

HEROES AND VILLAINS

Doped Athletes and their Impact on Society and Education

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**Prof Dr Jim Parry
Head of the School of Humanities
Leeds University
Leeds LS2 9JT, UK**

**Tel: (+44) 113 343 3272
Fax: (+44) 113 343 3265
Email: s.j.parry@leeds.ac.uk**

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Jim Parry (s.j.parry@leeds.ac.uk)

Olympism

For most people, I suppose, the word 'Olympic' will conjure up images of the Olympic Games, either ancient or modern. The focus of their interest will be a two-week festival of sport held once in every four years between elite athletes representing their countries or city-states in inter-communal competition.

Most people, too, will have heard of an 'Olympiad', even though it is sometimes thought to refer to a particular Games. In fact it refers to a four-year period, during which a Games may or may not be held. So: the Athens Games are properly referred to not as the XXVIII Games (since there have been only twenty-four, three having been cancelled due to World Wars) but as the Games of the XXVIII Olympiad. The Games are held to celebrate the end of the period of the Olympiad.

Fewer, however, will have heard of 'Olympism', the philosophy developed by the founder of the modern Olympic Movement, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, a French aristocrat who had been much influenced by the British Public School tradition of sport in education. This philosophy has as its focus of interest not just the elite athlete, but everyone; not just a short truce period, but the whole of life; not just competition and winning, but also the values of participation and co-operation; not just sport as an activity, but also as a formative and developmental influence contributing to desirable characteristics of individual personality and social life.

Olympism - a universal social philosophy

For Olympism is a social philosophy which emphasises the role of sport in world development, international understanding, peaceful co-existence, and social and moral education. De Coubertin understood, towards the end of the nineteenth century, that sport was about to become a major growth point in popular culture - and that, as physical activity, it was apparently universalizable, providing a means of contact and communication across cultures.

A universal philosophy by definition sees itself as relevant to everyone, regardless of nation, race, gender, social class, religion or ideology, and so the Olympic movement has worked for a coherent universal representation of itself - a concept of Olympism which identifies a range of values to which each nation can sincerely commit itself whilst at the same time finding for the general idea a form of expression which is unique to itself, generated by its own culture, location, history, tradition and projected future.

De Coubertin, being a product of late nineteenth-century liberalism, emphasised the values of equality, fairness, justice, respect for persons, rationality and understanding, autonomy, and excellence. These are values which span nearly 3000 years of Olympic history, although some of them may be differently interpreted at different times. They are, basically, the main

values of liberal humanism - or perhaps we should say simply humanism, since socialist societies have found little difficulty in including Olympic ideals into their overall ideological stance towards sport.

The contemporary task for the Olympic Movement is to further this project: to try to see more clearly what its Games (and sport in wider society) might come to mean. This task will be both at the level of ideas and of action. If the practice of sport is to be pursued and developed according to Olympic values, the theory must strive for a conception of Olympism which will support that practice. The ideal should seek both to sustain sports practice and to lead sport towards a vision of Olympism which will help to deal with the challenges which are bound to emerge.

The Olympic Charter

The Olympic Charter (2006) states simply the relationship between Olympic philosophy, ethics and education:

Fundamental Principle 2 (p7) says:

Olympism is a philosophy of life, exalting and combining in a balanced whole the qualities of body, will and mind. Blending sport with culture and education, Olympism seeks to create a way of life based on the joy found in effort, the educational value of good example and respect for universal fundamental ethical principles.

Fundamental Principle 6 (p7) says:

The goal of the Olympic Movement is to contribute to building a peaceful and better world by educating youth through sport practised without discrimination of any kind and in the Olympic spirit, requires mutual understanding with a spirit of friendship, solidarity and fair play.

If we add to this de Coubertin's famous dicta 'all sports for all people' (quoted in Daring and Brisson, 1994, p187) and 'All games, all nations' (de Coubertin, 1934, p.127) we seem to have a recipe for the core values of Olympism: universalism, humanism, fair and ethical competition, education and multiculturalism.

Sport and Universalism

We live in a world of universalizing tendencies, where the economic and political forces of globalization meet the ethical and cultural imperatives generated by our need to co-exist in a shrinking and increasingly inter-connected global society. And sport is not immune to these tendencies. Rather, in the experience of many millions of people, it is a prominent example of them, graphically illustrating them in the processes of global dissemination and participation, commercialization, sponsorship, athlete migration, equipment production and distribution, media/sport symbiosis, politics/sport relations, and increasing rules clarification together with their progressively universal interpretation and application.

