
The Ethical Side of Using Steroids

Moral Implications of Enhanced Drugs

Lots of people enjoy watching professional sports. NBA, NFL, and Olympics all have impressed thousands of people. One of the most attracting factors of professional sports is that you could see someone performing a skill which you would never be able to do. We were all amazed by the speed of Usain Bolt when he broke the world records of men's 100 meters. We also acknowledge that Michal Phelps is extremely gifted when he won 8 gold medals in the 2008 Summer Olympics. But what if someone tell you that their amazing abilities are achieved through the aid of performance enhancing drugs? Perhaps you will be less amazed since it sounds like cheating, and most likely you think that the usage of these drugs should be banned in professional sports. However, my thoughts are different; I think some of our moral intuitions about not using enhancing drugs in professional sports are not as concrete as we thought. In short, the usage of performance enhancing drugs should not be banned, for it does not go against the notion of fairness, does not significantly harm the athletes, and it does not violate the spirit of sports as well.

The most common and widely accepted view for banning the usage of performance enhancing drugs, according to Randall Lea's article "Ethical considerations of biotechnologies used for performance enhancement" (2009), is that the usage of these drugs gives the users an unfair competitive advantage over other athletes who do not use such drugs. Also, using performance enhancing drugs in competitions is against the rule and is therefore unfair. Since professional sports require a fair environment for everyone to compete, the usage of performance enhancing drugs ought to be prohibited.

Certainly this fairness argument is very convincing. However, it has a flaw. It was suggested in the article "Fairness and performance enhancement in sport" by Craig Carr (2008) that, give every athlete the opportunity to take enhancement performing drugs equally, and then no one will have the advantage. This point does reveal a significant problem with the concept of fairness. Indeed, if everyone can take the drug as they wish, it is certainly fair for everyone in the competition. Our notion of "fair" simply requires the exact same external conditions for every athlete, and this is the only thing that fairness should require in the context of sports. Carr further argues that it does not make much sense to ban the usage of performance enhancing drugs based on the reason that it violates the rules. He claims that sometimes it promotes fairness to breaking the rules. For example, in basketball games, there are times a player deliberately fouls to prevent his/her opponents from scoring. Everyone who likes watching

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basketball knows this is a very common strategy for playing basketball, and no person thinks it is unfair since both team can do it and it is a reasonable thing to do when one team is leading by its opponents by a few points and the time is running out. This is the same argument supported by Randall Lea (2009) that breaking the rule does not always follow unfairness. Thus it is not very convincing to accuse the usage of performance enhancing drugs simply based on the idea of violating the rules. Lea even suggests that the appropriate usage of enhancing drugs can create a fairer playground for those naturally disadvantaged athletes. Lea argues that the racial and genetic differences between athletes always exist. As a result, no matter what rules are made, fairness could never be maintained between athletes. The usage of enhancing drugs, however, can actually help level this differences between athletes, and is therefore promoting fairness.

However, after find the fairness argument does not work as desired, some people might still against the usage of performance enhancing drugs in professional sports. According to Dag Vidar Hanstad and Ivan Waddington's article "Perspectives, sport, health and drugs: a critical re- examination of some key issues and problems" (2009), these people concern the negative effects of enhancing drugs on athletes. They worry that athletes will be significantly harmed by taking enhancing drugs and probably cannot have a healthy life after their retirement. Considering these grim outcomes for the athletes, people argue it is necessary to prohibit the usage of enhancing drugs.

It is never wrong to think about a person's health. However, this view is not correct for two reasons: first, the harms of some widely used enhancing drugs are not as significant as most people think. For example, anabolic steroid is a very common type of enhancing drug which has been associated with many negative reports on its effects. But as Michael Evans-Brown, Rob Dawson and Jim McVeigh (2008) point out in "The dire consequences of doping," most of these reports are just case reports that do not give people a general sense of the drug's actual effects. In fact, according to Evans-Brown, Dawson and McVeigh, a research have showed that about half of the people who take anabolic steroid only report acne as the consequence, and those people claimed acne as an "acceptable hazard." Of course, this is not saying that performance enhancement drugs cause no harms, but consider the second reason: at the level of professional sports, it is much more likely that athletes will get significant injuries from intense competitions with others. According to Dag Vidar Hanstad and Ivan Waddington (2009), it is expected from the player that they should be used to the pain, injuries, and playing with them. Given this fact, people will find that the majority of the injuries that athletes get in professional sports are from the competition itself, not from taking any certain kind of drugs. As Hanstad and Waddington point out, the cases of injuries from professional level sports competition is numerous each year, while the number of significant suffering from usage of steroids remains unknown. Since it is considered normal for the players to play with pain, the argument based on health losses its power immediately. If we really want to grant a healthy life for the athletes in

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professional sports, the fundamental ways of playing in professional sports is the real thing we need to change, not the usage of enhancing drugs.

But some people still think it is inappropriate to make it legal for professional players to take performance enhancing drugs. According to Randall Lea (2009), people argue that it is against the spirit of sports even if the usage of enhancing drugs in professional sports could be made fair for everyone and it does not harm the athletes significantly. The spirit of sports, according to Lea, is defined to be certain virtues praised by people in competition, such as the hard work of athletes, the excellent demonstrations of certain skills. Lea reports that people are uncomfortable with taking drugs to help enhancing their performance because it makes them feel that the efforts made by the athletes like hard training are undermined. Also, they might feel the excellent performances are not given by the athletes, but by the drugs. Holding these moral intuitions, some people think the usage of enhancing drugs can never be allowed in sports.

It is really against our moral view that the usage of performance enhancement drugs can be legalized. However, as Steven Kotler (2008) writes in "Juicing 3.0", despite our moral disapproval, the fact is that the usage of enhancing drugs has a history as long as sports itself. Kotler concludes that the "history of sports is merely the history of drugs." If people really affirm their moral intuitions, the usage of enhancing drugs should not have existed for so long. Speaking of spirit of sports, no one could easily find an exact definition of it. As suggested by Craig Carr (2008), on one hand, people think it is wrong to use enhancing drugs because it is not the athletes themselves performing the skills, but it is the drugs that helping the athletes to achieve the results. On the other hand, various methods are deployed either by the coaches or by scientists to improve the performance of athletes, yet these methods are enhancing the athletes in a way very similar to performance enhancing drugs. For example, Kotler points out that the swim suit made by special material to help swimmers reduce the resistance under water is widely used in professional swim competitions, while no one blame the use of it been "inhuman" or making the performance "unnatural." Besides such bias on enhancement of performance, Craig further argues that in fact, what is valued in professional sports is not the hard work of players, but only the actual excellent performance demonstrated by them. He writes that who gets the golden medal is completely irrelevant to the effort done by the athletes in the preparatory stage. And what is relevant, according to Craig, is the actual performance demonstrated by athletes in the competition. Indeed, this view does not sound as moral as people would like, but it is the reality, the Olympic motto is Citius, Altius, Fortius (faster, higher, stronger). Not work harder. Therefore, promoting the prohibition of enhancing drugs by appealing to the spirit of sports is not valid.

It has now been presented that some of our common moral intuitions which go against the practice of performance enhancement in professional sports are not totally sound. Specifically, we cannot simply argue that the usage of enhancing drugs in professional sports should be

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banned by just appealing to the notion of fairness, health of athletes and the spirit of sports. On the contrary, the refutations of these arguments are actually served as supporting points for the legalization of enhancing drugs in professional sports. This fact showed that some of our moral intuitions may not as concrete as we thought, and we do have some reasons to legalize the usage of performance enhancement drugs in professional sports.

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