

FIGHT AGAINST DOPING: EXPERTS IN BERGEN

View of the closing ceremony of the conference during the address by Prince Alexandre de Merode. Left, Mrs Ase Kleveland, Norwegian Minister of Culture ; right, Prof. Hans Skaset.



THIRD PERMANENT WORLD CONFERENCE ON ANTI-DOPING IN SPORT

By Berit Skirstad

Assistant Professor at the Norwegian University for Sport and Physical Education

The third session from 23rd to 26th September of the Permanent World Conference on Anti-Doping in Sport, launched by Canada and the IOC in Ottawa in 1988, took place in Bergen (NOR). The conference was organized by the IOC Medical Commission and the Norwegian Sports Confederation and co-presided by Prince Alexandre de Merode, Chairman of the IOC Medical Commission and Professor Hans Skaset, President of the Norwegian Sports Confederation. Two hundred delegates from forty-eight countries attended, laboratory specialists and researchers, with members of the IOC Medical Commission and of the Athletes Commission, as well as from the IFs, the NOCs, national federations and government ministries responsible for sport, the Council of Europe and the EEC.

The messages delivered by athletes such as Mr Edwin Moses (USA), Mr Sebastian Coe (GBR) and Ms Grete Waitz (NOR) left no doubt that athletes want to compete on equal terms in doping-free sport. Whilst making a clear distinction between over-the-counter drugs, which can easily be taken in error, and anabolic steroids,

amphetamines and blood-doping, these sports stars, by proposing longer punishments than officials and coaches, confirmed the results of a British survey, in which three quarters of athletes questioned thought that the penalty for being caught "positive" the first time for anabolic steroids, amphetamines or blood-doping

should be a life ban or a ban of at least 5 years. Penalties much longer than those that exist at present.

The need to intensify out-of-competition testing was also stressed. There was evidence from many countries that the number of positive tests increases in almost direct proportion to the number of unannounced tests. A research project carried out in the USSR had revealed that athletes there were sure that some of their main rivals took drugs. Almost half had thought international and national doping controls, carried out mainly at competitions, were not effective enough, that certain athletes were sheltered from out-of-competition tests and were concerned about possible manipulations of samples.

The ethical issues associated with doping were given greater emphasis than at the conference in Ottawa and the last one in Moscow in 1989. Dr. Andrew Pipe (CAN) reported on the new independent anti-doping organization created recently in Canada following the recommendations of the Dubin report, the result of the enquiry into the Ben Johnson case. Canada is starting a new campaign to deter people from using performance-enhancing drugs, the intention of which is not to scare but to focus on fair play.

THE ATHLETE'S ENVIRONMENT

Prof. Sverre Maehlum (NOR), an Olympic Chief Medical Officer, concentrated on the dividing line between restoring an athlete's performance capacity and creating an unfair competitive edge. Several grey areas remain which need further examination.

Comparing doping to cancer, Prof. Breivik (NOR) explained that doping cannot be eradicated but must be controlled. The most important element in changing human attitudes and behaviour is still the individual athlete and his or her preferences, attitudes and morals. The environment, made up of officials, coaches, doctors, agents, the media, parents, friends and competitors, influences the athlete's decision whether to dope. Consequently, the athlete's social context, pressures and

aspirations need to be examined further. Training for coaches must include leadership, fair play and the study of ethics. A Norwegian survey of trainers and officials showed that they are generally poorly informed about doping. They admitted to having a responsibility for its prevention, but in Practice many are reluctant to take preventive initiatives' with their own athletes. This is confirmed by the lack of impact of a recent advertising campaign on the responsibility of coaches and officials for doping tragedies. This target group is very difficult to inform, influence and activate.

DRUG EDUCATION PROGRAMMES

Anti-doping education for the young athlete, according to those who are already experienced, is more effective, along with dialogue and of agreement on shared goals as regards the nature of sport and the values associated with it.

The Australian and Austrian educational models illustrate this. Ms Nathalie Nicholson from the Australian Sports Drug Agency emphasized the challenge of successful implementation, noting the importance of getting to know the needs of specific target groups. Teachers must be involved in improving their own programmes; drug education must be seen as a process and not as a product; one has to be prepared to make mistakes and to learn from them.

The Austrian Anti-Doping School follows the principle that controls are important and necessary but information and education are much more effective. According to the Director, Hans Holdhaus, a must for the model was that it should be practicable with regular teachers, efficient and cheap. The project, involving teachers, pupils, parents and the community, had been a success. Newspapers too play a role - in another intervention, Mr Goodbody (GBR) a journalist with "The Times" explained how the media can help society to combat drug abuse and play an educational role.

Some classes in Austria even discussed the doping problem in philosophy, biology, chemistry, German, English and French lessons. In the language classes, the pupils read articles or view anti-doping videos. An evaluation showed that the pupils' knowledge about doping increased, and that they passed some of it on to their friends who were not taking part in the programme. Austria has also run an "Athletes against Doping" programme, in which deliberate use was made of top-level athletes because of their status as important opinion-leaders and role models. Canadian and Swedish surveys revealed the frightening fact that many youngsters use anabolic steroids in order to look masculine, rather than for sports competition. The number of dope-users in schools was much higher than expected. In Austria, an anti-doping "hotline" has also been set up which operates 24 hours a day.

According to Prof. Radford (GBR) and Chief Executive Haynes (AUS), there is a need for more social research into the factors which influence an athlete to use drugs, as little is known about the ways in which athletes abandon, or should abandon, drug use. Many important questions remained unanswered concerning such things as dependence and athletes' fears of what might happen if they stop doping.

The need to prepare and exchange information was specifically stressed. Canada reported on work with the national reference library for sport (SIRD) to produce a new reference source for all those working in the anti-doping field. Emphasis was placed on the need to make efforts to involve those countries and IFs without

anti-doping programmes. Lack of unity on anti-doping measures among national and International Federations poses a serious threat to the credibility of the sports movement as a whole. Prof. Donike (GER), who gave examples of how athletes had beaten the tests in the past, reached the conclusion that the search for non-detectable doping agents is not yet at an end. The developing countries want more help with anti-doping seminars and there is hope that an anti-doping centre can be set up in Harare (ZIM) ready for the 6th All-Africa Games there in 1995.

The following conclusions were drawn at the end of the conference in an official release :

- the need for more social research, particularly to determine the factors that influence an athlete to use drugs ;
- the need to work with athletes when developing anti-doping strategies;
- the need to start educating athletes at a young age ;
- the need to assess the effectiveness of anti-doping programmes;
- the need to incorporate the ethical issues into anti-doping programmes ;
- the need for harmonization among countries and IFs.

The 4th Permanent Conference on Anti-Doping in Sport will be held in the United Kingdom in 1993. The International Working Group on Anti-Doping in Sport will develop guidelines for drug education which will be published in July 1992 and distributed to sports organizations and anti-doping agencies throughout the world.

B. S.