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**PERFORMANCE
ENHANCING
DRUGS**

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**DEBATING MATTERS
TOPIC
GUIDES**

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MOTION:

**“ALLOWING THE USE
OF ENHANCEMENT
DRUGS WILL NOT
UNDERMINE THE
SPIRIT OF SPORT”**

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INTRODUCTION

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As the world prepares for the 2012 Olympics in London, Sebastian Coe, chair of the Games' organising committee, has issued a stark warning on performance enhancing drugs, promising that the London Olympics will be 'the toughest ever' on drugs, and will utilise the most sophisticated detection technology of any Olympics in history [Ref: [Australian](#)]. In fact, Coe is supporting the British Olympic Associations' attempt to keep a lifetime Olympic ban for British 'drug cheats' which is against the International Olympics policy – based on World Anti-Doping Association (WADA) recommendations - of timed bans that enable athletes found guilty of doping to return to the Games after serving their punishment [Ref: [Telegraph](#)]. While Coe and others argue that those who use performance enhancing drugs should face moral opprobrium, and even life-long bans, some warn that the moral crusade against drugs has gone too far and question whether it really does protect the 'spirit of sport'. The spectre of cheating sprinters including Dwain Chambers, Ben Johnson, Marion Jones [Ref: [Independent](#)], has inspired condemnation from many, but others suggest that the use of performance enhancing drugs is more consistent with the desire to reach new heights of human athleticism than we might admit [Ref: [Reason](#)]. Indeed, one writer describes Ben Johnson's 'victory' at the 1988 Olympics as being 'just about the most exciting 10 seconds of sport I have ever witnessed' [Ref: [FT](#)]. But many remain vehemently anti-drugs, claiming that they undermine the spirit of sport. If drugs were allowed, the most successful athletes may not be the fastest or strongest, but those who have the best medical team. Would sport be undermined by sportsmen using performance enhancing drugs? Or would their use be in the tradition of what competitors have always done: pushing the boundaries of human capabilities?

KEY TERMS

[Gene Doping](#)

[Olympic spirit](#)

[Performance enhancing drugs](#)



What is the 'spirit of sport'?

Opponents of enhancement drugs argue that drug taking shows bad sportsmanship and deprives athletes of the 'level playing field' so central to the idea of fair competition. Recalling Pierre de Coubertin [Ref: Olympics], the founder of the modern Olympic games' famous maxim – 'The important thing in the Olympic Games is not winning but taking part' – some claim that winning at any cost has superseded other considerations, and is ultimately undermining the dignity and integrity of sport. But others ask whether the idea of 'fair competition' really stands up. Lacking the sports infrastructure and the team of trainers, doctors, nutritionists and lawyers that stand behind their Western counterparts, some query whether athletes from the developing world are really competing on a 'level playing field.' The shift from amateurism to professionalism in the Olympics, and in sport more widely, has improved the quality of sport and helped to produce better athletes [Ref: PBS], as witnessed by Usain Bolt's achievements [Ref: Wired]. Contrary to Coubertin's participation maxim, another definition of the 'spirit of sport' – the Olympian motto 'Citius, Altius, Fortius' (faster, higher, stronger) – implies sport is about exploring and stretching the limits of human potential. Winning has acquired a stronger emphasis, and this is no bad thing. Proponents suggest that the attempt to overcome natural limits is what differentiates human goals from those of animals. But others disagree. They argue that drug intervention can reach a point where it is impossible to distinguish between the uniqueness of human achievement and technological innovation. There are innate biological limits that athletes should respect and which give meaning to sporting excellence. Allowing enhancement drugs, by this account, would

de-humanize sport.

What are performance enhancing drugs

The practice of using artificial substances or methods to enhance athletic performance has a long history [Ref: Observer]. As far back as the 776 BC Olympics, athletes were using cola plants and even eating sheep's testicles in an effort to boost performance. Manipulation of the body, whether through training, diet or the use of equipment, was, and continues to be, an accepted part of athletic activity. What, ask critics, is so different about chemical enhancers, or even genetic enhancement? But strict limits are placed on the types of enhancers that can be legitimately used by athletes and there are currently nine main categories of enhancement drugs banned by WADA [Ref: WADA]. Advancements in biotechnologies in the last four decades now mean that athletes can use a cocktail of drugs to overcome physical barriers, including anabolic steroids, Beta 2, as well as methods such as blood doping and oxygen carrying. But while these drugs remain illegal in competitive sport, developments in performance enhancing technologies are growing by the day. The rise in potential for gene doping and bionic enhancement has pushed the ethical debate even further over how far athletes could be prepared to go [Ref: How Stuff Works].

Is doping dangerous?

Anabolic steroids can cause infertility, liver abnormalities and tumours and various psychiatric disorders. Androstenedione will increase your chances of having a heart attack or stroke. Critics of enhancement drugs argue that they pose a significant health risks for athletes. But isn't trying to be the best already hard on

THE ENHANCEMENT DRUGS DEBATE IN CONTEXT CONTINUED...

