

Drug Abuse in Sports and Its Psychological Effects on Athletes

Dr. J.B. Vipene

Department of Educational Foundations, Faculty Of Technical And Science Education
Rivers State University Of Science And Technology, Port Harcourt, Rivers State, Nigeria

Dr. A. N. Amasiatu

Department Of Human Kinetics And Health Education, University Of Port Harcourt, Port Harcourt, Rivers State

Abstract

The paper examined drugs and its abuses in competitive sports. The type of drugs that are banned in sports, that are performance-enhancing drugs such as psycho-stimulant, sympathomimetic amines (Amino substances) central nervous system stimulants, narcotics etc. Effects of doping drugs on the athlete and the psychological implication, which include deterioration of performance with constant use indiscipline and some times destitution may result. Suggestions were made on ways of curbing drugs abuse in competitive sports including counseling. The paper concluded that if the suggested measures are adopted, drug use in sports will be reduced to the barest minimum or totally eliminated from sports; that the use of drugs in sports if not curbed may result in more negative psychological consequences on both the athlete and society in general. (Journal of Vocational, Science & Educational Development, 4(1). April, 2003: 66 – 71.

Introduction

Pharmacology has been defined as the Science of drugs and how they are prepared while drug is described as an agent that affects living matter (Klafa & Arnhem, 1981). The issue of abuse, illicit trafficking in drugs is so serious that the 26th day of June, every year is to be observed as international Day Against Drug Abuse and Illicit Trafficking in Drugs. United Nations General Assembly declared this day. It was first held in Vienna, Austria in June, 1987.

Medication of all kinds are used by athletes both prescription and non-prescription. Drug abuse is usually regarded as the taking of drugs in a way, which deviates from approved medical or social patterns. The non-medical use of drugs may represent a means of escape from the monotony of living or may be the individual's attempt to cope psychologically with stress of life. A continuous use of drugs leads to a state of dependence on it, characterized by an urge to take drug on a continuous basis to maintain the new pathological state of wellbeing. According to Noois, (undated). All drugs with all abuse potential act on the central nervous system and either stimulate or depress it. The central nervous system depressants suppress the higher centers of inhibitory control and thus causes an uninhibited release phenomenon, which is manifested as euphoria. In larger quantity they cause marked dysphoria and depress respiration, blood pressure and produce a fall in body temperature.

Stimulants are usually used as mood elevators and produce a state of well being postponed fatigue and improve task performance. This is one of the reasons why resort to the use of such drugs to enhance athletic fit. By that the aim of physical prowess which sports competition is supposed to achieve is defeated. The commonly abused drugs in this category include amphetamines and cocaine. Drug and alcohol abuse is becoming common amongst our youths from where our athletes are drawn from.

Reasons for Using Drugs in Sports

The causes for its uses are obvious, according to Gabodmosi (1988), some use drugs to improve their performances in sports. Some too use drugs for social reasons that is to overcome their shyness and move freely with peers. For athletes it is presumed that drugs relieve tensions and tiredness of muscles.

Symptoms of Drug Abuse

Symptoms of drug abuse as outlined by Gbadamosi (1988) amongst others are sleeplessness, aggressiveness, easily irritated, truancy and petty money stealing. Others include depression, indifference to personal image etc. These are signs that when they appear in sportsmen and women the danger of control arises because they are used to pattern. This poses a lot of danger for the athlete because with the passage of time, the chances of drug dependence increase and drug abuse becomes a way of live for the athletes.

Sometimes, it could lead to criminal state, insubordination to their coaches and constituted authority. Breaking of training rules, general indiscipline in camp. Athletes involved are usually the ones that are often broke in

monetary terms amongst their friends in camp as they use their money to purchase drugs, and look for money for the next round of drugs to keep them going. According to Bisaria, (undated) since we cannot have a society free of drugs, it is a question of use and abuse, regulation and control, socialization and acculturation to curb the menace. While various governments the world over is busy wiping out trafficking in dangerous drugs including the Nigerian government, people are busy circumventing various measures.

