



COMBATTING ILLICIT DRUG USE AND ABUSE AMONG NIGERIAN ATHLETES.

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Abstract

The menace of drug abuse has bedeviled sports since antiquity till present. As athletes of various sports endlessly seek for ways to attain improved physical and mental performance and excellence in competitions, quite a significant number get involved in various forms of doping to achieve their set goals. Sport federations and other stakeholders in the sporting world have continued to seek for solutions to eradicate the problem of drug abuse among athletes. It is apparent that drug testing alone is insufficient to combat the menace of illicit drug intake by athletes. Educating athletes remains a major way to minimize the problem of doping and eventually eliminate it. Increased funding should be provided to anti-doping agencies to aid them in carrying out testing of athletes. Stiffer penalties should be employed to further discourage athletes from involving in illicit drug consumption.

Introduction

From antiquity till date, the importance of sports in societies cannot be over emphasized. Sports serves as a means for entertainment, competition, development of physical fitness among other benefits. Sports are generally competitive in nature with various forms of rewards received by participants for excellent performance in them. The rewards for success in sports remains a major drive for most participants.

Sports is currently a multi-billion dollar industry thus there is a constant increase in competitiveness and the desire of athletes to win. This has made it mandatory for athletes and other stakeholders in sports to seek for methods of attaining increased adaptation, physical fitness and sports excellence. As a result, numerous athletes employ diverse training methods



and consume diverse ergogenic substances with the hope of achieving their desired success level. However, many of the substances and drugs taken by such athletes are either abused by them or are banned drugs by the regulatory anti-doping agencies.

Drug abuse in sports is assuming an alarming rate thus it has become an enormous problem threatening the existence of various sports. However, the use of drugs and other ergogenic substances in sports is not a new phenomenon. Kumar (2010) stated that the use of drugs in sports goes back centuries, all the way back to the very invention of the concept of sports. In ancient times, individuals with the highest levels of physical fitness were selected as athletes and were given food and treatments believed to aid in the development of their musculature. Scandinavian mythology says warriors drank a liquid mixture called "butotens", with the aim of promoting their physical strength even at the risk of insanity. A disputed theory is that the substance was prepared from a mushroom called *Amanita muscaria*. Athenian and Spartan competitors were massaged with chemical substances thought to improve their performance. As early as the 3rd century BC, Greek Olympic athletes used different wine concoctions and ate hallucinogenic mushrooms to enhance performance. Kumar (2010) stated that in ancient Rome, athletes involved in chariot racing drank herbal infusions to strengthen them before engaging in competitions. It is quite interesting to note that even in ancient times, doping was mostly considered unethical. For example, in ancient Greece, identified cheaters were sold into slavery.

Drug use and abuse in sports has continued to increase over the years. Jean-Pierre de Mondenard (2000) reported a case of doping in which a contestant in an endurance walking race in Britain, Abraham Wood, said in 1807 that he had used laudanum a substance containing opiates to stay awake for a period of twenty four hours during competition.

Oshodin & Egor, (1999) stated that the use of illicit drugs during the 1984 Olympic Games held in Los Angeles and the 1988 Olympic games held in Seoul became a very serious problem and this was re-enforced in the Atlanta Olympics Games of 1996. Synthetic Reports (2007) reported that of the 37 elite athletes from two sports federations that were tested for doping, 12 (32%) out of the sample taken tested positive. Laker, (2005) reported that the percentage of elite athletes involved in doping according to meta-analysis of reports on sport men and women varied from 10% to 90%

Over 30% of athletes that participated in the 2011 World Championships in Athletics admitted to have made use of banned substances at different points in their careers. The reports from a study commissioned by the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), showed that 44% of the athletes had used them. However, only 0.5% of those that were tested were caught (Ulrich, R., Pope, H.G., & Cleret, L; 2018). Russian track and field team was banned from the 2016 Olympic Games, as the Russian State had sponsored and essentially sanctioned their doping program (BBC Sport, 2017).



Drug Abuse In Nigerian Sports

Nigeria just like most other countries in the world is faced with the menace of drug use and abuse in sports. The view that Nigerian sports was completely free from the use of illicit drugs used to enhance sports performance has been proven wrong as literature is replete with several instances of Nigerian athletes found to have tested positive to illicit drug use both in international and local competitions. Emeka (1991); Oshodin & Egor (1999) asserted that there were reported cases of Nigeria athletes in different sports who tested positive to performance-enhancing drugs. Majority of these athletes were in weight lifting and athletics. Okujeni (1990) and Oshodin & Egor (1999) noted that one major reason why Nigeria as a nation may find it difficult to be completely free from the menace of illicit drug use in sports is as a result of external influence and interaction with other nations during international competitions.

Mgbor (1995) asserted that illicit drug use by Nigerian athletes is a major source of embarrassment to the Nigerian government and also to coaches and other stakeholders in sports. A relatively recent case is that of Nigerian weightlifter Chika Joy Amalaha who won the gold medal in the 53kg weight class and set a new record in the 53kg weight category in both the snatch and overall elements in the 2014 commonwealth games. However, she later tested positive to prohibited substances and was stripped of her medal. She was subsequently banned from participating in the sport for two years.

