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STORYING THE IMPACT OF DOPING

“The ripples are big”: Storying the impact of doping in sport beyond the sanctioned athlete.

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Abstract

Objective: The purpose of this paper was to extend current doping research efforts by shifting the focus away from a doping-user perspective to examine the experiences of elite athletes that have been personally affected by other athletes doping behaviours.

Design: This research works within the interpretive paradigm, adopting relativist ontology and transactional/subjectivist epistemology.

Method: Conversational interviews were conducted with ‘competitive’ (N = 2) and ‘retired’ (N = 2) elite Track and Field athletes from multiple countries. In order to communicate the findings in a way that captures the complexity of the issue, whilst also appealing to the athletes this issue affects, creative non-fiction stories were used to present the findings.

Results: Two stories were created; one incorporating the ‘competitive’ athletes’ experiences and one presenting the ‘retired’ athletes’ accounts. The stories detail financial, emotional, and relational implications stemming from others’ use of performance enhancing drugs. Critically, the impact is not ephemeral; the retired athletes detailed the long-term implications of their experiences. Meanwhile, the competitive athletes suggest that given the current state of sport, they regularly have to defend their status as ‘clean athletes’. Thus, the ripples of doping in sport appear to be far reaching and enduring.

Conclusions: Incorporating a novel mode of knowledge production within the doping literature, the stories presented here demonstrate elite athletes’ candid accounts of being impacted by others’ doping behaviours in sport. This study also emphasises the value of adopting novel and creative approaches to data collection and representation within the field of doping research.

Key Words: Track and Field, creative non-fiction, doping, elite athletes, narrative

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Introduction

Public interest in the doping phenomenon has increased in recent years thanks to breaking media and news stories, and one sport in particular has been routinely affiliated with the issue: Track and Field. The latest doping allegations within Track and Field include systemic doping (e.g. Russian Athletics), corrupt administration (e.g. the International Association of Athletics Federation; IAAF), and leaked personal data. Consequently, the sport is under the media spotlight and is experiencing what has been referred to as a “doping crisis” (Roan, 2015b), with the image of the sport becoming increasingly tarnished. In particular, the IAAF – the global governing body for Athletics – has come under fire. At the time of writing, the International Federation is facing public (and legal) scrutiny over their alleged neglect to protect the rights of ‘clean athletes’ (i.e. an athlete who has publically denied using doping agents) in the sport (Roan, 2015a). Importantly though, it is not just the IAAF’s reputation that is on the line; the sport of Track and Field as a whole, and critically, the authenticity of self-declared ‘clean athletes’ performances are also being questioned.

Media portrayals of the doping phenomenon regularly highlight the implications of performance enhancing drug (PED) use for the banned athlete by broadcasting the personal repercussions of their sanctions (e.g. loss of eligibility, monetary penalties, social consequences, etc.). However, what the accounts commonly neglect to offer are insights into the lives of those in the background who arguably suffer as much – if not *more* – as a result of doping. As Larry Bowers (2014, p. 1), the Chief Science Officer at the US Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) points out, “cheating is not a victimless crime”. Athletes do not exist in isolation (Dunn & Thomas, 2012), so when an athlete uses PEDs their behaviour inevitably affects a range of other people. For example, there are consequences for fellow athletes in the form of lost prize and endorsement monies and opportunities for public recognition and glory.

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Surprisingly, such accounts are undocumented within the published doping literature. Likely contributing to this is the fact that – with the exception of research purposes – elite athletes are rarely invited to speak candidly about their (negative) experiences of sport. Instead, vigilantly protecting their public image – along with their sports’ – is often necessary in order to satisfy the expectations of numerous stakeholders invested in the sport (e.g. sponsors, governing bodies, etc.). Ultimately, an athlete’s behaviour has intrinsic and extrinsic consequences. Additionally, the (potential) ramifications of athletes’ behaviour(s) have intensified alongside the media’s growing interest in the doping phenomenon. However, it is acknowledged that “the media amplify what they see and, very often, distort what occurs” (Douglas & Carless, 2015, p. 21). Thus, choosing to speak candidly about one’s experiences related to doping in sport risks exposing an athlete to increased scrutiny from the media, the public, and the sporting community alike. Substantiating this, recent studies (e.g. Engelberg, Moston & Skinner, 2015; Georgiadis & Papazoglou, 2014; Kirby, Moran & Guerin, 2011) exploring athletes’ lived experiences suggest that athletes are more willing to discuss doping after receiving sanctions (i.e. after their PED use is made public) as opposed to during their active careers.

Against this backdrop, it is understandable that stories of this nature are rare within the field. Critically though, that does not mean they do not exist. Rather, it points to the fact that stories must be *told* before they can be *heard* (Douglas & Carless, 2015). Existing research has failed to provide an opportunity for such stories to be told. Consequently, our understanding of the (potentially) widespread implications of doping in sport is restricted. This research was conceived to qualitatively address this gap in the literature by: 1) providing a platform for elite ‘clean athletes’ to share their personal experiences in relation to doping in sport, 2) raising the voices of ‘clean athletes’ who have been personally affected by others’

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use of PEDs in sport, and 3) highlighting the potential ripple effect (i.e. direct/indirect impact on subsequent events/situations/people) that PED use in sport can have.

