

Example of essay on ethics of doping in professional sports

[Health & Medicine](#), [Drugs](#)



Introduction

The ethical issue in sports gains in importance over time, as there are more and more attractive rewards for the athletes, both financial and non-financial, such as fame and pride. As the prize becomes bigger, the competition gets more intense, and the incentive to cheat strengthens.

There are different ways to cheat in sports. Some of them are tactical and are aimed to get advantage in particular situation - good example of such behavior is so-called simulation in association football, when a player goes down easily pretending that he has been fouled to win a free kick, penalty kick or to provoke sending-off of an opposition player. In motorsports, a controversial story occurred in 1994, when Michael Schumacher had led the title contender Damon Hill by a single point before the final race of the F1 season. Schumacher was leading the race, but made a mistake in the late stage and damaged his car. With overtaking by Hill imminent, the famous German directed his bolide into bolide of the opponent, ensuring that both are out of the race after the collision. In a post-race interview Schumacher denied the intent to provoke the crash and the authorities could do nothing but to award him first World Championship. Amazing as it is, the story repeated in 1997, that time against Jacques Villeneuve, with the only difference that Villeneuve's car survived the crash and was able to reach finish.

Tactical cheating is obviously unethical, and authorities across the sports are trying to prevent it, and usually the best way to prevent it is to punish it severely enough to create sufficient disincentives to athletes (simulation in football is one of the issues that has not been addressed properly due to the

reasons one may find difficult to understand – apparently, starting to punish players with suspensions retrospectively is all it takes). But tactical cheating is not one that grabs the loudest headlines – the stories related to the long-term, “strategic” ways of cheating, grab the loudest highlights.

One of such outrageous, harmful for the dignity of sports, ways of cheating is match fixing. The primary reason for match fixing is earning in the betting market, and these mostly include lower leagues games, which do not attract much attention. However, the famous Calciopoli case in Italian Serie A (top tier of Italian football) proved that money is not necessarily the only reason: Juventus, AC Milan, Fiorentina and Lazio were consistently bribing the referees to fix the results of the league games. Juventus, who turned out to be the most outrageous offenders, were chasing title rather than money (though those two are certainly connected). Juventus received the toughest punishment – they were stripped of their last two titles, relegated to the second tier (where they started with points deficit) and a heavy fine.

Notably, all the key individual offenders (starting with Juventus president) eventually avoided the jail terms, while some bribed referees returned to working in the Serie A. Unsurprisingly, the story repeated in several years, on the lower scale, though.

The other issue related to cheating in sports is much more equivocal and less obviously unethical. While many accept the fact that doping is bad and unethical, there is no unanimous opinion on the issue. The aim of this work is to discuss the ethical aspect of doping and to present the documents from the both sides.

Doping in professional sports

In professional sports, doping refers to the use of prohibited performance-enhancing drugs by the athletes. The lists of such drugs are created by the sports governing bodies and severe punishments are being applied to those who fail tests on prohibited substances. The International Olympic Committee adopted the practice of stripping the athletes from their medals, should they test positive for banned drugs. Prior to the 2012 Olympic Games in London, the organizers promised to test the samples of every medallists. During these Games, fifteen sportsmen have been caught doping, including three medallists (one gold medallist). Until 2000, only fifteen sportsmen and sportswomen were stripped off their medals; during the 2000 Olympic Games in Sydney, fourteen medals have been returned (though five of them by a single athlete - Marion Jones).

Between 1930s and 1960s the most widespread performance-enhancing drug (PED) was Benzedrine - a trade name for amphetamine. In the season 1962/63, Everton F. C. won the English football leagues, and there were rumours that it was achieved not without help of Benzedrine. Thorough investigation led to confession by the goalkeeper Albert Dunlop, who stated that the players were given the pills in the dressing room. They were not obliged to take them, but most of the players did. The club later admitted to distribution of the drug among players but claimed that it could have no negative impact on them; Dunlop, however, according to his own words became an addict. In 1960th, Danish cyclist Knud Enemark Jensen lost his conscience during the race and died afterwards in the hospital. The autopsy revealed substantial amount of Benzedrine in his organism, together with

other drugs.

Anabolic steroids were discovered in 1958 and quickly gained popularity in the variety of sports. These drugs help gain weight and increase strength, but on the other hand, have range of vicious side effects, such as changes in cholesterol levels, high blood pressure and liver damage. The survey conducted during the 1984 Olympics revealed that more than 61% of asked athletes admitted they used anabolic steroids within past six months. 68% agreed that anabolic steroid not only provided additional physical strength, but also gave confidence (though it may be correlated). At the same time, 74% per cent claimed they were aware of the side effects of steroids (meaning that at least half of those who used them knew it was harmful) and 48% confirmed that they would favour banishment the use of PED's.

