
‘PLAYERS ARE TESTED BY MY FEDERATION, SO NO ONE IS USING DOPING?’ AN INVESTIGATION OF ELITE ATHLETES’ PERCEPTIONS OF AND TRUST IN THE DOPING TESTING SYSTEM

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Abstract

AIM: Doping testing is a key component of current anti-doping strategies enforced by anti-doping authorities. Doping testing is a tool to detect and deter doping in sport. This paper investigates how Danish elite athletes perceive the functioning of the doping testing system in their sport. Particularly it answers the following questions: 1) To what extent do athletes perceive doping test as a deterrent? 2) How do athletes evaluate the prevalence of doping tests and the selection of athletes for doping controls? 3) To what extent do athletes trust the efficiency of the doping testing programmes in their sport? And 4) Do athletes’ perceptions of and trust in the doping testing system vary among athletes of different genders, ages and types of sport, and does previous experience of doping testing have an effect?

LITERATURE REVIEW: Studies have shown that a majority of athletes regard drug testing as a deterrent (Dunn et al., 2010) and that athletes are less likely to consider using doping if there is a high chance of being caught and banned (Huybers & Mazanov, 2012). The great majority of Danish athletes support doping testing (Overbye, 2013). However, the doping testing system faces a variety of challenges: the implementation of the World-Anti-Doping-Code and the national testing programmes differ considerably from country to country (Hanstad et.al. 2010); some athletes experience discomfort during doping controls (Overbye, 2013); and the system is confronted with difficulties in detecting some prohibited substances. Moreover, recent evidence illustrates how some doping athletes have avoided positive doping tests for years despite frequent testing. Additionally, athletes report a remarkably low degree of trust in the efficiency of other anti-doping efforts such as the ‘whereabouts’ and

TUE systems – in particular those athletes who have had personal experience of these administrative procedures (Overbye & Wagner, 2013).

RESEARCH DESIGN: A web-based questionnaire was emailed to Danish elite athletes representing forty sports (N=645; response rate 43%). Athletes were asked: “How do you perceive doping testing efforts in your sport?”, subsequently eight items were presented measuring the deterrent effect of, as well as athletes’ trust in and perceptions of the doping testing system. One item targeted whether athletes felt that the number of tests conducted and the athletes selected for control were appropriate. Athletes who to some extent disagreed with this statement were then asked why they were not satisfied with the current testing programme, and five reasons for being dissatisfied, as well as an open-ended answer option, were presented.

RESULTS, DISCUSSION, IMPLICATIONS: Results show that 75% of athletes consider the likelihood that a doping test would reveal the use of doping if selected for control to be so great that this is a deterrent. Nevertheless, the likelihood of actually being selected for control is perceived as a deterrent by ‘only’ 40% of the athletes. 23% disagree to some extent that the number of tests and the selection of athletes for doping controls are appropriate. Of these athletes, 81% want the number of tests increased; only 2% feel that testing is too frequent and 29% that the ‘wrong’ athletes are selected for control in their sport. 15% of all athletes agree to some extent that doping tests in Denmark are sometimes conducted so unprofessionally that it is possible to cheat during the control, whereas 40% believe that this is sometimes the case when being tested outside Denmark. Noteworthy athletes with previous experience of doping testing show greater trust in testing at a national level; conversely, they are more likely to distrust testing when conducted internationally (compared with athletes without experience of testing). The results confirm a relationship between (dis)trust in the testing system and personal experience of administrative procedures as shown with regards to TUEs and ‘whereabouts’ reporting. Results related to athletes’ trust in the testing system, however, show in some cases dissimilar and more complex patterns of (dis)trust. Additionally, despite showing a fairly high degree of trust in the ability of tests to catch doping athletes, the actual likelihood of being selected for control does not seem to be a deterrent for a majority of athletes. Anti-doping authorities depend on athletes’ support and trust in order to efficiently prevent doping in elite sport and to legitimise the rather extensive anti-doping programme. Therefore, athletes’ distrust and sense of injustice needs to be dealt with. More results and analyses on the variation of perceptions and trust in the doping testing-system among athletes of different genders, ages and sport types with or without experience of testing, and the managerial implications, will be presented at the conference.

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