

Guilt by Genetic Association

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Editorial

In the UK, performance enhancing drugs such as anabolic androgenic steroids (AAS) and human growth hormone are controlled under Schedule 4, part 2 of the Misuse of Drugs Act 1971 [1,2]. There is an exemption from restriction on the possession of these substances, when they are in medicinal products and are for self-administration. AAS can only be obtained in the UK for non-medical use from sources of unknown derivation such as the black market or internet [3,4]. These products will definitely not be manufactured in accordance with good pharmacological practice and in many cases will present a serious health threat for the users [5,6]. Past doping violations contravening the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) illustrate the excessive polypharmacy in the world of athletics. In the past they have identified the extensive doping regimes of international athletes such as Dwain Chambers and more recently Lamont Peterson in boxing, when he tested positive for Testosterone in his world title fight victory over Amir Khan [7,8]. The use of performance enhancing drugs is contrary to all Olympic values and creates negative role models for young athletes. It is essential that we punish athletes who have been unequivocally using drugs to improve performance. In addition, any non-competing individuals who have been complicit in illegal dealing in any aspect of our society should be severely punished.

Despite the need to expose the cheats, it is essential that we avoid at all costs, false positive conclusions resulting in the indictment of innocent sportspersons. False positive conclusions are equally as dangerous and disturbing in law as they are in medicine and all efforts must be maximised to prevent these occurring: they have a profound influence on the athlete's future career.

On the sixth of May 2014 the National Anti-Doping Panel (NADP) tribunal issued a life-time ban on the father of an amateur female boxer subsequent to a Crown Court conviction associated with the exchanging of anabolic-androgenic steroids [9]. In addition his daughter was banned from amateur boxing for four years. The father pleaded guilty to the charge but it was his daughter's sentence that gave cause for concern and an appeal was launched on her behalf. The defence believed that the ruling against her was unjust and unfair with the facts of her case being misdirected and misrepresented. The evidence that was adduced by witnesses acquitted the amateur boxer of all knowledge and complicity in her father's activities. In addition, she had a negative drug test complying with the NADP and UKAD specifications for sport and a clean enhanced criminal records bureau check (CRB). The thrust of her appeal was that beyond all reasonable doubt and on the balance of probabilities there was no evidence

linking her to the wrong doings of her father. The NADP tribunal dismissed her appeal on the 30th July 2014. It would seem she was assumed guilty by association as opposed to implication.

It does present cause for concern when quasi-legal authorities have the power to make such damning decisions sometimes based on weak and hearsay information, when there was never even a criminal trial, let alone a criminal conviction. Surely the only objective evidence in this case was a negative blood test which was undertaken by a world recognised scientific laboratory. The remaining evidence presented was circumstantial, based on hearsay [10].

To enable us to remove drugs from sport we must gain the confidence of the sportspersons involved. They must be confident that scientific objectivity will be paramount in all decisions made with reference to their sporting careers following an indictment of cheating with the use of drugs. The presiding committees must be technically and scientifically wise, ethical and open minded. When this is achieved consistently, confidence will be assured that the right decisions have been made about the sportspersons future career.

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