In baseball, the battle against use of steroids started in 2004 when a new rule introduced the following penalties: 10 days for those who were caught for the first time, 30 days - for the second time, 60 day - for the third and one year for the fourth (each team plays 162 games in the regular season in Major League Baseball). Not only are players suspended from the games, but they also are not paid their salaries for the whole period of suspension. In 2008 the rules were tightened, with 50-game ban for the first instance, 100-game suspension for the second-time offenders and lifetime ban for those who are reckless enough to be caught for the third time. Since 2005, 43 established MLB players have been caught and banned, with additional 60 who had featured in MLB games, but had spent most of their careers in minor leagues, raising the total numbers of casualties to over 100. Alex Rodriguez, arguably the greatest active player, was within the latest range of

victims (if they can be called so) in 2013 – he received 211-game ban, which is likely to effectively end his career shall he lose the appeal.

While doping scandals are ever-present during Olympics Games as well as in American sports, football and baseball particularly, there is no other sport as deeply penetrated with doping issue as cycling. The first wave began in 1998, when the entire Festina team was disqualified Tour de France – the most prestigious event in the sport – following the discovery of a wide range of PEDs in the trunk of the team vehicle. Several other teams refused to participate in a gesture of solidarity with Festina. The scandal drew attention away from the event itself, but, ironically enough, Marco Pantano, who won the tour, later saw himself disqualified as he failed the drug test. Since then, drug scandals became ever-present in cycling, and the climax was reached with one of the most infamous sports-related scandals that have ever occurred – the story of Lance Armstrong.

Lance Armstrong case

Many would agree that doping allegation of Lance Armstrong is so far the biggest story that happened in sports. Armstrong, who won Tour de France on seven occasions, had been considered as one of the greatest athletes of all times, until the allegations reached its logical conclusion in January 2013, when the athlete, by that time stripped off his titles, admitted using doping consistently throughout his career in the interview with Oprah Winfrey.

Having started his career as a triathlete (he had become a U. S. champion in 1989 and 1990), Armstrong later decided to focus on cycling and turned professional in 1992. In 1996, he was diagnosed with a testicular cancer that

spread to his brain and lungs. In 1997, after brain and testicular surgeries and extensive chemotherapy Armstrong his victory over cancer was announced and he returned to the training, and very soon his career turned into a tremendous success (depending on how one defines success). Lance Armstrong signed the agreement with US Postal and become a part of US Postal/Discovery team. With this team he won seven consecutive Tour de France titles (1999-2005), which was a then record, but which is irrelevant now, as the records of his participation were excluded from the books of records. After his last Tour de France triumph in 2005, Armstrong retired from cycling, which proved to be a 4-year in the professional career, as he returned in 2009 competing for the Astana team and finished 3rd in the Tour de France overall standings. After uneventful in sporting terms 2010, Armstrong retired from cycling for the second time, for the last time. He, however, went on to participate in triathlon competitions winning couple of Ironman events. The revival of triathlon career turned out to be short, as on August 24th, 2012 the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) banned Armstrong from participation in the professional events in each sport that follows USADA rules for the use of performance enhancing drugs. Armstrong opted not to appeal to Court of Arbitration for Sport, which was somewhat surprising given his heated denial of all allegations throughout the career. The confession to Oprah became the dot in the story of the biggest lie story in sports (at least, revealed lie, as we have no information about ones that went unrevealed).

Despite the incredible results and general admiration of his both sporting and personal success, there has been always much controversy around

Lance Armstrong. In late 1990s he was widely criticized for his comments against the activist opponents of doping in cycling Paul Kimmage and Christophe Bassons, which was understood by many as an expression of sympathy towards the dopers. In 2003, he started cooperation with controversial coach Michele Ferrari, who was closely connected to the medicals industry. Ferrari was later accused of sporting fraud and abuse of medical profession, which immediately led to the suspension of cooperation, with Armstrong stating his zero-tolerance position against trainers who promote and organize the use of PEDs. During the “ years off”, Armstrong had to respond to the allegations provoked by the doctor who claimed that Armstrong, during the post-cancer treatment, admitted to having used performance enhancing drugs. The comments were the part of litigation between Armstrong and SCA promotions - the company that refused to pay the five-million bonus to the cyclist.

The really hard times began for Armstrong after his comeback - the proceeding against him were being conducted not only by USADA, but also by the U. S. government - federal prosecutors, led by Jeff Novitzki (who was also in charge of investigations of alleged steroid use by famous baseball players Barry Bonds and Roger Clemens) opened an investigation on the matter. Even though the case was suspended with no charges filed, it shows how important the case is even in the scale of the United States.

