

On the Subject of Doping History

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"Human beings have never had clean sport"

Charles E. Yesalis

I would like to express my happiness due to the publication of Journal of Sport and Social Sciences' first issue. The subject that I will share with you is related to the history of doping, one of the most common and illegal methods applied to gain unfair primacy in sports environments.

Pharmacologically, doping may be understood as attempts to enhance performance in sport by illegal administration of pharmaceuticals or application of prohibited methods. In other words, doping is an athlete's use of prohibited drugs or methods to improve training and sporting results.

Contrary to common belief, doping is not a matter of today's world. The use of prohibited substances for performance enhancement in sports has been known since ancient times. Various cures were used to increase athletic performance in third century BC. Chinese physicians recommended the use of an extract from the plant Ephedra called "Ma Huang" to enhance performance thousands of years ago. The Indian physician Sutruta recommended the eating of testicles to enforce virility around 300 B.C., and the Huns consumed testicles before battles obviously with the same aim. The use of the strong stimulant cocaine (coca leaves) in parallel to caffeine (coffee, guarana, cola nuts and mate tea) is reported from Latin America. Incas were reportedly able to run the distance from Cuzco to Quito (1750 km) in 5 days under the influence of those stimulants – almost incredible even with cocaine (Wadler and Hainline, 1989).

Some stories suggest that the practice of performance enhancement goes back to the original Olympics held in ancient Greece. At that time, athletes were said to consume certain potions or foods thought to confer some benefit on the playing field (cited in Rosen, 2008). Hallucinogenic mushrooms were taken in the third century BC to enhance performance during Olympic competitions, which were held between 776 BC and 393 AD. Critically considered, the materials available at that time may probably be categorized between nutrients or nutritional supplements (like eggs, meat, blood) and real "drug-like" substances with objectively expected activity, like bull testicles, or alcoholic beverages with their nevertheless two-edged effect on performance (cited in Müller, 2010). Potions were also used to patch up wounded athletes, so they could participate in the next round of the contest. Roman gladiators drank ashes mixed with water against bruises and abdominal cramps. Every trainer considered himself a sports doctor. Serious doctors, like Galenus, condemned their practices and thought that athletes ruined their own body.

(<http://ancientolympics.arts.kuleuven.be/eng/TC024EN.html>).

Sports columnist, Sally Jenkins, indicates that the ancient Olympic champions were professionals who competed for huge cash prizes as well as olive wreaths, lived on the public dole and were sometimes recruited by competing cities seeking status. Most forms of what we would call cheating were perfectly acceptable to them, save for game-fixing. There is evidence that they gorged themselves on meat -- not a normal dietary staple of the Greeks -- and experimented with herbal medications in an effort to enhance their performances. Olympic scholar William Blake Tyrell, author of "The Smell of Sweat: Greek Athletics, Olympics, and Culture," has observed: "Winning was everything. If they thought a rhinoceros horn would help them win, they would have ground it up." (Jenkins, 2007).

This antique "doping" was strictly prohibited by the rules of the ancient Olympic Games. The sanctions were however much more severe in the old Greek Olympics as well as in horse doping. Prokop (2002) mentions that even death penalties were given. When Emperor Theodosius abolished the ancient Games in the year 395 AD, the reasons he gave were that they had become "a hotbed of cheating, affronts to human dignity and doping" (Dirix and Sturbois, 1998).

Although doping was banned by the top most authority in ancient times some new findings reveal that it was often used by the athletes and their trainers based on some new findings. According to very new archaeological findings in the Aegean province of Aydın suggest that using performance-enhancing drugs in ancient Greece was not only permitted but celebrated. Locals living in the ancient city of Magnesia (Magnesia is located in Tekinköy village of Ortaklarresort in Germencik city of Aydın, on the road between Ortaklar and Söke) produced potions from the mood-altering plant mandrake, researchers have said, noting that their involvement with the drug gave them pride of place. Turkish Professor Orhan Bingöl, who is leading archaeological excavations at the site, located in Aydın's present-day district of Germencik, said: "Part of the [local] stadium was allocated for people who came from the ancient city of Ephesus. It is also observed that some political groups as well as bakers, gardeners, bird sellers had combined tickets. A tablet shows the most important part of the stadium, which has a capacity of 60 persons, was spared for a group of people called 'Mandragoreittoi.'" He also noted that the Mandragoreittoi produced mandrake, the genus of which is mandragora. "That indicates that doping was not a crime back then, but rather that those who produced that substance had a special place in society and were encouraged." (<http://www.hurriyetdailynews.com/ancient-sportsmen>)

As the last word, doping is not a modern art. It's just the medicine that's new. It means that there have always been individuals who in the pursuit of victory at the expense of challenging and disregarding social norms. Regardless of where competitors are- in war, in business, or in sport- they will seek to obtain a vantage over their opponent(s).

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