Commonly abused Drugs and their Effects on the Athlete

Primary natural products such as hemp or cannabis are usually cheap; you can buy rapps of N10.00. They are readily available too. They often provide a feeling of sublime and call for repetition of such experiences they create. Hence complete dependence is possible once somebody is involved in it. The modern addictive drugs have hallucinogenic properties, strong hypnotic effects and stimulant action (Amphetamines). These drugs synthetic Analgesic drugs are common in Medical practice. As Govil (undated), put it, their regular administration leading to physical dependence and addiction, which lead to mental changes. Example delayed comprehensive, weak memory, faulty decision, illogical reasoning and action. He went further to state “the psycho-physical damages resulting from prolonged indulgence may become irreparable in time. These dangers enumerated affect athletes; performances. It leaves a lot of psychological effects on the athlete who may discover that he/she is strong physically but has weal memory, faulty decision, delayed actions in taking decisions. He/she may be very hostile to even the coach who is suppose to be the closest person to him in training.

Drugs Used to Enhance Performance in Sports

Generally, drugs used in sports can be grouped into two main categories.

- a. Restorative Drugs: These are drugs used to treat injuries, illness and in some cases to suppress pain. They are therefore taken with the sole aim of restoring the athlete’s normal prowess. In this group are analgesics or anodynes pain relieving drugs, muscle relaxants etc.
- b. Addictive Drugs: This is usually taken with the aim of stimulating the athlete’s performance beyond his/her normal or natural limits. These drugs, which enhance performance is termed “Doping”.

Astrand & Rodahl (1988), defined doping as: the administration or use of substances in any form alien to the body or of physiological substances in normal amounts and with abnormal methods by health persons with the exclusive aim or attaining an artificial and unfair increase in performance in competition. Furthermore, various psychological – measures to increase performance in sports must be regarded as doping.

Doping artificially stimulates the organism causing uneconomic functioning of the whole body leading to over stretching of energy resources and physical overload. It slows down recovery rate and consequently the development of different prepathological and pathological conditions. This has led to premature deaths of sportsmen and consequent permanent health damages in their organisms. These harmful effects call for an organized war against doping and drugs generally. In support of this Ariens (1965), regard it as a matter of considerable concern, for it represents an unnecessary risk for the health of the user while any real advantage can only be expected from it for exceptional cases. Doping according to Anugweje (1989) is not completely a new phenomenon referring to Becket, a member of the international Olympic Committee’s Medical Commission and also a leading researcher into doping who wrote that in the Olympic games of the 3rd Century B.C., athletes tried improving their performances by the sue of substances. Anugweje (1989), further said, in 1965, Canal Swimmers in Amsterdam were using drugs, and in 1986, the first doping fatality in sports was said to be reported in Europe, of which the first scientific evidence of this phenomenon was made by a Russian chemist who was brought to Austria in 1940 by the Austrian Jockey Club. He demonstrated the presence of drugs in the saliva of horses.

The use of drugs, especially doping has acquired widespread use in professional sports especially, wrestling, weight lifting, boxing, football, cycling etc. It has also reared its ugly head in the ranks and file of Amateur Sports. Akono (1989) reporting the current International Olympic committee rules stated that there are five known banned groups of pharmacological substances or preparations. These include:

1. Psychostimulants: Examples are Amphetamines, phenmetrizine, cocain, fencainfamine etc. These are substances that act primary on the psychic, producing a stimulating effect and subdue weakness thereby causing a feeling of increased ability.
2. Syathomimethic Aminos (Amino substances): Examples are Ephedrine, Methoxyphenamine, Methylephedrine and Chemically or Pharmacologically related compounds. These are through the nervous flow respiration and other physiological system there aiding sports performance.
3. Central nervous System Stimulators: Examples are Nikethamide, Bemigrade etc. These drugs improve

- the reaction time or reaction to situations of an athlete.
4. Narcotic analgesics: Examples are Morphine, Heroin, etc. Their drugs reduces the effect of pain on the body. It is usually for combat sportsmen and women.
 5. Anabolic Steroids: Examples are chostebol neramol etc. this unlike the first four groups act in a chronic manner in what Medical Doctors will describe as the anabolic effect. This is a Arobable increasing the metabolism of proteins retention of water and other substances.

This long-term harmful effects are the occurrence of traumas, joint ailments, liver disease, intestinal diseases, cancer, high blood pressure, decrease sperm production in men, disruption of menstrual flow in women, muscularlinization of women and stops the growth of height of young growing sportsmen and women. Sometimes infertility. Apart from the aforementioned substances, there are others like the Beta-blokers. There are another groups of central nervous system acting drugs that are used by athletes. There are also other non-pharmacological ways of doping, example blood doping or blood transfusion.