Methodology and Method

Philosophical Underpinnings

Working within the interpretive paradigm, this study adopted relativist ontology (reality is socially and experientially influenced and shaped) and transactional/subjectivist epistemology (the investigator and investigated co-create the findings as the investigation unfolds).

Procedures

After receiving ethical approval from the host institution, purposive sampling (Smith, 2013) was used to identify and recruit participants who: (1) were aged 18 and over, (2) represented the sport of Track and Field at an international level (competitive or retired), and (3) had been personally affected by doping. Whereas we initially aimed to recruit one participant for this analysis, four athletes from multiple countries were identified in a short period of time and all agreed to participate (personal details have been removed for anonymity purposes). A face-to-face interview lasting between one and two hours (average 82 minutes) was carried out with each participant at a time and location of their choosing, and all interviews were conducted by the lead author. In line with other scholars (Blodgett, Schinke, Smith, Peltier, & Pheasant, 2011), conversational interviews (i.e. unstructured) were utilised. Generally, conversational interviews commence with an open-ended question regarding a particular topic (e.g. the experience of being affected by others' use of PEDs) and the interviewer follows up on the interviewee's responses as they see fit (based on the interview aims) (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). For the purposes of our research, conversational interviews were considered useful because they: a) provide participants with a high degree of control over the stories that are shared, and b) allow the researcher to respond to the participants' stories.

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Equally, conversational interviews allow both the researcher and the participant to engage in a more participatory mode of knowing (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015). In adopting this approach, storytelling is invited rather than suppressed (Chase, 1995), which is critical since stories provide insights into biographical events unique to peoples' lives (Coffey & Atkinson, 1996).

Although the interviews utilised a conversational approach, before each interview the lead author familiarised herself with background information on individual participant's careers through publically available stories. The purpose of this procedure was two-fold; (1) to confirm that participants satisfied the inclusion criteria, and (2) to develop general guiding topics to prompt discussion during the interviews. Despite being familiarised with available media stories, the only structured question presented during the interviews was the opening question: *How have you been personally affected by others' use of PEDs?* Individualised questions (e.g. What was your initial reaction when you heard that your competitor had used PEDs? Did you have any suspicions that your competitor was using PEDs?) were then posed based on participants' responses and the guiding question. Consistent across all four interviews, the participants provided the majority of the dialogue.

Data Analysis and Representation

In light of the original aims of this study, the high profiles of the participants, and the sensitive nature of the topic, a storytelling approach was chosen, building on an emerging tradition in sport and exercise psychology (e.g., Blodgett & Schinke, 2015; Carless & Sparkes, 2008; Carless, Sparkes, Douglas & Cooke, 2014; Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2015; Smith & Sparkes, 2009). Specifically, creative non-fiction (CNF) stories was considered the most appropriate way to represent the data on the basis that they can: (1) help protect anonymity, (2) present findings in an engaging, accessible, and understandable form for a wide range of audiences, (3) elicit emotional responses, (4) be useful for exploring taboo,

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silenced, and ‘dangerous’ issues that are often excluded from research and practice in elite and professional sport, (5) preserve the integrity of participants’ words and accounts, (6) facilitate vicarious learning for the readers, (7) provide the possibility of portraying a complexity of lived experience, and (8) minimise interpretation and theorising (Blodgett et al., 2011; Carless & Douglas, 2013; Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2008, 2009, 2015; Smith, 2010, 2013; Smith, Tomasone, Latimer-Cheung & Martin Ginis, 2015; Sparkes, 2002a). Essentially, CNF stories are grounded in research findings and based on actual events and people (Sparkes, 2002a).

Notably, the term ‘fiction’ denotes varying meanings amongst researchers (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Consequently, failing to acknowledge distinctions between ‘fact’ and ‘fiction’ in research can create tension for some authors (Sparkes, 2002a). For the purposes of our research, we have adopted Sparkes’ (2002b) stance on the issue. Specifically, he contends that the difference between ethnographic fiction (i.e. CNF) and creative fiction (i.e. fiction) is that the former draw upon “actual data gathered by the researcher in the field” (p. 2); the authors claim to have ‘been there’ in the data collection process. Meanwhile, authors of the latter (i.e. fiction) demonstrate a willingness to include things that never happened; there is no obligation for the author to have ‘been there’ in the field. Given that the stories presented here are based on the lead author’s interview transcripts – she was ‘there in the field’ – we consider these stories to be examples of CNF.

Importantly, there are three types of CNF: (1) *portrait*, (2) *snapshot*, and (3) *composite*. Specifically, *portrait* CNF demonstrates an individual’s character and voice; *snapshot* CNF provides a description of what was observed in a situation; and, *composite* CNF combines the stories of multiple individuals into one (Blodgett et al., 2011). For the purposes of this paper and critically, to protect the anonymity of the participants, *composite* CNF stories are presented. Ensuing from their capacity to amalgamate mixed experiences

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into one all-encompassing narrative (Ely, Vinz, Downing, & Anzul, 1997; Spalding & Phillips, 2007), composite CNF offers a good compromise for staying true to the participants' words and experiences, while also making sure that their identities are protected. In writing the stories, a mix of experiences and voices from the participants were drawn upon and combined together, forming stories that depict a range of intersecting themes around the personal impact of PED use in sport. As scholars highlight (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015), the stories are not intended to be read as quotes from an individual athlete's experience, but rather, should be considered a synthesised account.

