athletes lives for to cheat is "violating the standards of fair play" (Allen, 2004, p.1) and with performance-enhancing drugs, "athletes are never equal at the moment of competition" (Mehlman 2005, p.3).

The norm of fair play includes laws as in laws for tax evaders and codes of conduct imposed on professionals. Our society generally denounces cheating and considered major ethical transgression and a model of all moral misconduct. A doped sprinter for instance is taking inequitable advantage of the sport institution and individuals' running the same race

similar to a tax evader taking unfair advantage of the government and members of the community and therefore both of them is dishonest (Allen, 2004, p.1).

Athletes tend to justify the use of these drugs through the excuse that “everyone is doing it” (Allen, 2004, p.18). "This is not cheating - not when everyone does it" (McCloskey et. al., 2005, p.56). They are therefore having no choice but to do the same thing to preserve their standing in the competition. They seem to forget that the true meaning of sport is to measure the athlete's natural skill, rather than a synthetically improved performance that masquerade any human potential within the athlete (Simpson 2000, p.4).

The primary reason that many organizations are concerned with anabolic steroid use is the fact that it is cheating and taking these drugs contravenes practically every rule of sports association. The concern of sport federations in banning use of these drugs is simple. It is founded on the moral and ethical issues (Yesalin and Bahrke, 2005, p.441)

Some people may argue that rules in sports as any other rules can be altered. However, we have rules to follow and it would be an oversight to set aside the significance of these rules (Mehlman 2005, p.4). If important changes have to be made, it must be limited to a certain level. For instance, rules can say that a game must be played in a new way but it cannot definitely say to play the game with steroids. We must also remember that there are rules, traditions, and expectations from sports fans that we cannot ignore. They simply do not like people who cheat and similar to the aggressive soccer enthusiast, they might be forced to put the law into their hands (Mehlman, 2005, p.5).

6. Preventing and Controlling the use of Performance Enhancing Drugs

Athletic plays a very crucial role in our society but it's sad to see that some popular sports are not much of a good example. The use of performance-enhancing drugs in football,

baseball, and other contact sport is hazardous and sending the wrong message that “performance is more important than character” (Taxin, 2004, p. 832). The availability of drugs anywhere, the emergence of designer drugs, and inadequate method of drug testing are just a few of the many reasons why it is difficult to control (Yesalin and Bahrke, 2005, p.441)

However, some experts believe that regulation and not prohibition is the answer to these problems. Currently, drug testing has been the chief deterrent for athlete’s attempting to cheat but the conflict and disagreement on the results of such test from governing bodies is another problematic situation (Dawson, 2000, p.2). It is clearly justifiable for sport to prohibit hazardous practices and it is just proper to discourage its use for the athletes own protection. However, the cost of prohibiting them would be too great. The sport federations should strive to develop and a more accurate test and weight the cost of enforcing them against the impact of changing the rules slightly to accommodate safe enhancements (Mehlman, 2005, p.4).

7. Conclusion

Our society, the sports fans and the media, more often glorify those who finished first. They simply do not care for second best or for those who came late but give their greatest effort. To win is the typical way of philosophy today and becoming persistent in our minds predominantly our athletes who are doing whatever it takes to win. This irresistible desire to enjoy the fruit of success, fame and financial gains, is leading them to the false sense of security, success, and into the culture of cheating. An ethical and moral attrition has no beginning and certainly has no end. Performance-enhancing drugs have no place in sports and certainly not applicable in any human competition. The danger involves and deadly side effects are enough to discourage its use and ban these drugs in sports. The health risk

associated with these performance-enhancing drugs use is simply not a valid reason to justify its use to improve performance. These drugs should therefore remain illegal and prohibited in the athletic field.

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