

The Societal Impact Of Doping In Sports

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Introduction

Doping in competitive sports is the usage of banned Performance Enhancing Drugs (PED), and generally refers to as an unethical practice. The regulatory bodies and sports competition organizations use the term 'doping' to refer to the use of PEDs in sports. As a rule of thumb, doping is unethical, and organizations consider doping prohibited. Moreover, athletic programs and individual players explicitly evade detection through medical measures, which also involve overt cheating and deception. Anti-doping authorities and other opponents of doping emphasize the [health risks associated](#) with the consumption of performance-enhancing drugs. Additionally, players of the sport need to stand by the 'spirit of sport' and work on portraying drug-free sports as exemplary for society. In a similar way, equality of opportunities for athletes is [moral argumentation grounded in principles](#) of liberty and equality. Doping does provide a level playing field to the players, but utilitarianism defines the action as 'wrong' if it reduces the overall well-being of the society. Doping reduces the benefits to society in socio-psychological and health terms.

Cheating or Levelling of the Playing Field?

In defence, G. Pascal Zachary argues that the use of PEDs, along with [genetic enhancement](#), can increase overall societal well-being through satisfying the need for Übermensch (superhuman), which results in declining public interest in sports. Übermensch (Super Human) is a concept first presented in the book, "*Thus Spoke Zarathustra*," written by [Friedrich Nietzsche](#). Übermensch is the set goal of humanity and a shift from religion towards human ideal. In a similar way, sports scholar Verner Moller argues that setting different standards for athletes and conforming to distinctive morals at large is hypocrisy in society. Jen Floyd, writer at Fox Sports, also argues that modern humans are living in a pharmacological society. In a similar way, Floyd emphasizes living in a modern society that relies on shortcuts and faking things to improve overall satisfaction, but considering sports as the evil empire of cheating means double standards. On the contrary, athletes are doing something similar to what everyone around them is doing, which is actually not the problem.

Goldman's Dilemma

Furthermore, Goldman's dilemma asks a question from elite athletes, which was asked by publicist, physician and osteopath Robert M. Goldman. The question explores whether the player will take a drug that could guarantee them overwhelming success in games but will make them die in five years. The research is an extension of the research previously conducted by Mirkin and illustrates that half

of the athletes were willing to actually take the drug despite the odds of dying after a five-year span. However, modern research (James Connor and co-workers) yielded a much lower number and reduced the scope of previous research only to the general population of Australia. These statistics explain the eagerness of players to take PEDs to achieve personal goals and ambitions. The empirical evidence suggesting that half of the participants are actually willing to take drugs that reduce their life longevity means irrational thinking on the part of the players. Sports is not only about physical strength or advantage due to genetics; moreover, sports is the show of combining skills, talent, education, dedication, and many other traits.

Doping in Cycling Races

Moller (2008) contends that cyclists are the ones who actually pioneered the use of doping to enhance individual endurance levels in six-day cycle races. The merit of doping is in the form of a coping mechanism for cyclists during the race when faced with external pressures, which turned out to be internal integration for professionals of the cycling race. The rationale behind doping in cycling is the necessity of survival in professional cycling. Additionally, the measures of the cycling governing body (UCI) and the Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) were less effective when viewed in light of the trend that kept the phenomenon of doping nearly at the same level as when the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) came into existence. Participants in sports, especially elite sports, are motivated to actually take PEDs, which will make them put at health risk. PEDs not only affect physical health but also affect the psychology of players.

As per World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) statistics for the 2011 World Championships in Athletics, forty-four per cent of the participants used some kind of banned substances during their respective careers. Additionally, thirty per cent of athletes participating in 2011 Athletics admitted use of banned substances at least once in their careers. On the contrary, players were tested for standard procedures and protocols of the championship in 2011 Athletics, and the percentage of getting caught was merely 0.5 per cent. Moreover, the entire track and field team from Russia was banned from the Olympic Games (2016) with allegations of state-sponsored and sanctioned doping programs in place. These findings also suggest that the increasing trend of doping has pressurized sports policymakers to view the possibility of benefiting from doping. However, doping's levelling of the playing field effect benefits the economy more and, to a lesser extent, benefits society. The pros and cons of doping legalization for society are negative in the long run; moreover, the attack on society is of an ethical and moral nature.