Creating the Stories

All interviews were audio-recorded as agreed by the participants, and the interviews were transcribed verbatim by the lead author. Next, the individual transcripts were used to develop the first draft of the stories. Specifically, the lead author read each transcript multiple times, highlighting key words, quotes, and ideas that seemed to represent the ways in which the individuals had been impacted by PEDs. During this process it became apparent that the accounts of the two retired athletes differed significantly from those of the competitive athletes. While the retired athletes seemed to be telling stories from the perspective of 'looking back'; the competing athletes shared stories with a 'future focus'. It was therefore decided that two stories should be created rather than one in order to represent these two diverging accounts. Thus, from this stage onwards the transcripts were dealt with as two separate datasets ('retired' and 'competitive'), each undertaking the same data analysis and representation procedures.

Next, the highlighted segments were copied into a separate document, forming the initial skeleton of the stories. Direct quotes were maintained from the interview transcripts as much as possible to preserve each of the individuals' spoken words (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015). Following this, the experiences and ideas contained in the narrative skeletons were

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linked together by writing around them so that a full and flowing representation of the combined stories was produced. The original transcripts were then reviewed and compared to the stories multiple times to ensure that no content relating to the personal impact of PED use was overlooked or misrepresented.

Story Structure

According to Cheney (2001), the best CNF stories do not tell readers *how* to think or feel about something, nor what emotions should be aroused. Rather, they *show*. In other words, they present the experiences of individuals as *they* experienced them, with as little altering and/or editing as possible. While this was desirable, it is still important to highlight that the stories do not depict unaltered words delivered straight from the mouths of participants on all occasions; there are multiple reasons for this. First of all, given that these are *composite* stories (combined experiences from multiple individuals), coherently combining the unique accounts required that words be added in places and removed from others to help create a natural flow. Nevertheless, direct quotes from the transcripts have been left intact wherever possible. Further, heeding researchers' (e.g. Smith et al., 2013) suggestions that stories should provide vivid description and focus on human senses; words, phrases, and comments have been added for literary purposes at times. A central element of CNF is the use of many techniques of fiction (e.g. contextualised, vernacular language; composite characters; dialogue; metaphor; allusions; flashbacks and flash forwards; tone shifts, etc.) to communicate results in compelling and emotionally vibrant ways (Smith, 2013). Lastly, the stories are not word for word what the participants said due to the length of the interviews and the amount of data collected. For the sake of brevity, only select sections of the transcripts could be included. To help reduce the transcripts the lead author referred to publically available media stories regarding the athletes' careers and experiences to see what information was already available. In utilising this technique, the content was further

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reduced by focussing primarily on including experiences and details that had not already been told in the media.

Although we have attempted to be transparent regarding how these stories were developed, we are conscious of the fact that different researchers with a different history may have opted to select and include alternative extracts. In this sense, the lead author's personal experiences and background have likely influenced the selection on some level. Not only that, but noting the words of Randall and Phoenix (2009), any story is influenced by the motivations of the teller, the audience, the context, interviewer-interviewee relationships, the temperament of the teller and listener, the levels of literacy and storytelling ability, and memory. Thus, not only have personal viewpoints and backgrounds likely influenced the stories that have been presented in these CNF stories but, equally, the stories that were shared (or withheld) by the participants in the first place may have been unintentionally swayed by the lead author. Ultimately, from the moment of arranging the interview, through the interview, through the transcription, and through the analysis, her interpretation has been omnipresent (Josselson, 2007). Although this is important to acknowledge, it should not detract from the stories. Rather, *good* bias – that which stimulates inquiry without interfering with the investigation – is unavoidable and necessary in research (Wolcott, 1995). Equally, caution was taken to help establish rigour throughout this research. Specifically, the initial drafts of the stories were returned directly to the participants; thus, facilitating an empowerment process, and providing participants with an opportunity to take ownership over their involvement in the research (Blodgett et al., 2011). Participants were influential in determining how the stories were presented and shared. Exemplifying this, one participant asked that a detail be removed from their story for anonymity purposes; while another made minor tweaks to some of their comments (the stories presented here are the final versions and have received full approval from all four participants).

