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Drugs: Curse in sports

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Abstract

This paper examines some of the major issues associated with drug uses and abuse in professional sports. In particular, the reasons why athletes may take drug and means of primary prevention is addressed more specifically, it is believed that athletes take drug because they have not developed effective intra and interpersonal skill to cope constructively with the pressure exerted by management media and fans. A broad based program of primary prevention is offered that attempts to circumvent the most significant cause of drug abuse. The first phase of the program involves drugs education that provides honest, straight forward information about the benefits and detriments of various drugs. Second, because the drug use is not believed to be controlled by purely rational decision making, “emotional education” molded after the scared straight programs with juvenile delinquents would be used to reach young athletes at the “gut” level. Third effective coping and general life skills would be taught as a means of providing the athletes with ways of constructively handling the pressure. Finally, a supportive environment would be developed to assist the athletes in coping with their lifestyle and the associated difficulties.

Keywords: Drug, circumvent, rational, juvenile, supportive environment, coping

Introduction

Sport that is based upon the true spirit of sports- that is, fair play- is likely to have strong preventive value in itself, without any additional elements. As mentioned earlier, young people can develop many protective factors through involvement in sports based on fair play. But because young people are exposed to many instances where the spirit of sports may not be fully reflected, it will require serious, ongoing attention to ensure that young people and those around them demonstrate these values. This means that the coaches, officials and parents must communicate these values in their words and actions. Team meetings, practice sessions or sessions with the players and their parents provide good opportunity to emphasize these values. Perhaps the best learning opportunities occur in the natural course of practicing and playing, when a coach takes a player aside and provides immediate feedback on the player’s behavior. Being alert to examples of fair play and, in those instances, giving praise to the player is even more effective. A code of conduct will be a living code- that is, meaningful to the players and accepted by them- if: they have a chance to contribute to it or shape it; parents are introduced to it and actively support it; and team officials give it regular attention throughout the season.

Evolving Code of Conduct to guide the player’s behavior

A Code of Conduct can be helpful not only in preventing player’s misbehavior, but also in dealing with it when it occurs. If a player experiences consequences that flow directly and logically from a Code that they have committed to upholding, they are more likely to accept the consequences and learn from them. However, a Code of Conduct will mean little to players if parents and organizers do not actively promote it and support it. For example, coaches, other team members and parents refrain from drinking when involved with the team show a strong support for a commitment by the athletes to not use substances.

One of the risk facing sportsperson is that there are many forms and reasons for the development of a drug or alcohol addiction. Broadly speaking, these can be broken out into three categories.

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- An addiction to performance enhancing substances
- An addiction to stimulants to alleviate depression
- An addiction to prescription painkillers

How to achieve your goal

Once your goals have been established, consider options for achieving them. A good way to design your programme is to prepare a work plan that lists each activity you decide on, and, for each activity, who's doing what, when it will be done and what resources will be needed. Within each activity are messages we communicate with respect to drug use and fair play, so it is important to spend time clarifying the values and messages that you wish to communicate to players or participants. Remember to test your messages with your players or group you are trying to reach; better yet, ask them to help you design your messages.

Messages will vary with every programme, but these are key; players are capable and worthy of respect; without fair play, sport breaks down; mood altering drug use interferes with enjoyment and performance; performance-enhancing drug use is cheating. A written Code of Conduct is one way to present key programme messages. But we also communicate unspoken messages through our behavior – and actions always speak louder than words. So if, for example, we wish to communicate respect to young participants, what do we do (e.g. listening closely) will carry more weight than what we say. Similarly, the way we talk about drug use in our casual conversation (e.g., through jokes and stories) may be more important than what we say in a formal “drug education” session. Because there is so much emotion and mystique surrounding drugs, “*In the field of sports you are more or less accepted for what you do than what you are.*”

It is hard to have a normal conversation about these issues. If we approach drug use conversations as we do any health issue, such as diet or exercise, it will help young people feel more comfortable in raising issues and discussing them. In doing so, however, we need to be careful not to send unhealthy messages through these conversations. The media give messages that are at times unhealthy. Engage the young people in your programme in questioning the prevailing messages for professional sport and the media. Team, club, or league slogans help to frame all the little messages that are presented in your programme.

