

Legalization of performance enhancing drugs in sport

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



When examining stories of competition from the past and present, all of them involve a winner and incontestably, a loser. Sports are the most popular form of competition where people will do almost anything to win, including cheat. Performance enhancing drugs are one of the most talked about issues in sport today. Though many people think that doping has only been an issue for the past 30-40 years, there is evidence of athletes using substances to enhance their performance since the early Olympic games in approximately 700 BC. The testing for substances have always been one step behind the latest drug and many tests for banned substance are not always accurate. This makes it very difficult to catch all of the so-called cheaters. Using banned substances can also have dangerous side effects when not used properly and in the past, many athletes have fallen victim to these problems. Due to the vast list of banned substances in high level sport, many athletes have been stripped of their titles when caught taking something as simple as an over the counter flu medication, which many people feel is not fair. The only solution to these issues in sport is to legalize these banned substances. This would eliminate skepticism, allow athletes to be on the same playing field, and potentially save their lives as they would be properly educated on how to safely take performance enhancing drugs. Enhancing performance in competitions or sports has been going on for years. It is believed that early Olympians consumed herbal, mushroom concoctions and would eat Molenaar 3 sheep testicles to increase their testosterone levels for competition (CBC). Today, many athletes take specially tailored vitamins and supplements to improve their performance in training and in competition. This is perfectly legal as long as these

substances do not end up on the banned substance list. Athletes are regularly tested not only during competition, but also randomly during training sessions. Though it may seem to work well, this system has many flaws. Many athletes take substances that are not yet detectable in tests, or they will flush the drug from their system before any testing can take place. Pampel explains that " authorities strive for better and more complete testing, others strive to find drugs that can aid performance without being detected. " (58). He refers to this struggle as " a high-tech version of cops and robbers. " (59). The battle is never ending, and the testing officials are always on the losing end. Athletes have always been enhancing their performance in order to win, whether the results come from taking a drug or taking a vitamin. Deciding which are legal and which are not is a very difficult task. Many stories have come up over the years about athletes who have been caught through testing with drugs from the banned substances list (almost 10 pages long). The majority of these athletes have had excuses, though some have been better than others. Among the excuses have been claims that the positive results were due to spiked drinks, CIA plots, vanishing twins, and accidentally drinking shampoo (Pound 83). Some of Molenaar 4 these people actually got away with their stories and were exonerated, though most of those types of stories are not enough. There is one case; however, that tends to stick out in the minds of Canadians that truly was an accident. Silken Laumann, a Canadian rowing icon, was stripped of her gold medal at the 1995 Pan Am Games along with the rest of her quadruple sculls teammates. Laumann tested positive for pseudoephedrine, an ingredient found in a Benadryl product, after being told by a team

physician that Benadryl would help ease her cold symptoms and that the drug was completely legal. What they forgot to mention to Laumann was the type of Benadryl she could legally take, which in turn led to her purchasing the wrong product and testing positive. Laumann feels betrayed and says that she "did everything in [her] power to ensure that what [she] was taking was not a banned substance." With such an expansive list of banned substances, it is impossible to separate the innocent from the guilty, such as the case of Laumann and the Canadian rowing team. Legalizing the use of not only performance enhancing drugs, but also allowing an athlete to take something as simple as a decongestant will eliminate the punishment of hard working athletes. Most people are familiar with the phrase "everything in moderation"; this is especially important when it comes to the things your body ingests. Vitamins, protein powders and other supplements all have labels on them that inform the consumer what is considered a proper and safe dosage. An athlete taking any of these will know how to do it safely, but if they take an illegal substance they have no guidance. Many of the new drugs that athletes take to improve their performance are still in early testing stages but without knowing much about the drugs, athletes do not know enough about dosages. Former athlete and president of the Canadian Olympic Committee, Dick Pound explains "when you [athletes] get to the next level of abuse, the risks increase exponentially. No one has any idea what the impact will be." (65). Athletes are not going to stop taking these substances; they want to win too badly. Legalizing the drugs will allow more attention to be paid to testing, learning side effects, and understanding safe dosages. This will help keep athletes safe. Athletes are not always the

ones to blame when testing positive for a banned substance. Sometimes, they have had nothing to do with any banned substances whatsoever. The testing process is flawed, and many tests have been known to produce false results. An athlete's sample may produce a positive test result, but they may not have taken any illegal drugs at all. Dietary habits or prescriptions can often be at fault; unfortunately there is no way accurately lay the blame. For instance the anabolic steroid Nandrolone is a drug that commonly comes up in tests. This can be due to the fact that eating meat from an animal that was given Nandrolone can transfer the steroid to humans. Nandrolone tests can also come out positive if a woman is pregnant or on the birth control pill (Pamphlet 83). Relying on athletes to be honest about if they cheated or ate some meat is clearly not an option. Therefore, if officials are not able to be 100% positive of the source of their results, then they should not be labeling that particular substance as illegal. No matter how far advances come in testing, there will always be a new substance to make athletes go faster, jump higher, or get stronger. The craving for success and the praise that comes along with it is natural to humans. Enhancing athletic performance has been occurring since the beginning of sport and competition, meaning it is time to stop fighting it because there is no end in sight. Athletes who have played fair and obeyed all will be punished for honest mistakes until performance-enhancing drugs are legalized. With physicians supervising and prescribing safe doses, there will not longer be the same dangers and risks involved to competitors who have so much potential. If these banned substances are allowed, they will no longer be looked at negatively by the sporting world. Athletes will all have equal

opportunity, and argument or doubt over the honesty of competitors will vanish. This is part of the evolution of sport, just like advances in nutrition, sporting equipment and training techniques. Legalizing these performance-enhancing drugs will benefit athletes and their fans. Athletes will have equal opportunities, be healthier, safer and overall happier. Legalizing performance-enhancing drugs is the only way to eradicate the word "cheater" from sport vocabulary

Molenaar 7 Works Cited " A History of Performance Enhancing Drugs" CBC. ca. CBC, 2010. Web. 21 Nov. 2010

Pampel, Fred C. Drugs and Sports. New York: Facts on File, Inc., 2007. Print.

Pound, Richard. Inside Dope: How Drugs are the Biggest Threat to Sports, Why You Should Care, and What Can Be Done About Them. Mississauga: John Wiley & Sons, 2006. Print. " Squeaky clean Silken tests positive. " Archives. cbc. ca. Canadian Broadcasting Corporation, 2007. Web. 19 Nov. 2010.