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Criteria for Judgement

There are currently competing claims regarding what qualifies as ‘good-quality’ within interpretive research (Chan et al., 2014) and it is beyond the scope of this paper to discuss these in detail. However, it is important to specify how we have attempted to maximise the quality of our research. Sparkes and Smith (2014) suggest that fictional works should be judged based on their: (1) aesthetic standards, (2) emotive force, (3) ability to engage readers emotionally, (4) verisimilitude, and (5) authenticity/integrity. This ‘list’ is just one of many though, and various authors have made numerous suggestions regarding criteria that they consider appropriate for judging differing tales; thus, no list should be considered closed or finite. Accordingly, we reviewed the lists (e.g. Carless & Sparkes, 2008; Sparkes & Douglas, 2007; Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and rationale offered by multiple researchers experienced in the use of fictional representations within sport. As a result, given the unique aims of our research, we suggest the following criteria (in the form of questions to be asked) for judging our research: (1) believability – is it plausible?, (2) evocative – does it provide an opportunity for vicarious experiences?, (3) does it create a space for silenced voices to be heard?, (4) can it raise the awareness of individuals surrounding and shaping the participants’ experiences? (e.g. is there something to be learned?), (5) does it invite dialogue and response?, and (6) does it affect the reader emotionally? We invite the reader to judge this research based on these criteria.

The Stories

Two composite CNF stories are presented here, one encompassing the words of the two retired athletes and the other presenting the words of the two competitive athletes. Notably, the stories are not linear in nature but, rather, they are fluid and overlapping narratives. Although there is a textual beginning and end, these do not actually reflect a static beginning and end. Instead, they present single moments that the participants are fluidly moving in and

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out of, some unravelling even during the interviews (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015).

Accordingly, while the events that unfold in the stories are based on participants' accounts, they do not follow in the precise order in which they were told during the data collection.

Equally, these are composite stories; they consist of the experiences of two athletes presented as if they were experienced by one.

“Nobody saw it coming”

“I took the sport up when I was seven and my mum always tells this tale: the first night I went training the coach says to me ‘what do you want to do?’ I said ‘I want to win the Olympics’. He actually meant ‘do you want to run, jump or throw?’ But you know, that’s my vision. I want to win the Olympics”

As an international athlete, I’ve always just thought ‘well I’ll never come up against anyone who dopes’. I mean, I’m doing my sport for the same reasons I chose to do it when I was age seven - I always believed I could get to the top in my sport if I worked hard and did my best. I’ve just presumed everybody else was doing it for those reasons too.

Well, I was wrong. Doping *has* affected me and my results. A lot.

Actually, because of everything that’s happened and how much I’ve been impacted by performance enhancing drugs, this year I’m not going to our World Cup. I’m sure nothing bad would happen, but it easily could. They could manipulate a test or something like that. It’s not worth the risk. Even if the risk is 1%; it’s not worth the risk. One of my teammates said that he’s not going from the moment that the host nation was announced. He literally said ‘I’m not going back there’. The rest of us always joked and we’d say ‘yeah do we want to go back? We’ll do something stupid if we’re back there. We probably shouldn’t go’. It

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was always something we had joked about, but then it was ‘no I’m actually not going to go’. I think it is a good stand. The reality is though, the statement we’re making and the reason behind it will be different. The statement publicly will probably be something along the lines of a protest. But really, it’s us being worried that they could do something. I mean, they could not let us in the country; easily not let us in the country. They’ve rejected my visas before and they could do it again. And then once you’re in there, if they take a doping sample and it goes to the lab; anything could happen. We’ve seen it. It’s clear that this sort of stuff can happen. It’s just not worth the risk. It’s not worth that risk of missing out four years of competition and having my name completely tarnished. That’s one way this has affected me personally; I’m missing my World Cup next year.

Let’s see, how have performance enhancing drugs impacted me results wise? That’s easy. A few years ago I missed a final by one spot and I literally didn’t really sleep for two nights. I felt so disappointed in myself and questioned all my training and thought ‘what could I have done different?’ To be honest, it wasn’t just disappointment. It was more than that. I felt almost uncomfortable in my own skin. I was so disappointed and unsatisfied. I felt so discontent with myself and I felt like I’d let people down. Even though no one said ‘we’re disappointed with you’, I know the consequences of that. As a result of that race, my funding halved. So the next year instead of having a wage where I can just train and not need to worry about paying the bills – it doesn’t make me rich but it covered all my living costs – all of a sudden I only had half of that. So obviously now it was like ‘oh ok so I’m going to have to maybe get a part-time job as well as my training in order to keep competing at the level I want to’. Brilliant.

The thing is, since then four competitors have been banned from that final for using performance enhancing drugs. That’s half the finalists! 50%! I didn’t actually realise it was so bad. I just presumed that it’s one person every so often who would choose to go down that

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route. Clearly that's not the case. Their results have been annulled now, which means actually, the worst I would have got is 5th in that race. That means I would have got the other half of my funding – and that's for two years as well. A difference of £13000 a year. That one race alone resulted in a loss of £26000 for me.

So now with the bans, I'm obviously thinking to myself 'I shouldn't have had to go through that mental torture and that whole questioning everything and thinking I wasn't good enough. I shouldn't have had to experience that awful feeling that I didn't do well'. Actually, I could have been floating on clouds for a couple of days. It really did knock me hard. I'm quite a proud person so I'd love everyone to know 'oh by the way, you know that race when you all thought I didn't make the final? I actually would have'. But obviously that's just important to me and everybody else is probably just getting on with their lives and have already forgotten about it. Really, I almost want – not justice – I'd almost like the *true* story to be told. I want people to think I was good. I don't want them to think I failed. It was a big failure to me not making that final but obviously now I actually realise there was probably very little I could have done because it was out of my hands. I was unlucky.