Level Playing Field

Khan's (2017) article in Forbes highlighted the nature of elite sports and stated that games have competitive sporting advantages for gifted players and that elite sports 'may be biased against the disadvantage.' Roomy Khan (2017) is a Personal Finance Expert and writes, "Each year, over 3000

athletes worldwide test positive for banned substances.” Every athlete is not genetically gifted, and the competitive advantage some players gain over other players due to genetics can be at the outset with the regularization of doping in sports. Although the biological position of each player may be different, actual competitive sports do not rely only on the competitive advantage gained from genetics. The sports players capitalize on techniques of the game, natural talent, and drilling that takes place within training sessions. The article outlines the need of some players to opt for biological manipulation through [enhancement drugs](#), which provide a level playing field to those who are in a disadvantaged position. One of the influential proponents of doping for sports is Julian Savulescu, an Oxford Professor, who states, “By allowing everyone to take drugs, we level the playing field... we remove the effects of genetic inequality. Far from being unfair, allowing performance enhancement promotes equality” – December 31, 2017.

Equity Theory and Doping

In a similar way, Scott & Edwards’ (2017, p. 31) application of equity theory to the sport of cycling describes the motivation behind some cyclists to utilize Performance Enhancement Drugs (PEDs) to improve their respective competitiveness. The research of Scott & Edwards provides insight into one of the sports, ‘cycling,’ and the use of doping in the sport, which has implications for understanding general questions pertaining to the ‘level playing field’ effect of doping in sports. Stacy Adams first introduced the equity theory, which can be used to understand doping behaviour amongst players in sports with a case study of cyclists (Adams and Freedman, 1976, p. 48). The equity theory assists in rationalizing the motivational aspect, along with perceived inequity, of doping behaviour in the case of cyclists. The research findings of Scott & Edwards (2017) illustrate the desire of players at elite level sports to become competitive, and the negative emotions associated with inequity contributed to the continual utilization of doping by cyclists to make the field level playing. Additionally, the research concludes with emphasizing on ‘commercialization of sports’ and ‘cycling sport culture’ as contributing factor towards the behavior of doping through PEDs.

For instance, the physical demands of professional cycle racing, coupled with the expectations of the stakeholders, which include spectators, sponsors, and coaches, put enormous pressure on cyclists to explore a variety of tools and techniques for performance enhancement. Brewer (2002, p. 279) argues that doping was administered openly before the cycling governing bodies changed their attitude towards doping. Union Cycliste Internationale (UCI) and the International Olympic Committee (IOC) prohibited the use of performance-enhancing drugs in sports in the years 1966 and 1967, respectively. Doping is not a modern phenomenon, although the intensity at which its reliance has increased in sports, which subsequently brought analysts to argue the legitimization of doping for providing a level playing field in sports. In ancient times, substances were used to increase individual and group performance in chariot racing. For example, combatants and athletes in ancient times were served food, along with treatments aimed at increasing muscles, with the perspective of diet, nutrition, and herbal infusions for strengthening players before chariot races. In recent times, cycling and baseball players’ use of performance-enhancing drugs has resulted in popular controversies. Not

surprisingly, the views of players regarding PEDs vary significantly, but sports organizations and authorities have strictly regulated the use of drugs in sports. The opponents of 'doping legalization' presents diverse argument, but the philosophical foundation of those arguments lie in the value of not going against 'spirit of sports.'

For example, 'Illustrated London News' discussed the strengths and weaknesses of managing to live through a week with an amount of rest, which is infinitesimal, and travelling five hundred miles during 138 hours. Furthermore, discussion involves the lack of sufficient reasoning behind practices, that is, constant repetition of facts. In 1807, Abraham said he used laudanum, containing opiates, to make him able to stay awake for twenty-four hours when competing with Robert Barclay. Seventy years later, walking races are stretched to five hundred miles, and the next year, five hundred and twenty miles at Islington, London. The economy plays its due role in accelerating the process of development, and the popularity of the event, with each day 20,000 spectators cheering, had an encouraging effect on promoters, which paved the way for cycling races of a similar nature. The resulting impact in the form of six-day bicycle races across the Atlantic and America explains the fascination of the public at large.

Basic finance is at work; that is, with an increase in spectators paying at the gate, the higher the incentive for riders to stay awake through the means of PEDs to make the ride the greatest distance. The French word for healer, 'Soigneurs,' assisted in the exhaustion of the cyclists, and the role is similar to helpers in boxing. The supplies for the event included a drug, Nitroglycerine, which medical practitioners use to treat and stimulate the heart after a cardiac attack. The cyclists used the drug to improve their breathing during the race, which also resulted in the form of repercussions, such as hallucinations. Major Taylor refused to continue the race in New York and stated, "I cannot go on with safety, for there is a man chasing me around the ring with a knife in his hand." Eventually, the public reaction turned against the trials of a similar nature.