For examples:

- Step by step we reach the goal
- Sports yes- drugs no
- drugs don't play here, we do

When developing messages concerning drug abuse, it is important to distinguish between performance enhancing drug abuse and mood-altering drug abuse. They both show a lack of respect for the game, opponents, team-mates and oneself; however, they arise from different motives. In the case of performance-enhancing drug abuse, the player is cheating by trying to gain unfair advantage, while in the case of mood-altering drug abuse, the players compromise their ability to perform at their best.

The Dark Side of Sports

However, evidences are there that sports can be associated with other less positive aspects of life. Today, we see that sport can lead to violence, where a person intentionally tries to hurt another; trying to get around the rules by cheating; a lack of respect for those who don't win; situations where not everyone gets an opportunity to participate. Besides, sports have been

found to be linked with alcohol and other drug use by young men and women, even though they are more likely than non-athletes to have received drug education. There is a growing concern over the growing use of products called “health supplements. They can enhance performance, but also carry health risks. At the high school level, recent studies in France, Slovakia and the United States paint a similar picture. High school athletes in these studies were more likely than non-athletes to use alcohol, cannabis, heroin, cocaine and amphetamine-type stimulants (ATS). While some of these studies suggest that young male athletes are at greater risk than young female athletes, others show that girls are just as likely to use substances in potentially harmful ways.

Young people in these studies were involved in highly competitive sports. Perhaps the condition under which competitive sports are often played contain elements of risk for substance use problems. For example, among the college athletes studied, it appears that alcohol and to a lesser extent, other drugs, were used to reduce stress of trying to maintain a high level of performance and good grades. But the connection between drugs and sports may not be limited to competitive sports. Studies suggests that even those who play sports for recreational basis may use substances in risky ways.

Effects of Drug Abuse on Sportsperson

- Learning disability
- Hearing impairment
- Lack of coordination of body parts
- Unable to making Decision
- Decrease in academic performance
- Depression
- Liver disease
- Kidney failure
- Brain hemorrhage
- Infertility
- Insomnia

Ways That Used in Sports to Prevent Youth Substance Abuse

Many people believe that various attitudes and social skills can be developed through sport. As we have seen, many of these potential benefits have not yet been proven through research. However, some- including reduced stress, increased academic performance and improved family relations- have been shown to be protective factors for substance abuse. So, sports can be used to prevent substance use problems among youth. But it is not as simple as “throwing the ball on the field” and hoping it will happen. Sport may not be the answer in every situation. Pushing sport on an unwilling group of young people will not work. However, most people enjoy some form of sport when it is presented respectfully and they see it as a choice. The world of sport offers many choices that can appeal to a range of interests, and which can develop particular strengths or protective factors in youth. For example: team sports such as football or rugby may be particularly good at developing social skills such as communication, conflict resolution and working effectively with others toward a common goal; Individual sports, such as archery or table tennis, may be particularly suited to develop self-reliance, self-discipline and personal goal setting; extreme sports, such as white water kayaking or mountain climbing, can build self-reliance and fill the need for adventure and a measure of risk that may serve as an alternative to drug use for some young people. Outdoor sports, including cross-country skiing and cycling, can increase appreciation and care for the natural environment; Indigenous

sports like those played by aboriginal people around the world can help young people to connect with their culture and traditions. If a sport is presented as an option and you work in partnership with young people, there are several ways to use sport to prevent substance use problem: sport with the right spirit; adding drug-related information and life skills training; improving community conditions. No single option is best for all; the best option will depend on your aims, circumstances, resources, your team or agency's readiness to work with others and willingness of your community to support your work.