So definitely people using performance enhancing drugs has affected me quite a lot and some of my results. I've probably been denied that personal satisfaction on lots of opportunities. I never really know what the true result is. I've won international medals which was great, but if these allegations are true I've probably won double the amount, which puts me in a totally different league to what I've already achieved. I don't know whether I will ever actually get any of those medal upgrades, but I would be so grateful. I could have been the best in the world and I was never told. At the same time, I just think to myself, and it almost sounds a bit too cheesy to say, but I can sleep at night. I've got some real satisfaction out of what I've done. I guess it just makes me prouder because I think 'ah look what I managed to do. I got medals despite not really being on a level playing field'.

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So yeah, obviously my results have been affected by performance enhancing drugs, but it doesn't stop there. A friend – a guy I trained with – just tested positive a week and a half ago. When I first heard, my immediate thought was 'he must have taken a supplement. He must have been taking something that he didn't know had anything in it; this is fine. He'll get his B Sample tested and it'll be fine. It'll be a three month suspension and we can move on'. But then he declined having his B Sample tested, all of his social media accounts were gone, and he hasn't made a statement. I actually just heard from one of the guys that he knows he did something wrong and I was like 'well shit'. Now he's basically admitted that he was *knowingly doping*. The crazy thing is, I had no suspicions. None. He's been really outspoken too. He's one of the guys in the Press very much going after systematic doping; very outspoken. It was shocking to me; it was shocking to the Press. It was seriously shocking. Nobody saw it coming.

So now having gone through the whole systematic doping allegations and dealing with the anger I felt with that – those guys are stealing medals and it's ridiculous – then having this guy who I was training with a month earlier; having a personal connection to this story? It definitely brings home that human aspect of things. I mean, the guy has a kid due in like a week – his whole life is basically crumbling. Again, my first reaction was anger. But then it was kind of – not justification – but I could see why he did it. He's hit Olympic standard for multiple Olympics but not his national standard, so he hasn't got to go to the Olympics even though he got the standard. It was looking like it could happen again next year. I guess he decided that he needed to make an Olympics and that was his goal. So for him, that was his gold medal. And to be honest, it didn't really necessarily directly impact other people. Yes, someone might have finished 17th, deserved to finish 16th, and that's important – I mean you can't look past that – but it's on a different scale than guys who are standing at the podium. He's the middle of the pack – he's not stealing medals from anyone

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– he’s just trying to make an Olympics. My mind-set towards him is different than it was towards these other guys, the ones involved in the systematic doping. That’s what’s drawn me back. It has really brought back the fact that *this is a person*. They screwed up and they deserve to be punished for screwing up, but I realise now that how you go about doing that is a consideration I hadn’t been making as thoroughly as I needed to. The whole thing – it was kind of an eye opener for me. I just thought ‘oh shit! I need to get off my high horse here. I’m riding a double standard’. Actually, you can start to see why people – you sort of see the many different reasons why people do this – it’s not just the people that are trying to make the podium. Not everyone dopes so they can *be* the best in the world; some people dope so they can *compete* with the best in the world. Really, his story could easily be anybody’s story about how people can get pulled into this world of doping.

Man, coming to that realisation has really made me aware of the fact that I was definitely up on a pedestal – very altruistic about the whole thing. Only bad people do this. I always thought people who take drugs must have an iron heart and not have any feelings. But actually, I liked him. I was really ignorant about the whole issue. Now I’ve realised that perfectly nice people can be doping behind your back. To be honest, I think a lot of people are like that until it becomes more personal. As a youngster I just didn’t really think doping was widespread; I thought it was just done in moments of isolation. Now that I’m older I can come to understand people are in different circumstances. If it’s systemic, ‘this is what we do, this is the culture’, then it’s what they’ve always been brought up with. I can understand that’s just what you think happens. If you are in a group where a lot of people are doping and you’re training with these people day in and day out, they become like part of your family really and you just think it’s the norm and it’s okay because everyone else is doing it. It’s like an accepted thing.

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But going back to the guy I trained with, someone actually tweeted a photo of us together at the training camp, so people obviously know that we were training together. I'm not going to shy away from that fact if it's brought up, but right now I don't know whether or not I'm going to be the one to bring it up. I actually haven't said anything yet. I need more time to figure out what I'm going to do. I see myself as an advocate for Clean Sport, but now I'm associated with him. The association jeopardises my position on what I'm trying to do. It worries me from the standpoint of when I try to come out against these guys who are doping, that point – us training together – being thrown back in my face.