Through our participation in, or consumption of, sport such widespread tendencies and processes are rendered visible and potentially intelligible. Critics have often noted the

conservative effect of sports in their ‘naturalizing’ of human capacities and relations (‘... of course men and women are not equal - look at tennis or athletics ...’). But I suggest that this effect need not be conservative. It is also possible for *radical* restatements of capacities and reconceptualizations of human relations to be naturalized through sport. One example is the current re-examination of racism in Europe sparked by the racist chanting of football spectators in the European Champions Cup. European football (especially English football) is now so thoroughly international and interracial that it foregrounds the unacceptability of racism in society in a way unthinkable even 20 years ago. Sport leads the way in exhibiting universal ethics.

Sport, Universalism and Ethics

Since Olympism achieves its ends through the medium of sport, it cannot escape the requirement to provide an account of sport which reveals both its nature and its ethical potential. Let me briefly suggest a set of criteria which might begin to indicate the fundamentally ethical nature of sport.

- *physical* (so *effort* is required)
- *contest* (‘*contract to contest*’ - *competition* and *excellence*)
- *rule-governed* (*obligation* to abide by the rules, *fair play*, *equality* and *justice*)
- *institutionalised* (‘*lawful authority*’)
- *shared values and commitments* (*due respect* is owed to opponents as co-facilitators)

It is difficult even to state the characteristics of sport without relying on terms that carry ethical import, and such meanings must apply across the world of sports participation. Without agreement on rule-adherence, the authority of the referee, and the central shared values of the activity, there could be no sport. Indeed, the first task of any International Federation is to clarify rules and harmonize understandings so as to facilitate the universal practice of its sport.

The Philosophical Anthropology of Olympism

We must now return to the concept of Olympism, and examine a little more closely its origins and meanings. My guiding thought lies in the status of Olympism as a social, political and educational ideology. Based on its heritage and traditions, any such ideology necessarily appeals to a philosophical anthropology - an idealized conception of the kind of person that that society (or ideology) values, and tries to produce and reproduce through its formal and informal institutions.

Social anthropology is the investigation of whole cultures, which are preferably, from the point of view of the researcher, quite alien to the researcher’s own society. A social anthropologist investigates the living instantiations of human nature - the apparently quite different kinds of human nature that are to be found around the world - practically, scientifically, through observation and social scientific methodology.

A philosophical anthropologist, however, tries to create a theory about human nature by thinking about the human being at the most general level. Hoberman (1984, p. 2) writes

about differing political conceptions of sport, but finds it necessary to refer to several levels of explanation and theorizing:

(Different societies) ‘... have distinct political anthropologies or idealized models of the exemplary citizen which constitute complex answers to the fundamental question of philosophical anthropology: ‘What is a human being?’

In order to try to fill out just what were the ideas that have been handed down from the Olympism of classical times, to be reinterpreted and re-specified (by de Coubertin and others) we need to examine two central ideas.

The Ideas of Kalos K’agathos and Arete

Lenk says (1964, p. 206):

Many representatives of the Olympic movement combine these values together to form a picture of the human being harmoniously balanced intellectually and physically in the sense of the Greek ‘kalos k’agathos’.

This is also a theme in Nissiotis (1984, p. 64):

... the Olympic Ideal is what qualifies sport exercise in general as a means for educating the whole man as a conscious citizen of the world ... The Olympic Idea is that exemplary principle which expresses the deeper essence of sport as an authentic educative process through a continuous struggle to create healthy and virtuous man in the highest possible way (‘kalos k’agathos’) in the image of the Olympic winner and athlete.

Eyler pursues the meaning of the Olympic virtue of excellence in performance and in character, through Homer, early philosophers, Pindar and Pausanias. He concludes:

In summary, arete has several meanings - distinction, duty (primarily to oneself), excellence, fame, glorious deeds, goodness, greatness, heroism ... valour and virtue. Some of the many implications of these meanings contextually are: man is born, grows old, and dies; performance is not without risks; winning is all; man achieves by his own skills ... human performance is the quintessence of life; and finally, man is the measure of all things and the responsible agent.
(1981, p. 165)

Paleologos (1982, p. 63) echoes the mythical origins of the Ancient Games in the deeds of one of the great heroes of antiquity, Hercules:

With the twelve labors depicted by the bas-reliefs on the two metopes of the Temple (of Zeus), the world is presented with the content of the moral teachings which Olympia intended with the Games.