Effects of Doping on athletes

Does doping really have any benbeficial effects on the athletes anabolic Steroids, present the possibility to the athlete of training harder for longer duration than is naturally possible. This enhanced training in turn leads to the enhancement of glycolytic enzymes in the muscle cells. Athletes in sprinting events, jumping, throw and weight-lifting activities patronize drugs a lot. The drug users have some advantage over the non-users. This is because the users can train longer and harder thereby enhance performance. Though this is short lived. According to Mohammed (1990) the record of the disgraced 1989 Olympic Sprinter Ben Johnson, of Canada, has dropped considerably. In an article caption “Ben Johnson Life Without Drugs”.

Psychological Implications to the Athlete

Doping not only creases a situation of unequal participation during competitive sports but also disrupts its moral and ethical basis, which affects the athletes psychologically. The disgrace meted out to Ben Johnson, of Canada is a typical example. He had advantage over other participants. If he was not detected out, this should have been enough to psyche others out of competition. On the other hand, he was caught and banned for two years, which psychologically affected him and tarnish his image worldwide.

Performance usually deteriorates with constant use of most drugs. This makes the athlete get to his peak very easily. This may cause easy frustration on the part of athletes. Consequently, the athlete will become very hostile to both coach and sometimes teammates who are not involved in drugs use. Indiscipline of all sorts result, which leads to breaking of bounds. Hiding out of camps without permission seeking for where to secure drug which he depends on.

As the monetary demands also increase, begging, borrowing or stealing becomes a way of life, this psychologically affects the athlete in performance. He thinks more of how to obtain drugs than he thinks of training. As such he cannot perform to his peak; because, he is not sure of where to get money to procure the next round of drugs. If this happens during a major competition, the athlete is bound to make mistakes because he hardly concentrates.

Depression is another psychological emotion usually exhibited by individual including athletes that use drugs. At this point in time, if they are competing or training properly as such, no activity makes meaning to them at this time. Indifferences to the athletes personal image and anti-social behavior may manifest which affects him psychologically. Most of the times they resort to a lot of self-defense mechanisms to safe image.

Anumonye & Ajaji (1988) outlined the following as the immediate psychological (emotional) effects of Indian hemp which is a common drug used amongst our youths including our athletes.

1. Distortion of the senses: Such as disturbance in timing of effects.
2. False confidence about one’s clarity of thinking.
3. Hampered performance in many ways including clumsiness in movement
4. Misinterpretation of things perceived often referred to as illusions
5. Observing things, which others do not observe, often called hallucination. This can affect any of the five sense organs
6. Delusion or abnormal thoughts, usually feelings of persecution or of grandiosity (that is of unwarranted greatness).

These psychological factors apart from affecting performance in sports adversely have its attendant dangers to

the family in particular and to the society in general. If the affected persons are Secondary School Students/athletes the kind of experiment at the Sports Institute of Rivers State, Isaka, where sports and academics are combined. Such students may not complete their academics career. They become danger to live with both in school and at home. They become truant in most of their dealings with other people.

Suggestions

1. Anti-doping control is very necessary in the country now. This involves special measure directed at the detection of doping drugs and substances used by athletes to enhance performance.
2. Proper dissemination of information on the harmful effects of drugs in sports should be encouraged in the country.
3. Counseling both in and out of school can reduce drug use to an extent
4. Since religion plays a major role in the life of individuals in the country, religious leaders should assist in educating their followers on the harmful effects of drugs use in sports
5. The availability of drugs especially addictive ones such as cocaine and Indian hemp should be made difficult by very strict and restrictive measures.
6. Coaches should be properly educated on drugs education so as to be able to educate their athletes
7. However, to curb drugs amongst youths, the effect by the Federal Government against drugs is highly commendable
8. The propaganda embarked on buy various organizations example that Lion Club, the Lioness Club, International Federal of Women Layers is also the right step in the right direction.

Conclusion

With these various measures, it is hoped that the use of drugs in sports will be drastically reduced if not eliminated in the nearest future. This paper therefore, conclude that the use of drugs to enhance sports performance may result in more negative psychological consequences on both the athlete and society in general.

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