But you know, really it's all about the bigger picture of wanting to clean up the sport as a whole. I don't think drug stories are good for the sport. Our sport doesn't have a ton of respect to begin with. It loses respect when we have all the top guys doping. So that personally affects me too, because I want our sport to be respected and recognised. I mean, I don't believe it's rife in our sport, I just believe that unfortunately, in the last few years there have been quite a lot of people who chose to dope. Now people are always going to question your performance. I'm very aware of that. Actually, one thing I do to help make sure there aren't any questions about whether I'm clean or not is on the drug tests I put a cross in one of the boxes agreeing for my sample to be tested retrospectively. It's optional but I always put a cross there because I always think 'oh! Will I look guilty if I don't?' They always say you don't have to mark it, but I always think 'I'll just do it anyway'. I would never want a test to come out in the future that could detect a substance and then they go 'well you know Ralph – we've never been able to test his'. I want to prove in years to come that there's never any doubts and even though that information would probably never ever get out, I always just feel like I'm abiding by every rule. Also, my goal for this year is to be as transparent as possible. I think the best way to be transparent is to let people know what I'm doing and how I train and all that stuff; that leaves little room for them to question what I'm doing. Being like 'hey

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look I'm not immune to this but look what I'm doing and you be the judge of whether or not you think I'm doing it clean or not'. Really, a big part of it is keeping that asterisk away and not having that question mark beside my name when I finish. I've obviously learned the hard way that it's impossible to make sure you're not surrounded by people who are doping – it's out of my control – but I'm not going to associate with them. I've got no time for it. So from here on out, you be the judge of whether or not I'm clean.

“I've got scars”

Looking back on my professional athletics career, yeah I've been affected by performance enhancing drugs on countless occasions. I've not been wronged once, twice, three, four – I've been wronged for many *years!* I think once it happens not just once but on a number of occasions you know psychologically it can be very damaging. You go through a period where you wonder 'what's the point? What's the point when this happens time and time again? What's it all worth? What's it all for? What happens if I would have done better?' I've got scars from the people who have done me wrong.

So yeah I've missed my opportunity. I've been robbed. I've been cheated. I'm not alone though. I'm just one of many victims of performance enhancing drugs – the unsung heroes. We're the people that have lost out on medals, positions, financial rewards...all that. No one hears our stories. No one hears about the ripple effect, but it's usually the ripples that are far and wide that have the most effect on people. They can stop people from competing again, from ever getting to that same level. The ripples are big and they get smaller, but performance enhancing drugs affect everybody. So, how have I *personally* been affected by performance enhancing drugs? Actually, it's been quite a few years since I retired and I try not to harbour bitter thoughts. I think I was very angry and bitter that a guy cheated me out

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of my livelihood, cheated me out of places, cheated me out of maybe an opportunity to stand on the podium. Well actually, not just one athlete – a *lot* of athletes. I'm older now though and I don't want to be a bitter and an angry man anymore. People make mistakes.

Still, I feel sorry for the athletes that are coming into our sport. Any good performance now is tainted by the question; 'are you taking drugs'? Their performance is not going to be truly believed. Everyone thinks every Olympic medallist is on drugs. I even know elite coaches who think any great performance is down to drugs. Even you as yourself you get suspicious and *you're an athlete* so you're watching and you never had these suspicions before and now you're suspicious. Now I'm part of the general public and an ex-athlete and I think that everyone's taking drugs. I don't trust people. I think that's sad for those athletes who are clean. Prime example, being at the Olympic Games, watching whoever it may be break world records and thinking 'wow that's awesome!' But then the afterthought is 'was that a legitimate performance? 'Is he or she a drug user?' That's the wrong thing. If those athletes out there are doing it the right way and the hard way – which I believe a number of them are – they shouldn't have to go through that level of scrutiny and doubt because of a group of people who are spoiling it for everybody else. The global sporting body the IAAF need a reality check!

But still, I don't trust people. When I see athletes who don't talk about performance enhancing drugs at all I'm really suspicious about them. Then at the same time, I'm wondering about the people who *really* talk about performance enhancing drugs too. Actually, I don't even trust athletes in my own country! Once athletes in your own country are taking drugs, people instantly think you must be on them too. I know, because during my career one of my teammates was exposed. If your teammate tests positive then there's suspicion around the whole team; is it systematic? Is it just one? The suspicion cloaks everyone. The other side to the story – the one that people don't really realise – is that

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because of this ‘teammate’ I missed out on qualifying for a major Championship by one place. One spot. Guess who got it in front of me? Yep, *he* got it. Not only that, but he had already failed his A Sample at that point! He knew he was going to be banned and he still took the spot. You can’t do anything till the B Sample’s tested positive, so I missed the opportunity to go to the Championship because of him. A cheater. I missed out. I can’t get that opportunity back. I’ll never get it back. I’ll never know the elation of being crowned Champion, standing on the podium, fulfilling childhood dreams; you can’t get that back. That’s what you dream of doing, that’s what you kind of visualise when you’re young – standing on that podium, seeing your country’s flag be raised above every other nation. You can’t get that back. You *never* get that back. On top of that, because I didn’t make the team I had a 50% reduction in my biggest sponsorship contract. I lost *half* of my largest earning potential based literally on that decision where I wasn’t able to go to the Championships because someone cheats ahead of me. That blow could have ended my career. Simple. Track and Field isn’t like other sports where you get paid lots and lots of money. This is a hand-to-mouth kind of existence. I was one of the fortunate ones and had a few pounds saved in the bank so I was able to continue, but it could have been the end. It would have been the end for a lot of athletes.