The idea is that the sculptures of the demi-God Hercules in Olympia performed a morally educative function, standing as role models, especially for the athletes who were there to train for the Games, of physical, moral and intellectual virtue:

... Hercules is shown bearded, with beautiful features, ... a well-trained body, fine, proportioned muscles, ... as a representative of the 'kalos kagathos' type, where the body is well-formed and harmonious, the expression of a beautiful soul, and the face radiates intelligence, kindness and integrity. (1982, p. 67)

Nissiotis concludes (1984, p. 66):

The Olympic Idea is thus a permanent invitation to all sportsmen to transcend ... their own physical and intellectual limits ... for the sake of a continuously higher achievement in the physical, ethical and intellectual struggle of a human being towards perfection.

So: a philosophical anthropology is an idealized conception of the human. Based on its heritage and traditions, each society (and each ideology) has a political and philosophical anthropology - an idealised conception of the kind of person that that society (or ideology) values, and tries to produce and reproduce through its formal and informal institutions.

If we ask ourselves what the Olympic Idea is (see Parry, 2006a), it translates into a few simple phrases which capture the essence of what an ideal human being ought to be and to aspire to. From the above, and drawing on conceptions of Olympism presented in the previous section, I think we might suggest that the philosophical anthropology of Olympism promotes the ideals of:

- individual all round harmonious human development
- towards excellence and achievement
- through effort in competitive sporting activity
- under conditions of mutual respect, fairness, justice and equality
- with a view to creating lasting personal human relationships of friendship;
- international relationships of peace, toleration and understanding;

That's the general idea - a conception of the human being who is capable of being and doing those things. This gives us both a sense of the Olympic Ideal, and an account of the Olympic Athlete as hero.

The Olympic Athlete as Villain

However, opportunities for great achievement are also often occasions for great temptation. When the stakes are high and the rewards of success are possibly life-changing, a person might easily consider the rule-breaking involved in doping to be not such a serious offence. After all, many people try things that are not actually illegal, but which seem quite similar to doping. They take creatine and whey protein, and other kinds of food supplementation; they use hypobaric chambers, applied sports science of all kinds, elective surgery, etc.

Here we must notice that athletes are not quite like ordinary citizens. 'Ordinary' laws and moral principles apply to athletes as much (or as little) as anyone else – but athletes are subject to another set of considerations *just because* they seek to enter the co-operative enterprise of competing with and against others in sporting contests. As 'contractors to contest', they must accept certain constraints in order to count as acceptable opponents.

One such constraint is that against doping in sport. Much has been written on the theory, facts and morality of doping, and on the justification for banning it (e.g. Grayson 1999, Waddington 2000, Houlihan 2002, Parry 2006b, and articles in Morgan & Meier 1988, and Tamburrini & Tännsjö, 2000 and 2005). Here and now we just need to explore why athletes do it, and what makes it villainous.

Why do athletes take drugs?

There are many reasons given for taking drugs, which refer to the supposed benefits of doping:

- Enhanced performance (direct and indirect)
- Decreased recovery period, allowing more intensive training
- Masking the presence of other drugs
- Making the weight
- Staying the course (simple endurance - e.g. long-distance cycling)
- Psychological edge (promoting the athlete's confidence)
- Keeping up with the competition (coercion - pressure to follow suit)

Why do we think it is wrong to take drugs?

1. Pre-competition agreements

The primary wrong lies in simple rule-breaking. The rules function as a kind of pre-competition agreement which specifies an athlete's eligibility to compete and his rights, duties and responsibilities under the agreed rules. What's wrong with doping is the secretive attempt to evade or subvert such a 'contract to contest', an explicit example of which is the Olympic Oath, by which athletes swear that they have prepared themselves ethically, and will keep to the rules. To subvert the contract to contest threatens the moral basis of sport, jeopardises the integrity of the sporting community and erodes public support and trust. For me, this is the primary villainy involved in doping, because it threatens all that sport is.

However, the rules themselves require a basis of justification, since the anti-doping rules must appeal to some issue of principle in addition to rule adherence. Considerations advanced include the following:

2. Unfair Advantage

Arguments against performance enhancement through doping are not simply arguments against performance enhancement, since that is what athletes constantly seek to achieve by training, coaching, nutrition, the application of sports science, etc. Neither is the argument simply against performance enhancement by means which confer an unfair advantage, since many legal means are beyond the resources of most countries. Rather, the argument is specifically against unfair advantage conferred by illegal means.

