

The doping dilemma



Analytical Summary Paper: The Doping Dilemma In “ The Doping Dilemma”, Michael Shermer writes about the consequences and the ethics behind performance enhancing substances in professional sports.

He begins with an anecdote, which describes the feeling of getting “ dropped by your competitors on a climb” (420: 2). As described by the author in the development of the story, every athlete has a genetic limitation that regular training cannot exceed (421: 4). According to Shermer, the only thing to be done is to dope. Arguing that, in order for an individual to stay competitive nowadays, he needs to make use of performance enhancing substances. Shermer concludes that today’s drugs are better, harder to test, and the incentives usually favor them (421: 8/422: 9). The author effectively argues that there should be a direct shift on the incentives regarding sports doping. His experience read as a reflective narrative to young competitors who are now starting, and to those who are already veterans.

He believes that sports should return to the foundation of celebrating those rewarded by excellence, aided only by their determination to succeed. Shermer points out the scenario professional athletes have been facing since the 1990’s. Making performance enhancing drugs part of the team’s “ medical program”, team members are bound to embrace illegal substances in their preparation before they are cut from the team (421: 6). According to Shermer, his reasons for competing did not match the principles behind doping. He was a thirty-year-old academic with a career to return to, cycling just to test his physical limitations. However, he could relate to the young, amateur athletes who earn their living through sports and have no other ambitions in life, other than compete and win. These same athletes, who are

convinced that “ everyone else” dopes; therefore, they should do it too (421: 7).

Even though we rather deceive our minds from even considering that such competitors use drugs, we are lead to believe that they are left without option and support from athletic departments, teams, and confederations. From my perspective, it is clear why, many times, our “ idols” end up giving in to illicit substances. First of all, due to the evolution of drugs: the industry for these products has experienced an unpredictable growth in demand, making researchers and developers work harder on the final product to be more effective. Second, the competition between takers and testers has been consistently won by those guilty of the cause. Consequently, emphasizing the scientist’s advantage – whose work is constantly and solely dedicated to mislead testers – to over perform them in their own game. In addition to that, I believe that amateur athletes begin their journey as sportsman at a relatively young age. Uneducated and immature, without familiar and technical support to back them up, they might end up on the wrong track towards success.

Very early the doping chain reaches them: professionals dope in order to stay competitive, and, before they know, they are doping too; however, simply to compete. While Shermer asserts that the third reason for the success of doping is the incentive behind it, he provides multiple concrete ideas to shift the incentive back to competing in compliance. Ideas such as immunity to athletes for past doping; improve the testing methods by doing it more often, through independent agencies right after competitions; reward the development of unknown testing methods; increase the competitor’s

penalty and make the appeal system fair and trustful; and finally, disqualify the team even if only one member is under use of drugs. According to the author, Nash equilibrium needs to be reached in sports. This means that, in sports, the appeal to cheating needs to be reverted so that it has a lower utility cost than playing by the book (422: 11/423: 12). From his suggestions, I believe that readers might start to find that sports are not as ethical, truthful and fair as they have once judged to be. Essentially, the public's disbelief to professional sports is rather due to their shock with reality, than because of the actual cheating taking place.

Since the issue with incentives is so acute, Shermer provides a very truthful and transparent analysis in his recommendations to grant – once again – belief to the spectators that sports could possibly become about honor, and not dishonesty. Given that the author is a competitor himself, it makes the reader more likely to consider his words of wisdom, especially because he offers examples of true accounts and events. To emphasize his recommendation analysis and to propose a deeper understanding, he uses the mathematician, John Forbes Nash, to persuade the reader towards his ideology. After reading this, spectators will have a better understanding of the false driving force behind the sports industry. However, they will be more incisive when making honesty have a greater utility cost than cheating. Shermer's analysis not only reveals what has been unknown, but it also raises public pressure on confederations to reward those who really deserve to compete. According to the facts mentioned above, I believe a major change in attitude from big decision makers is needed in order to achieve transparency in sports.

Young athletes should be under constant supervision and support, so that they are correctly directed towards professionalism. The right people should consistently check competitors at high-levels, making their will to cheat decrease by escalating the risk of doing so. Finally, I believe that my ideas provoke a deeper understanding of what is behind the public's superficial vision of sports competition. They emphasize the lack of respect by those who dope, the obvious absence of ethics, and the insufficient structure and support to incoming athletes, making us view and understand that what drives people is not being the best, but coming first – which are two completely different things.