Sports as a Resource for Human Development

A sport is a physical activity with an agreed upon structure, or set or rules, that allows for competition against oneself or an opponent. Sport provides an opportunity for a mix of fun, self-improvement and competition that will vary with the players involved and the sport they are playing at a particular time. Sports have the potential to develop a range of assets in young people. Sports are also associated with less positive practices, including substance abuse. Whether a sports experience is positive for young people or not depends on the extent to which the values of fair play is respected. Respect is a fundamental part of fair play. Competition is an essential part of sport, yet too much emphasis on winning can have a number of negative effects on young athletes. A focus on tasks to be accomplished in a sport – rather than winning and losing – will bring out the spirit of sport and will appeal to more young people.

Sports with the Right Spirit

Sports is based on the true spirit of sport – that is, respect and fair play – is likely to have strong preventive value in itself, without any additional elements. Team officials and parents need to communicate the values of respect and fair play through their words and actions. Look for opportunities to (sensitively) give immediate feedback when a player shows poor behavior and to give praise for examples of positive behavior. A Code of Conduct helps to clarify and emphasize the values of fair play and respect. A Code of Conduct will have more meaning for players if they have a chance to contribute to it and if officials and parents actively support it.

Adding Information and Life Skills Training

Use credible people (such as coaches, peer team leaders, or sports trainers/nurses/doctors) to provide the information or facilitate skill development. Select leaders who are comfortable with the facilitative role rather than a directive one and who show empathy and understanding for young people. Emphasize the immediate performance – related effects of mood-altering substance use. In addition to structural sessions, look for opportunities to bring the topic into conversations with players (i.e. without preaching or lecturing).

Bringing It All Together

Ask adults involved with the programme to support healthy messages and to avoid those representing unhealthy attitudes towards substance use. Continue to give drug issues some attention throughout the playing season, a single shot effort will not work. Developing life skills such as anger management requires demonstration of the skill by leaders who are comfortable facilitating this kind of session and practice by the players. Team leaders can be effective in this role when trained and supported by officials. Have the team identify a player who can provide support and information on community resources to players experiencing problems.

Improving Community Conditions through Sport

Sport can be used to interest and empower young people in becoming involved in improving community conditions. When approaching community work, start small and begin with issues that are relevant to young people, rather than from a preset plan. Use a social contract that says, 'When you get something, you need to give something back'. The team concept is a very helpful way of approaching improvements in the community. Sports values such as teamwork, participation, working together, determination, desire, commitment and hard work are very important qualities for community work.

Clarify the Problem and the Available Resources

Gather information from more than one source for your assessment of the problem. Determine the resources available to support your programme. Involve young people in conducting and providing information for the assessment.

Determine the Activities and Messages

To guide your programme, use a work plan that outlines the activities, roles of those involved, time frames and resources you will require. Clarify the key messages you wish to communicate through the activities. Ask the players to help you design your messages. Unspoken messages – actions – are more powerful than words.

Connect With the Players

To connect with young people, go to where they are. Listen closely, remain flexible with your programming and involve young people in as many aspects of the programme as possible. Try to accommodate everyone in your programme, including youth who cannot play, those less skilled and young disabled people. Identify worthy role models for your players. Role models may be professional athletes or local athletes whom your players can relate to more easily.

Pay Attention to the Coaches

Coaches are critical to the success of the programme, so close attention needs to be paid to their selection, training and support. In addition to training on sport-specific skills, coaches can benefit from knowledge of young culture and training on communication, drug education and diversity. Build strong alliances inside your organization and in community generally. Create a path and structures for youth to return to the organization as adult leaders. Build a strong training programme. The support of a well-known person in the community who is committed to your programme aims can help sustain a programme. Actively seek opportunities to command volunteers and funders. Keep the programme fresh and responsive to the needs and interests of young people. Evaluation will improve and build the credibility of your programme. An evaluator needs to be brought on board early in the programme; they can help you clarify your plan for the programme and ensure that it is ready to be evaluated. Young people need to be able to give their comments from the evaluation and possibly help carry it out.

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