3. Harm

Many argue that doping may be harmful, because the substances are inherently harmful, or because they have been administered without medical supervision, or because they have been inadequately tested. Further, it is argued that harm to other athletes is caused by the coercion they feel to follow suit in order to maintain competitiveness.

4. Social Harm

With the huge expansion in the market for drugs in gyms and fitness clubs, there is now an emerging claim for a further wrong: that, by modelling dope as a lifestyle, athletes contribute to the social problem of thousands of sport, fitness and bodybuilding fans consuming substances whose long-term effects are unknown. Athletes, it is said, should be more aware of their social responsibility.

The Olympic Athlete as Role Model

This potential for social harm, and the requirement of social responsibility on the Olympic athlete, is not a new thing, but it has recently taken on a fresh importance. It has long been thought that rock music has had at best a mixed influence on its audiences – it has produced an alienated as well as anti-authoritarian culture; free-spirited as well as drug-fuelled personalities, and so on. But sport now has at least equal cultural power to rock music, and we must ask the question: what is its influence on its audiences?

The jury is out. Some sports spectatorship seems fuelled by a love of violence, or seeks the humiliation of the opponent. Regionalism and nationalism are rife. Commercial values and personality cults sometimes override the values of sport, and individuals prosper without a thought for putting something back into the community that nurtured them. Are there as many villains as heroes?

Recently, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) has experienced some success in persuading governments that sports-doping is an issue for them, and that they should support WADA's stance and activities. However, this is not because governments have suddenly realised that sports-dope is harmful to athletes, or that sports ethics is an important field. Rather, it is because of the huge increase in the amount of sports-dope being consumed by the non-athlete population, in the promotion of body image for personal and social reasons. This may have two kinds of consequences for government: the potential harm caused by the extension of medically unsupervised sports-dope usage into the general population, and a potentially massive contribution to the general extension of 'dope culture' in society.

So here we see a 'new' issue: the use of 'sports-dope' as social dope, which sheds fresh light on the notion of the Olympic athlete as social role model, and gives fresh impetus to the 'social responsibility' argument.

Ben Johnson revisited

It is now nearly 20 years since the Games of the XXIV Olympiad ended in uproar and moral panic induced by the Ben Johnson episode. Or maybe it was shock occasioned by the scarcely credible and thitherto unthinkable event of a top athlete actually having been caught taking drugs. The Ben Johnson affair merely confirmed what we already had good reason to suspect had been going on for a long time. It is true that stimulant abuse had been virtually eradicated, because it is so easily tested for. But the evidence seems to show that in other areas the athletes were often one jump ahead of the testers, and the suspicion must be that Seoul medal-winners other than Johnson were drug-assisted, and that the athletes and their

advisers were maintaining their advantage over the testers. Nevertheless, 1988 produced an Olympic villain like none before or since.

In Moscow back in 1980 there were *no* positives out of 1667 tests. In LA in 1984 there were twelve. Surely no-one believes that this represented the true level of drug-taking amongst Olympic athletes at the time. Rather it represents the spectacular failure of the doping police, despite their expensive resources. Johnson was caught because he had been taking a steroid which had been thought to be undetectable as he had been using it. A new test introduced at the last minute gave a success for the testers on this occasion, but it was rather tough on Johnson, who must be considered very unlucky.

To explain the predicament in which people involved in sport at various levels find themselves I think we must see sport as a reflection and as a feature of modern life. Modern-day high-performance sport encourages us to see the body as an instrument; and a deep-rooted acknowledgement of the value of science and technology leads us to seek technical means for making the body go faster, higher, and stronger in the pursuit of records (see Parry 2006c).

The athlete is faced with a contradiction inherent in the nature of sport. The internal logic of high-performance sport looks towards continual record-breaking, not recognising that limits must exist. The Olympic motto *citius, altius, fortius* expresses in one breath an ideal of human striving and excellence, but also an internal logic of compulsion which must eventually be doomed to failure. The biological possibilities of the human frame must at some stage become exhausted. Athletes can go on setting records for as long as their support services can produce better shoes, better tracks, better diets, better training schedules, better psychological preparation and better equipment, but surely not forever.

