

Doping



The temptation..

Doping is an evil — it is morally wrong, physically dangerous, socially degenerate and legally indefensible.

It is said that, to define doping is, if not impossible, at least extremely difficult, and yet every one who takes part in competitive sport or who administers it knows exactly what it means. The definition lies not in words but in integrity of character.

Originally, the word "doping" described the use of a thick liquid as a food or lubricant ! It then developed the slang implication of a narcotic or stupefying drug — hence the word "dope" describing disparagingly an individual who is mentally, morally and physically dulled. This may be called "negative" doping — a process resulting in an impairment of function. Such a method has, unfortunately, been all too well known in the world of racing horses and dogs for many years — so-called "nobbling". For some quite unexplained reason, in the modern world of competitive sport, it has acquired an exactly opposite meaning — the production of improved function or increased energy — "positive" doping.

This curse of using drugs with the intent and purpose of artificially increasing performance is a fairly recent phenomenon. It probably finds its developmental causes in a) the highly competitive

nature of modern sport, often associated with the factor of national prestige ; b) the far greater rewards that accrue from participation in sport — even, sad to say, amateur sport, than happened twenty or thirty years ago. At the same time, rapid advances in the science of pharmacology have produced a great variety of drugs, many of which are easily obtained and some of which are actually advertised.

How widespread is this sinister practice it is impossible to assess, and the answer to this question is certainly at present unknown. One hopes that it is less prevalent than might be deduced from the increasing number of reports that come to hand of cases in which it has produced unfortunate (if not disastrous) results. Not surprisingly, it is the big crowd-attracting professional sports which appear to produce the worst offenders — the lure of the awards, financial and otherwise, resulting from high powered performance being too attractive — but, unfortunately, there have been many well-authenticated cases in quite a number of amateur sports as well.

The problem has been extensively investigated, both in Europe (Switzerland, Denmark, Italy) and in the United States of America. The Council of Europe Committee for Out-of-School Education, set up a special working party solely

for the purpose of investigating the subject, This working party has already produced two very valuable reports in March and November 1963. The implications of doping are not only medical but these naturally bulk more largely in the public mind. It is fair to say that there is no medicament known which, bearing in mind the infinite variety of individuals who might use them and of conditions in which they may be used, can guarantee the correct degree of increased performance at the correct time. It is also true that any drug with a definite pharmacological effect in the required direction is potentially toxic and therefore dangerous. It constitutes a positive risk to the athlete. Habitual use of any drug potent enough to improve physical performances is likely in the long run to damage health. Continued use of stimulants (or depressants) automatically leads to increased dosage and so a habit is set up which is the first stage of addiction.

One of the most dangerous outcomes — and one often quite unappreciated — of the use of stimulants is the abolition of the normal physiological reaction to fatigue, in which case dangerous exhaustion may set in without warning. Again, these drugs automatically lead to a disturbance of co-ordination, both mental and physical, which can only be detrimental in the precision movements of many sports and the sense of euphoria or self-confidence engendered may lead to a dangerous sequence of events.

On the ethical or moral side, it is the weakness of character which allows an intent to obtain an unfair advantage over one's fellow competitor in sport that is such a depressing aspect of doping. Nothing could be more unsportsmanlike. Legally, there are many interesting facets, so far largely unexplored. What is the position of the doctor who prescribes or administers such drugs or worse still of the trainer or coach who does so ? Has the athlete suspected of doping any case against the administration (local, national or international) that inflicts sanctions on an offender ? Does medical investigation or testing or searching of clothes or equipment constitute technically an assault upon the person ? These, it is suggested, are points of some importance.

Socially, the example of drug-taking by sports heroes can, if known or even suggested, have possibly a devastating effect on the record-crazy youth of to-day. And, commercially, pharmaceutical firms supplying or even advertising relevant drugs should be made aware of the risks involved.

What can be done about all this ? Without doubt, the best long-term result — the abolition of this pernicious practice — can be achieved only by intelligent persuasion and explanation to those concerned — particularly the competitors. The inherent dangers of doping — immediate and protracted — should be particularised and exemplified, without any suggestion of accusation

or censure. One good point to make is that the taking of drugs is in itself an expression of an inferiority complex. This is surely the task of the medical profession in any country and especially of those doctors closely associated with sport, but educational and clerical authorities must also be prepared to share this responsibility.

However much common-sense and a sense of fair play may be instilled into an individual, the temptation, in this fast-moving dynamic and somewhat amoral world in which we live to-day, to rise to the big occasion by whatever means are available still unfortunately exists. Therefore, some measure of control must, if humanly possible, be enforced. Sanctions are not the real answer (which is a moral one) but some emergency, and one hopes temporary, measures would seem urgently called for. Thus, at its last meeting, the International Olympic Committee gave consideration to possible actions that might be taken :

1. The National Olympic Committees should stimulate general education on the subject through their medical sports organisations.
2. National Olympic Committees should incorporate in the entry form for the Olympic Games, signed by each individual competitor, a statement that he or she did not indulge or had no intention of indulging, in doping. (This would automatically clear the way for testing and examination as and when considered necessary.)
3. International Sports Federations should include in the rules and regulations governing their particular sport a categorical prohibition of the habit.
4. The I.O.C. itself should :
 - a) issue a strongly condemnatory statement on "doping" ;
 - b) be given powers to establish sanctions against either N.O.C.'s or individuals adjudged to be guilty of doping during the Olympic Games ;
 - c) Make correspondingly suitable arrangements for examination and testing of competitors during the Games when occasion demands — such arrangements to be under the supervision of the medical authorities of the Organising Committee of the Games, assisted perhaps by officials of the F.I.M.S. — the international medical body duly recognised by the I.O.C.

Whether these measures are practicable, or which of them seems wise at the present juncture, will be discussed at the next meeting of the I.O.C. in Madrid this year, when it is hoped decisions of some sort will be forthcoming. In the mean time, it behoves every one of us interested in the basic values of amateur sport to keep this matter under the closest surveillance and to remember always that the "dope" in the American sense — the mentally physically and morally dulled individual — is to some degree at any rate the inevitable corollary of doping.

To this article is appended a statement issued some months ago by the British Association of Sport and Medicine to which is added a definition of doping — admittedly complex and certainly not comprehensive but equally basically sound — and a list of the drugs at present most frequently concerned with the “practice of doping”.

Sir Arthur Porritt.



... and the result.