While there has never been lack of controversy related to the doping in sports, the case of Lance Armstrong will remain the symbol of the issue for the long time. Due to its soundness, but also amount of revealed information, it will be referred to in the discussion section.

Ethics of doping prohibition

Before discussing the ethical side of using doping given that it is forbidden (which is, by definition, cheating), I believe it is necessary to go through the issue of using doping to enhance sporting results in general. The very claim that doping should be forbidden is far from unequivocal. Why should doping be prohibited?

One argument is that the effects of doping are unrelated to skills gained by the athletes in a 'natural' way (by training) and are not the results of effort, so it gives an unfair advantage. But super-light athletics shoes, graphite tennis rackets, lubricants for ski are also unrelated to the naturally gained skills, but use of the products of technological progress is not considered unethical and are not forbidden (performance-enhancing swimming suits are a rare and rather ridiculous exception).

The other, the most often cited argument is health of the athletes. And in my opinion, this argument is the weakest one. Exercising is healthy; professional sports - by no means. The competitiveness of the modern sports assumes that the athletes pay high costs for chance of a moment of glory - this includes financial investments (coaches, equipment), time and, of course, health. The payoffs, on the other hand, are high, though their distribution is not proportional (it is rather a winner-takes-all environment). In football, every couple of years a high-profile players dies for the reasons related to work overload - the heart cannot hold a pressure. Rafael "Chucho" Benitez fell the latest victim - he died in July, 2013 aged 27, having completed his EUR 10-million move to the Qatari club El-Jash. Despite that, the competition in football is high as never as people happily accept the risks for the chance

for recognition and lucrative contracts. If the athletes are allowed to sacrifice their health to train countless hours putting their bodies to the edge, why should not they be able to use performance enhancing drugs if they are willing to do so. Coming back to the survey conducted in 1984, vast majority of the athletes who used PEDs were aware of their side effects. It is their rational choice, and it is not easy to see why it should be taken away from them.

Another argument states that due to doping-related risks people will be more reluctant to let their children engage in sports. This is fairly rubbish argument, because parents are motivated by the prospect of seeing success of their children at least as much as children themselves. The football example is applicable for this argument too. Professional sports are unhealthy, and parents do let their kind do them. There is no “will be” here, because we already see how people behave.

There is also an argument that fans will be less interested in sports, if they will feel that the athletes use PEDs. However, there is no evidence that the fans care at all. They mostly want sports i) to be aesthetically attractive, ii) to hold uncertainty of outcome, iii) to ensure that athletes/teams have the equal opportunities. The latter is only partially true, as in the team sports the richest teams attract most supporters.

Finally, the last argument claims that while separate arguments are imperfect, the combination of them is convincing enough to conclude that doping should be banned. And I would probably agree with it, if the ban would provide that the athletes indeed do not use doping. But the fact is that they do. If doping is not prohibited, there is no unfairness, as everybody is in

an equal position to decide whether to use doping or not. One may say that those who care about their health have unfair disadvantage because they are forced sacrifice it for the chance to compete. The truth is that mostly those who do are ready to give up some of their long-term health come to facing such decisions.

What really happens, is that the ban on doping creates advantage for those who do not comply over those who comply. And this is truly unfair.

Ethics of cheating on doping bans

What should people tell their people about Lance Armstrong? Should baseball cards with Alex Rodriguez decrease in price? Should people in Jamaica stop talking to Osafa Powell?

The athletes who get caught usually use the universal tactic for defense: everybody does. And if it is true, one would find it hard to disagree that in such a case cheating is that unethical. If everybody is cheating, it is not cheating any more. But if I am the only one who cheats, than it is certainly unethical. But what if three quarters cheat? What if a half of top athletes cheat? What if a third? What if only one, who, courtesy of doping, becomes a favorite to dominate in the sport?

Here we should to remember the nature and the driving power of sports. As it was mentioned before, the sports industry is the winner-take-all industry. Of course, in each sport there is a group of athletes who earn big money and are famous, but this is always a very small percentage of total number of market participants. The claim that footballers in the UK earn more than surgeons is false: while Premier League players are highly paid, the median

professional footballer (there are at least 8 Divisions where professionals play) earns less than median surgeon. Athletes are driven by the dreams to be the best - the World Cup winners are in the history forever - the runners-up are being quickly forgotten. Olympic medal is great, but Olympic goal is what makes the country proud.

Given that the whole industry is being driven by the aspiration to be the best, I believe that doping stops being unethical, when a person knows that at least one competitor also uses doping. It might be reckless from point of view of health, it might be plain stupid, as there is a good chance to get caught, but in my opinion, it is morally justified if one is 100% sure that there are others in the sport who use doping.