Efforts have been made to eradicate the problem of illicit drug use in Nigeria. However, it appears that the use of these drugs is on the increase. Levy (1997) stated that the reason for the increase in illicit drug use in sports can be attributed to the overriding urge by athletes to win competitions at all costs. Resulting from this, athletes decide to experiment using diverse diets, drinks and drugs in a bid to achieve their training and competition goals. The consumption of drugs in a bid to enhance sports performance and win competitions can thus be regarded as a global problem. One can therefore conclude that the reason why the use of illicit drugs to enhance performance in sports seem to continually be on the increase is because of the perceived benefits which await victorious athletes from governments, philanthropists and big enterprises after winning competitions. There is therefore a “win at all cost” mind-set thus promoting drug abuse.

Oshodin & Egor (2000) opined that a major reason for the growing incidence of illicit drug use in sports may be linked to the fact that the competitions are becoming tougher with increasing standard. New records are set in almost every competition and old ones are broken in most sports. Majority of sports are evolving at a very fast pace thus creating room for more participants, stringent selection processes and technological innovations. With all these changes, many youths succumb to the increased pressure and are determined to try out diverse drugs to improve their performance. Knots (2000) reported that many youths are involved in the use of



various drugs such as steroids, tobacco, amphetamines, cocaine, lysergic acid diethylamide (LSD) and other doping substances for various psycho-social reasons. Such reasons include escape from reality, frustration, expectation of failure in competition, pressure from team mate, social recognition peer approval and motivation from mass media.

Strategies for Curbing Drug Abuse

Alaranta (2006) stated that “Controlling doping only by tests is not sufficient; a profound change in the attitudes, which should be monitored repeatedly, is needed” This statement describes the current reality in relation to doping in sport in most part of the world. From the report submitted by Backhouse (2011) to WADA on the doping situation, it appears that, although drug testing and rules regarding illicit drug use in sports have been developed, it has not been the case in terms of education and prevention. It is obvious that drug testing alone can fail and is not adequate to combat the menace of illicit drug intake by athletes. Education of athletes remains a major way to minimize the problem of doping and eventually eliminate it. According to Lentillon-Kaestner, V., Hagger, M.S., & Hardcastle, S. (2012), preventive measures are needed to establish and fortify attitudes towards doping at an early stage of an athlete’s career. Elite athletes are members of a group that includes family, coaches, support staff and other athletes, and these relationships may encourage or minimize the behaviour towards the use of banned substances (Dunn & Thomas, 2012). For example, changing favourable attitudes towards doping into unfavourable ones, and teaching athletes how to resist pressure to engage in doping will help to reduce the intentions to engage in doping, even among athletes with a history of drug use (Lazuras, 2010).

Sas-Nowosielski and Swiatkowska (2008) highlighted that, with the increase in task orientation as against ego orientation, the attitudes towards doping have become more acceptable to people. They concluded that creating a motivational climate which promotes task orientation may aid anti-doping efforts. Kim, J., Kang, S.K., & Jung, H.S. (2011) reported that 79 % of Korean Olympians received regular education on anti-doping regulations from Olympic-sponsored education classes (64 %) and coaches (15 %). Striegel, H., Vollkommer, G., & Dickhuth, H.H. (2002) reported that 92 % of 74 elite athletes surveyed received a doping education update within the last 6 months, and most believed that the update was relevant. Also, the educational requirements of team doctors in relation to doping laws need to be assessed (Somerville, 2005).

Erdman, K.A., Fung, T.S., & Doyle-Baker, P.K. (2007) opined that individual consultations on dietary supplement use may be a more appropriate educational strategy for older competitors, whereas presentations given by credible sports medicine and sports science professionals may be better suited for younger athletes. It is also important to consider gender differences regarding the types of supplements selected.



More investment should be done by institutions such as the world anti-doping agency (WADA), national anti-doping agencies, national/international sport federations and other national/regional sport foundations or sports institutes by balancing the costs of control and prevention programmes. Sometimes, institutions develop and start prevention or educational programmes without suitable financial investment. Better controls are clearly needed, as are more effective educational programmes that do not necessarily involve greater financial investments.

Conclusion

The use of illicit drugs in sports continues to be a serious challenge facing sports all over the world today. It has become apparent that drug testing and punishment of erring athletes is insufficient to discourage majority of athletes from using drugs. As a result, focus should be on the setting up of special informative programmes designed for athletes to minimize the problem of illicit drug consumption. It is also vital for athletes to be introduced to these programmes at an early age. Sport institutions must provide adequate resources to projects in relation to anti-doping controls. Sport federations should ensure that sporting rules do not favour the possible advantages of using banned substances in competitions (i.e. by reduction of the total distance covered by competitors in competitions and allowing longer recovery between different stages of the competition). The programmes targeting athletes and those around them must be carefully planned and developed as a middle- to long-term objective.

Recommendations

1. Emphasis should be laid on educating athletes on the dangers of drug abuse and this should be done as early as possible in the athlete's career.
2. More funding should be provided to our national and local anti-doping agencies to aid them in carrying out testing of athletes.
3. Stiffer penalties should be employed to further discourage athletes from involving in illicit drug consumption.

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