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ON August 6th ,2024

~~“In the first paragraph,... Then in the second paragraph... Then in the third paragraph ...” = 🥲~~

Would legal doping change the Olympics?

Adapted from *The Economist*, Aug 6th 2024

Trying to rid elite sport of drug cheats is an expensive and often thankless task. Competition organisers can never be sure that an event is clean: retests of samples from the Beijing and London games led to more than 100 medallists being disqualified. A small minority—including Aron D’Souza, an Australian businessman—believe it is time to lift the ban and make drug-taking a legitimate means to boost performance. Mr D’Souza plans to hold a doped competition, dubbed the Enhanced Games, in 2025. Most athletes have dismissed his plan as absurd and dangerous. But he believes that doped competitors would beat plenty of official world records. Is that true?

It could be, at least at first. Taking banned substances, such as anabolic steroids for strength events and hormones for endurance competitions, can improve performance, sometimes substantially. In athletics, the women’s world records for the 400m, shot put and discus are 39, 37 and 36 years old respectively. All three current records were set by athletes from East Germany or the Soviet Union, where governments presided over policies of near-mandatory drug-taking. Its athletes also set long-standing records in men’s events and in other sports. Even significant improvements in training, nutrition and biomechanics over the past four decades have not allowed clean competitors to best them—but with drugs, they might.

But legal doping would be unlikely to revolutionise sport in the way that proponents claim. If a new world record were set by a drug-taker, it would not mean that ever greater feats would follow—after the initial boost, athletes’ chemically induced improvement would plateau. Better drugs might be developed over time. But over the past four decades new enhancing substances have not guaranteed victory for cheats over clean athletes, nor over old-school dopers, as the enduring records from East Germans show.

In many cases that plateau would probably occur before a world record was broken. In the men’s 100m sprint, drug-taking has been so rife that four of the five fastest men in history have served suspensions for (knowingly or otherwise) taking banned substances. Yet even with chemical assistance, none of the four could do what the fifth and fastest man, Usain Bolt, could do clean. His unique physical gifts and mental toughness made him unbeatable.

But the normalisation of drug-taking would entail serious health risks. The effects of doping are not immediately apparent, but can be severe. In 2005, decades after they had competed, almost 200 East German athletes sued a pharmaceutical manufacturer, alleging that the drugs they had taken had caused infertility, heart problems and breast and testicular cancer. Drugs such as erythropoietin, which stimulates the production of red blood cells to aid recovery, put additional pressure on the heart and raise the risk of stroke.

If doping were legalised, it would in effect become compulsory: few athletes with serious designs on winning titles would cede what could be a decisive advantage to their rivals. That might make times and distances a little more impressive—but it would not revolutionise the Olympics. Many would argue that even if performances improved, the games would not. ■

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§6 = Conclusion / Answering the question

INTRODUCTION

Each time the Olympic Games are held, the performances of certain athletes are questioned, raising the issue of doping.

This is what this article published in *The Economist* on August 6th, that is during the Paris Olympics, is about.

This article assesses whether it would be preferable to legalize doping in sport, as some have suggested.

SUMMARY

- §1 = INTRODUCTION -

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It is difficult, not to say impossible to eliminate cheats in sport.

Consequently, some people suggest allowing / legalizing doping.

They are **even** considering creating a doped competition in order to break more records.

But this is debatable.

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Some records set by drug taking athletes decades ago still haven't been beaten, despite incredible progress in training and equipment

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- new drugs have not enabled athletes to win over clean ones or break old records

- sprint : athletes that have been found guilty of doping still ran less fast than Usain Bolt.

So allowing doping doesn't necessarily mean improving performances.

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In conclusion, the journalist believes that if doping were authorized, most athletes would resort to it. So it wouldn't make much difference to the Olympic Games as we know them today.

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In short, the journalist is far from convinced by the idea of allowing doping.