So yeah that’s one example of how I’ve been affected by performance enhancing drugs, but I’ve got another. This one still throws me. During my career there was this one athlete I used to compete against all the time and I always had suspicions about him. In this one competition in particular I knew something was completely wrong. I just knew it. Something was wrong. The whole scenario felt off. We were heading out to our event – all of us competitors – and as we’re walking through the hallway I saw his coach pass him something. You can’t do that. It’s totally illegal. I saw it and that’s when it all changed for me. I’d seen the pair do suspicious stuff before, but this time I had witnesses. Immediately

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everyone around me goes “did you see that?” “Yeah we saw that”. He did it in front of us! Everyone that was behind us saw it. The first thing I did – and this probably cost me my medal – was I said to the closest official “his coach just handed him something”. That moment changed everything. My mind had gone from competing.

He won the medal, went up for the ceremony, and I knew he was suspicious because he kept running away from his chaperone in the warm-up area after the event. He was trying to get away. There was panic in his face.

So it was no surprise then when two days later I got a call and they told me “you’re going to be upgraded because he’s just been banned”. I felt like ‘I knew it! I knew it!’ I mean I was happy. I was relieved that I was right. It was definitely one of those ‘I told you so’ moments. But I was also angry; angry at him. The anger is misplaced though because you can’t do anything with it. You have to kind of deal with it. It’s a good thing he left the village immediately because if we saw him we probably would have all kicked him to death or spat on him. I had the worst race of my life because I was concentrating on him. I’d never done that before. I wasn’t focussing. If I had run my normal race I would have been at least bronze, maybe higher. So I was just thinking ‘I lost my medal because I was concentrating on someone who was taking drugs; I’ve really screwed this up’. I was really upset by the fact that I’d lost out; really sad. I lost a medal to a drugs cheat in more ways than one. He nicked the medal from me because he performed better, and he got it because I concentrated on him. I concentrated on him and didn’t concentrate on my own performance.

To this day I have lots of regret for doing that, but then for the greater good of the sport...if I hadn’t have done it they never would have found the evidence. Literally, if it wasn’t for me they wouldn’t have done anything. I do wonder though, how different would that have been to my career? I honestly don’t know. So what’s the payoff? How do I get paid back?

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I've tried to just focus on the fact that he got caught. The payback is that he got caught and he's out of the sport. He will never compete again. Too bad that doesn't bring back the medal. It is nice though now with the more cases coming out and they're retesting samples retrospectively which have been kept; it feels quite good actually because I can't go back now. Those times are gone. I can't be on that podium. But to know that those bastards are getting caught and they probably can't rest at night. I can take a bit of delight in knowing that they're shit scared that tests which were frozen or kept from many years ago are being retested. Whatever they're doing in their careers – whatever it is – they might have built their careers off of their success in sport, but if they've gone down that avenue and they get exposed? There's a sense of satisfaction and gratification actually because I can sleep at night. I can do the mirror test. I can do all those things. I've got no worries. But these people – they've got a lot to be worried about. Hopefully they're squirming with worry. If I end up on that Olympic podium then I guess that would be a sweet bit of justice. It will be really interesting to see how many people were really clean in my career. How many more medals I could have won or how many upgrades I would have gotten from medals I already have. No doubt I'd have a much better medal collection. I'd probably have a bigger profile too. Obviously the money and the livelihood as well. I'm sure if I had won those medals I would have earned a whole lot more money. I would financially be in a much better position today.

But the reality is, I'm never going to get that back. You've just got to get on with it don't you? You accept it as part of the sport – you don't want to, but you have to. So yeah, I do look back and wonder 'what if?' What could have been if I had been competing on a level playing field? I know what I achieved going through what I went through and doing it the legitimate and right way, but I wanted to test myself against the very best in the world. I wanted to believe that I could be the best. The truth is, I don't know. I know how good I was, but I don't know where that stands in the world rankings apart from those ones who have

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tested positive; what about the ones who haven't been caught? I'll probably never know and that's the reality of elite Track and Field.

Knowing what I know now, I probably would have chosen a different sport. Don't get me wrong; I believe the sport of Athletics fundamentally can be a great sport. But if I had known those barriers which I was going to be faced with? Yeah, I think I would have chosen a different sport. And as a parent now, I wouldn't want to encourage my children to do it at the professional level; school level is fine. That's sad.

Discussion

The purpose of this research was to extend current doping literature by shifting the focus away from a doping-user perspective to examine the experiences of elite athletes that have been personally affected by other athletes' doping behaviours. Accordingly, we aimed to provide self-declared 'clean athletes' with an opportunity to share their experiences of being personally affected by others' use of PEDs in a context that would protect their anonymity. Simultaneously, we aimed to highlight the potential ripple effect of doping in sport. To achieve these aims we have chosen to adopt the position of a *storyteller* as opposed to a *story analyst* (Smith & Sparkes, 2009) when discussing these stories. Whereas a *story analyst* adds further analysis and theory to a story, a *storyteller* treats stories as analytical and theoretical in their own right (Smith & Sparkes, 2009; Ellis, 2004). Fundamentally, the story *is* the analysis (Ellis, 2004). Therefore, attempting to interpret and/or substantiate the stories by adding author-driven analytical dissection would hinder their ability to evoke responses and reactions from readers directly. Instead, we wanted to encourage (and enable) the reader to construct their own understanding of the stories, being mindful of the reality that different readers may settle on divergent conclusions. Essentially, we are relinquishing control of the stories and trusting the audience (e.g. participants, readers) to actively participate in constructing their own reactions and understanding (Smith & Sparkes, 2009).