The premise of doping legalization is that genetics can create an uneven playing field in sports, and doping can assist in making the field even. The opponents of doping reject the premise, and the general argument is the lack of societal concern for an 'uneven playing field.' The second premise for doping legalization is the elimination of the genetic advantage of some participants in sports over others through heavily regulated doping programs. The opponents also reject the premise and state that the whole point of sport is to utilize a combination of resources for the game, such as natural talent, education, biological excellence, and skills, which affect the beating of the opponent. The attitude of 'who could out-dope everyone else' is an unhealthy attitude, and setting these morals would adversely affect overall societal morals. Henceforth, the premise of creating a more even playing field among participants in sports can actually redo the world to society.

Utilitarianism and Doping

Philosophy provides an understanding of the moral problem through tools and techniques that

analyze the issue under certain assumptions. [Utilitarianism is the ethical philosophy of John Stuart Mill and Jeremy Bentham](#) and is widely used in social sciences for analyzing issues with ethical and moral perspectives. The philosophy of utilitarianism states that the action is right action if it promotes the well-being of the overall society and subsequently wrong if it reduces the well-being of the overall society. The promotion or reduction of well-being is the collective well-being of the society and not just the well-being of the person taking action. In other words, action does not only affect the well-being of the individual taking action, but it involves other people and places. Three general axioms for analyses of doping within the context of utilitarian tradition are as follows:

1. The only thing with intrinsic value is happiness or pleasure.
2. The happiness of everyone is equally important.
3. Actions are simply right if they tend to promote well-being, and they are wrong when they promote unhappiness.

Henceforth, doping tends to promote the well-being of the participants and provides a level playing field for the participants of the game. It certainly increases the well-being of all the players, if doping is a routine process, by removing genetic advantages with some of the players. Additionally, doping does not serve the purpose of sports because sports are not merely for entertainment; instead, sport allows society to stay vibrant and healthy. Not only the use of PEDs has negative consequences for the players, they also tend to take away the spirit of sport. As the axiom emphasizes the intrinsic value of 'happiness,' doping reduces the overall happiness level through faking the process. The legalization of doping can significantly change the tide in favour of a society that relies on romantic consumerism.

The second axiom emphasizes the overall happiness of all affected by the action. In the case of doping in sports, the whole of society gets a share, whether socially or economically. On the one hand, doping allows players to perform at their best, and on the other hand, it deprives people of the chance to stay healthy and fit. Artificial life is only going to make society a place for the sale and purchase of things that will no longer be meaningful to people. Lastly, the third axiom highlights 'action' as right if it promotes well-being, and doping in sports does promote well-being. However, doing a SWOT analysis of doping in sports yields different outcomes than expected. For example, doping in sports can provide a level playing field to all the players and can also increase the overall economy of the sport. On the contrary, the moral theory of utilitarianism suggests that raising the 'happiness' level does not mean that society is right. If the personal health of a player deteriorates due to the consumption of PEDs, then the resulting impact is similar to the Gladiator Games in Ancient Rome. Yes, doping allows for a level playing field; however, it is at the cost of personal health to the player, coupled with overall societal satisfaction level. However, the increase in crowds at a sports game due to doping use is a need of a consumerist society and not the actual satisfaction level of society.

Conclusion

The use of PEDs in sports is on the rise, and players from different sporting categories are utilizing drugs to enhance their respective strengths. There exist arguments in favour of doping legalization, and it provides a level playing field to players at the genetic level. However, it has negative consequences for the health of participants and negatively contributes to the society where young people find the phenomenon attractive and put their respective health at risk. The logic is similar to suicide, and taking one's own life is generally illegal around the world, except for a few nations. Allowing PEDs to balance the genetic advantage is sending a negative message to the next generations of the human race. The moral philosophy of utilitarianism also points in the direction of categorization of doping as a 'wrong' action because it reduces the well-being of overall society and not just the well-being of players. The upward trend of PED consumption for sporting purposes is due to the perks and benefits associated with becoming a champion or winning an important game for the team and nation. Cyclists, with the aim of increasing endurance for six days in a race, are also aiming for adverse health outcomes. However, committing to drugs despite knowing the consequences is not a rational decision making and does not benefit society. The legalization of doping will make the field level playing for players in genetic terms, but the socio-psychological and health costs of doping are higher.

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