And the logical extension of this instrumental attitude towards sporting activity is that others seeking to compete will adopt whatever methods are necessary to 'win' - in both the sporting and socio-economic sense. It's not so long ago that moral crusaders in sport were waging war against the 'shamateurs', claiming that they were undermining the moral basis of sport and cheating by gaining unfair economic advantages. But now we have millionaire tennis and athletics stars at the Olympics.

This is the background we must call to mind if we are to understand drug use in sport. Those athletes who use them see them as a logical extension of other technological and instrumental means which they use to achieve their ends more efficiently, and this kind of outlook coheres both with the overall evaluative position of modern sport and with wider social attitudes and beliefs.

Of course, Johnson was a villain – and so were his advisers, his coaching and medical staff, and some of his stablemates. As the Dubin enquiry found, this was a corrupt system, not just a villainous athlete – and the same can be said of the BALCO affair. But we can see how and why such abuses occur. The problem is that any victory based on corruption cannot produce a hero.

I have already said that I believe that the primary wrong in doping lies in simple rule-breaking – in the secretive attempt to evade or subvert the pre-competition agreement, or 'contract to contest'. This threatens the moral basis of sport, jeopardises the integrity of the

sporting community and erodes public support and trust. It also calls into question the status of the Olympic athlete as role model, if the public perception is that a medal-winner is likely to have been doped. All are tainted by the suspicion generated by a few.

The Olympic Movement and International Understanding

This is really important at the educational and interpersonal level. There is so much good that can be done by positive role models working with young people – if they can be trusted, and if their performances were ‘real’. But there are also wider issues to be considered.

Let me draw attention to the emerging relationship between the Olympic Movement and the United Nations, two global organizations facing similar problems in regard to universality and particularity. The general problem faced by both is how they are to operate at a global (universal) level whilst there exist such apparently intractable differences at the particular level.

Olympism seeks to be universal in its values: mutual recognition and respect, tolerance, solidarity, equity, anti-discrimination, peace, multiculturalism, etc. This is a quite specific set of values, which are at once a set of universal general principles; but which also require differential interpretation in different cultures - *stated* in general terms whilst *interpreted* in the particular.

This search for a universal representation at the interpersonal and political level of our common humanity seems to me to be the essence of the optimism and hope of Olympism and other forms of humanism and internationalism. In the face of recent events in Europe and elsewhere it seems a fond hope and a naive optimism; but I don't see why we should not continue to argue for and work towards a future of promise, and I still see a strong case for sport as an efficient means. I believe that sport has made an enormous contribution to modern society over the past 100 years or so, and that the philosophy of Olympism has been the most coherent systematization of the ethical and political values underlying the practice of sport so far to have emerged.

It also has radical political potential. Despite the US-led boycott, the Olympic Games went to Moscow in 1980, and it was impossible to prevent the penetration of ideas into a previously closed society. Maybe it goes too far to claim a direct relation of the Games to the dramatic, spectacular and incredible events of 1989, when ‘the Wall came down’ - but maybe not. Now, less than 20 years later, many of the former ‘Eastern bloc’ countries have formally joined the European Union. A generation ago this was unthinkable. What will be the result of Beijing 2008, when a mighty and venerable culture, on the cusp of massive economic expansion into world markets, accepts the influence of visitors and the kind of global communications associated with an Olympic Games?

The very idea of a ‘closed society’ is under threat everywhere - the people are no longer reliant on restricted and controlled forms of information. The internet, satellite TV and global forms of communication are all contributing to a democratization of information, and the extensive migration of people across continents is producing a new cosmopolitanism. It will require increasingly high levels of dogmatism, authoritarianism, isolationism and extremism to sustain closed, exclusivist societies. Their life is limited. This, at any rate, has to be our

hope, and the hope of any kind of peaceful internationalism based on the idea of individual freedom and human rights.

Does all this matter? Is it just abstract academic theorizing? I think it matters a great deal, and our commitment to the development of global forms of cultural expression such as sport, and to international understanding through ideologies such as Olympism is one way that we as individuals can express our commitments, ideals and hopes for the future of the world.

As Nelson Mandela said:

Sport has the power to change the world, the power to inspire, the power to unite people in a way that little else can. It speaks to people in a language they understand. Sport can create hope where there was once only despair. It breaks down racial barriers. It laughs in the face of all kinds of discrimination ... spreading hope to the world.

This is the challenge for the 21st century: to promote universalism and humanism in sport as an everyday reality, in order to produce a better and more peaceful world for us all.

And no-one is better placed to do that than the Olympic athlete. We need heroes.

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