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The purpose of these stories is to *show* rather than *tell*. *Showing* seeks to evoke reactions and responses in readers, prompting the formation of theoretical questions and responses (Ellis, 2004). The audience is encouraged to think *with* the story, rather than *about* the story. Frank (1995, p. 23) distinguishes between the two processes by saying that “to think about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyse that content”. Meanwhile, to think *with* a story implies taking “the story as already complete”. Thus, Frank argues that rather than hearing a story and moving on, in thinking *with* a story, the reader is encouraged to further reflect on it, perhaps even modifying the story at a later point. Markedly, this aligns with our intention to raise awareness to the potential ripple effect of PED use; strictly hearing these stories is likely insufficient for increasing appreciation for the broader implications of doping behaviour. However, prompting reflection and active engagement with the stories in readers has the potential to instigate conversations and discussions that can expand our limited understanding of the doping landscape. On a basic level, one way to ‘engage’ with these stories is to use them as a resource to prompt discussion around the issue of doping in sport. Drawing from other research, Smith et al. (2015) recently noted that amongst adults with spinal cord injury (SCI) and health care professionals, stories were considered a valuable resource for disseminating evidence-based information relative to physical activity. Based on their research, they suggest that stories can be used to facilitate dialogue, teach, remind, and reinvigorate people. Additionally, the ability of stories to facilitate informed dialogue around taboo issues in sport amongst coaches, psychologists, athletes, and students has been demonstrated in previous research (Douglas & Carless, 2006, 2008, 2009) and is particularly intriguing given the taboo nature of doping in sport. Potentially, stories could provide a (much needed) platform to openly discuss the doping phenomenon amongst coaches, teachers, parents, and athletes.

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Offering initial support for this possibility, the participants in this research (i.e. athletes) provided their reactions to reading the stories; we have found these responses particularly encouraging. One participant commented “I have had a read through the piece and it sounds really great. It's very powerful and really captures the emotions, mind-set, and situation that myself and the other interviewee have encountered”. In addition, another participant noted that “it's certainly a unique way of presenting the information but it does do a fantastic job of catching the emotion and passion that probably couldn't be captured any other way”. Returning to the ‘Criteria for Judgement’, these reactions suggest that the stories are: (1) believable, (2) evocative, (3) create space for silenced voices to be heard, (4) invite response, and (5) affect the reader emotionally. Thus, satisfying five of the six criteria. Given that the only criterion not satisfied is ‘can it raise the awareness of individuals surrounding and shaping participants’ experiences?’, this criterion presumably cannot be met by the participants themselves. Importantly, participants were not made aware of the criteria for judgement; thus, not prompted to provide any specific responses. The fact that their responses provide details pertaining to the specific criteria for judgement is increasingly insightful.

The other two participants provided more generic responses; however, they are equally encouraging. Specifically, one participant simply replied “brilliant article”; notably, the reference to the story being an ‘article’ perhaps alludes to the reality that elite athletes are commonly approached for news stories (i.e. articles). Meanwhile, participating in this research has presented a unique and novel means for sharing their experiences anonymously. Finally, the fourth participant replied “good to hear there has been an increased interest and uptake in other athletes wanting their story and voice to be heard. More work for you...” This final response suggests that indeed, the stories have provided the opportunity for generally silenced voices to be heard. Cumulatively, the participants’ responses suggest the

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potential value of incorporating these stories (and others like them) within current anti-doping education efforts and campaigns. As a starting point, simply to prompt conversations.

Conclusion

Overall, this research presents a novel and promising approach to presenting doping research. The methodology employed has provided an opportunity for elite athletes to share their personal (negative) experiences of sport in a frank and candid manner that is unusual in this field. In doing so, it has revealed elements of the generally overlooked ripple effects that PED use in sport can have. Doping does not only affect the individual doping athlete; on the contrary, the use of PEDs can – and does – have consequences for numerous individuals, teams, organisations, sports, and even nations. Likewise, the duration of the impact is not static; as these stories show, it can linger long after an athlete's sport career ends. Thus, based on the stories presented here, further research into the broader repercussions of PED use in sport is warranted. Equally, the use of CNF and narrative methods within the doping research field should be encouraged. Finally, the two unique stories presented here should prompt researchers to reflect on the types of stories that are (and are not) presently depicted within the doping literature. What other stories are currently being withheld and/or ignored? From an ethical standpoint, it is our challenge (and obligation) as researchers to ensure that there is space and opportunity for *all* stories to be heard. Failure to do so will limit our capacity to protect the rights of athletes to compete in Clean Sport (i.e. doping-free) both now and in the future.

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