



STOPPING CHEATERS

In the Olympic annals of Track and Field, for every Jesse Owens and Babe Didrikson there has been a Ben Johnson and Marion Jones. Every hero seemingly can be counterbalanced by an athlete who tested positive for a banned substance or who was suspected to have done so.

Two weeks ago when I attended the Prefontaine Classic meet in Oregon, I found my lifelong enthusiasm for this purest of athletic competition somewhat muted by the presence in the 100, 200 and 400-meter dashes of Americans that were competing after having served drug suspensions.

When two of the three won their events, it tempered my level of excitement and made me question their performances, because if there is one thing of which I am convinced, it is that a drug addict is more likely to take drugs than a clean athlete.

All three of the trackmen were found to have broken rules established and enforced by the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA).

Recently, however, evidence has surfaced that should surprise nobody familiar with sport. There are world-class distance runners that apparently have been beating tests with known drugs.

Perhaps the most misunderstood aspect of drug testing is that unless the tester knows what he/she is looking for, they are unlikely to find a banned substance. But shockingly to many, the substance allegedly used in this latest scandal that has the potential to rock Track and Field to its very foundations is one known to everybody. Testosterone.

Usually when a drug cheat beats the system it is with a designer drug, a substance whose molecular structure has been altered enough to be undetectable by even the most modern of testing methods, but still powerful enough to provide an edge to win the Olympic 100 meters or the shot put.

The Bay Area Laboratory Co-operative (BALCO) proved that designer drugs delivered a powerful edge while remaining undetectable, until a rival coach anonymously sent a syringe containing residue of an illegal steroid to USADA. Once the drug became known, it was easily discovered by testing, but not before.

What is disturbing about the newest allegation is that it allegedly proves that some very savvy cheaters have found a way to beat the tests while using a known banned substance. Reportedly, the cheaters are taking their edge by first establishing a baseline of an athlete's usual testosterone level and administering small enough doses within 24 hours of a race that will not exceed testing levels while still providing an edge in competition.

If you think this has nothing to do with horseracing, you would unfortunately be incorrect. The reason Out Of Competition Testing (OOCT) has been embraced by the Breeders' Cup is based on an understanding and belief that some prohibited substances both have a short window in which they can be detected by tests and are administered well in advance of competition. This is not based on speculation, it has been proven.

So obviously, while testing can be effective in revealing cheaters, it should be just as apparent that authorities charged with keeping sports clean face challenges. They need to be lucky to catch a cheater using OOCT or micro-dosing close to competition or using designer drugs.

There is a popular and well-founded notion that cheaters will always find a way to stay ahead of the cops. Authorities are well aware of this. So difficult has it been to catch cheaters by the use of evidence that bodies overseeing and enforcing drug rules in the last few years have instituted new policies, which in essence allow for drug convictions based on circumstantial findings. This has allowed the cops to level the playing field in the timeworn battle between crooks and police. And while useful, none of these methods provide the answer. It is not the silver bullet authorities have sought.

The surest way to end cheating in horseracing is by using good old fashioned detective skills to find how cheaters ply their methods and then have enough teeth in the rules to impose penalties strong enough to rid the sport of these miscreants and send a message to their peers that will create a true deterrent.

Drug addicts are the most likely to use drugs. When I say drug addict, I refer to a trainer that has been hooked on administering banned substances to his/her horses. Once a cheating trainer has seen the powerful effect of drugs on their athletes, they become as hooked as any heroin mainliner.

So once identified as a drug addict, these individuals need to be banned from the sport for life. This will deter some from trying or continuing to use illegal drugs. But more importantly, this method will rid the game of people that are robbing their competitors and horseplayers of money.

In an [Op/Ed piece written several years ago](#), I recommended USADA be enlisted to save our sport. Shortly, Federal legislation to appoint USADA that I wholeheartedly approve will be introduced.

With USADA on board, the independent nature and skill set of this organization can move forward to cleanse our sport of its crooked element. Unless readers want to see racing marginalized to the extent of Track and Field, they should do all in their power to encourage their leaders, both in Congress and racing, to embrace this initiative.

I share everybody in our sport's joy and pride in having a new Triple Crown winner. But this will not be enough to lift our sport out of the doldrums caused by a game hooked on drugs.

Former NBA Commissioner David Stern last week at the Pan American conference in New York pointed out that unless a sport was ready for prime time by cleaning up its act, any good publicity would not be impactful enough to represent a game changer.

As I have written before, we need to clean up this sport before we have something to offer the public that we can be proud of. This year we have the chance to take the first step toward achieving this goal. I urge you all to get behind it.

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