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your health? Exercise is known to be healthy, but the extreme exercise many athletes put themselves through can also be damaging. Changing the rules to allow the use of enhancement drugs, say some, would be safer, protecting athletes from excessive use and dangerous drug cocktails. But critics say that the dangers posed by enhancement drugs are very different. Evidence given by the young female athletes involved in the infamous East German doping scandal of the 1970s and 80s revealed that forced steroids and testosterone doping had done profound physical damage, including liver dysfunction and infertility. Those that questioned the procedure were told that 'you eat the pills, or you die!' [Ref: [New Yorker](#)]. The scandal thus also raises important questions about coercion in sport. Many have underlined that recent doping scandals reveal the systemic nature of the problem, involving coaches, sports doctors and officials. As attractive as narratives of the 'human will' are, can the decision to use performance enhancing drugs ever be a wholly autonomous one? Other sporting bodies, including the Professional Footballers' Association (PFA) in the UK have voiced concerns around the intrusiveness and indignity of drug tests [Ref: [Guardian](#)]. The scale and sheer expense of WADA's regulations and bureaucracy have led some to ask whether the success of the present drug control regime is worth the price that we are paying. Some even go so far as to suggest that moral posturing and political opportunism is what is really propelling the anti-doping machinery on, as opposed to the professed concern about sportsmanship and a concern for athletes' health.



ESSENTIAL READING

The great divide

Kait Borsay *Sky Sports* 19 December 2011

Pumped-up dream deflates in disgrace

Ben Doherty *Sydney Morning Herald* 16 July 2011

'Athletics will never escape the shame of Ben Johnson'

Mihir Bose *Evening Standard* 10 March 2011

The Miracle of Bionics: Presenting challenging questions

Impact Lab 30 May 2008

Chemically enhanced

David Owen *Financial Times* 11 February 2006

FOR

In defence of the rights of sportsmen

Klaus Wivel *spiked* 14 December 2011

Sports: real dope on doping

Rajesh Kalra *Times of India* 7 July 2011

The Case for Performance Enhancing Drugs in Sport

Matthew Herper *Forbes* 20 May 2011

Should we allow performance enhancing drugs in sport?

Radley Balko *Reason* 23 January 2008

Why we should allow performance enhancing drugs in sport

J Savulescu, B Foddy, M Clayton *British Medical Journal*

AGAINST

BOA ban on drugs cheats is right. We must fight to keep it

Chris Hoy *Daily Telegraph* 14 December 2011

Chris Tomlinson: Drugs cheats cost me medals

Simon Turnball *Independent* 23 November 2011

We're winning the fight against doping in sports

Caroline K. Hatton *Christian Science Monitor* 23 November 2010

Bring back sportsmanship

Peter Reinharz and Brian C. Anderson *City Journal* 1 April 2000

Against Legalisation

BBC

IN DEPTH

No Harm, No Foul? Justifying Bans on Safe Performance

Enhancing Drugs

John Gleaves *Academia.edu* 2011

High-profile drug cheats exposed by WADA

Independent 10 November 2009

An amputee sprinter: is he disabled or too-able?

Jeré Longman *New York Times* 15 May 2007

Drugstore Athlete

Malcolm Gladwell *New Yorker* 10 September 2001

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BACKGROUNDERS

The Power of pushing limits

National Center on Physical Activity and Disability 29 August 2011

Why Oscar Pistorius deserves to run

Ford Vox CNN 27 August 2011

Fair Game?

David James *Ingenia* June 2011

A helping hand? Sportsmanship and cheating

Debanjan Chakrabarti *Independent* 17 October 2010

Bolt is freaky fast but nowhere near human limits

Alexis Madrigal *Wired* 25 August 2008

Making no waves

Economist 11 June 2008

Female athletes not immune to lure of performance enhancing drugs

St Petersburg Times 5 April 2008

Drugs in sport: a brief history

Observer 2 February 2004

The fight against doping in sport

European Commission 6 April 1999

How performance enhancing drugs work

How Stuff Works

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RECOMMENDS:

'Real Steel', 2011

Find out more about our partnership with the education charity FILMCLUB, how you can bring the power of films into your school debates, and this autumn's recommendations from the FILMCLUB team for Debating Matters!

ORGANISATIONS

British Olympic Association

UK Anti-Doping Agency

World Anti-Doping Agency



IN THE NEWS

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Drug cheat Martin Gleeson drags Hull into cover-up shame

Daily Mirror 30 December 2011

BOA to take on WADA in courts over right to ban drug cheats

Telegraph 16 November 2011

BOA chairman Moynihan attacks 'toothless' anti-doping regime

BBC Sport 15 November 2011

Oscar Pistorious not certain of 2012 Olympic place

BBC Sport 2 November 2011

Lord Coe backs Britain's Olympic life ban for drugs cheats

Guardian 11 October 2011

Cleaners set to spy on dopers

BBC World Service 4 October 2011

Passport to a drug-free Olympics?

BBC News 27 July 2011

London 2012 Olympic Games promises to be 'toughest ever' on doping

Australian 27 July 2011

Athletes set to face anti-doping raids on rooms at London 2012

Olympics

Guardian 16 October 2009

New drug test scheme is a 'step too far', says Taylor

Guardian 12 November 2008

GM athletes could break 2hr marathon

The Times 13 April 2008

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- I am a sixth form student and would like further details about events in my area
- I am interested in becoming a Debating Matters judge
- I am interested in sponsoring/supporting Debating Matters
- Other (please specify)

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Professional role
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School/work phone

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**“DEBATING MATTERS
TEACHES A WAY
OF THINKING.
INTELLECTUAL
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TRISTRAM HUNT, HISTORIAN & BROADCASTER