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"*The process isn't a case of report it and stop":* Athletes' lived experience of whistleblowing on doping in sport

Erickson, K. L.; Patterson, L.; Backhouse, S.

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Blowing the whistle on doping in sport

Abstract

Whistleblowing is effective for exposing doping in sport, garnering increased support and promotion within the global anti-doping community. However, limited attention has been afforded towards understanding the doping whistleblowing process. In response, the authors convey a sense of the whistleblowing context by using the actual words of whistleblowers to illuminate their experience. To achieve this aim, the authors have adopted a narrative approach. Three doping whistleblowers were interviewed regarding their lived experiences of whistleblowing on doping and the data has been represented in the form of one composite creative non-fiction story. The story narrates the whistleblowing experience as a process whereby individuals must (a) determine what they witnessed and experienced was doping, (b) make the decision and take action to report it, and (c) deal with the myriad of consequences and emotions. It also highlights the dilemma faced by whistleblowers who are likely equally compelled to adhere to the moral of loyalty and fairness; yet in this context they are unable to do both. Stemming from the story presented and the forms of retribution experienced, the authors offer practical suggestions for sporting organisations to address in order to empower others to whistleblow on doping in sport. Specifically, organisations should establish and implement whistleblowing policies that: (a) provide protection for whistleblowers, (b) mandate whistleblowing education, and (c) identify an independent person for individuals to seek guidance and support from before, during and following the act of whistleblowing.

Key Words: whistleblowing, doping, narrative, retribution, policy development, creative non-fiction

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1. Introduction

For decades the concept of whistleblowing has been widely researched within the public sectors and is commonly defined as "…the disclosure by organisation members (former or current) of illegal, immoral, or illegitimate practices under the control of their employers, to persons or organisations that may be able to affect action" (Near & Miceli, 1985, p. 4). Individuals are confronted with a serious dilemma when deciding what to do in possible whistleblowing situations. According to Uys and Senekal (2008), one must choose between adhering to the morality of loyalty (an obligation to people, organisations or groups within a particular context) versus the morality of principle (individuals should adhere to certain abstract principles irrespective of those involved in the situation). More recently, this dilemma has been referred to as the fairness-loyalty tradeoff (see Waytz, Dungan, & Young, 2013). Fairness and loyalty are considered basic moral values but they conflict at times, including in potential whistleblowing situations. Norms of fairness demand that all people and groups be treated equally. Meanwhile, norms of loyalty dictate that one should favour their own group over other groups. The former requires that people report and punish wrongdoing, while the latter indicates that reporting another person to a third party constitutes an act of betrayal. Thus, there is justification and rationale for blowing the whistle and staying quiet (i.e., protecting the individual and the group), but only one can ultimately be safeguarded.

Following high profile cases of whistleblowing in sport (e.g., Yuliya and Vitaly Stepanov regarding Russian Athletics), the concept of reporting wrongdoing has garnered increasing interest from researchers (Erickson, Backhouse, & Carless, 2017; Whitaker, Backhouse, & Long, 2014), the media and anti-doping organisations worldwide. Despite the increased emphasis and reliance upon intelligence-driven deterrence over the traditional detection-deterrence approach (i.e., drug testing), research on doping whistleblowing has not

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kept pace with the developments in anti-doping policy and practice. Few researchers have considered the issue (see Whitaker et al., 2014; Erickson et al., 2017), and insights from individuals who have actually blown the whistle on doping are unavailable. This lack of understanding, alongside growing recognition for the limitations to the detection-deterrence approach (e.g., drug tests will never be able to detect all substances) inspired the present research. Specifically, we aimed to increase understanding of whistleblowing behaviour by engaging with those who have direct experience of living through the process. In doing so, there is an opportunity to design and implement evidence-based whistleblowing policies which, in turn, have the potential to: (a) reduce the negative stigma commonly attached to the label 'whistleblower' (e.g., snitch, tattletale), (b) deter athletes who may be considering doping from doing so as they will no longer feel confident that their behaviour will be kept secret and (c) create an open and transparent environment (Winneker, 2016). Additionally, it ensures that individual whistleblowers receive a certain level of care.

The content of a whistleblowing policy has a direct influence on its effectiveness (Lewis, 2002). In order to implement a bespoke doping whistleblowing policy it is necessary to understand the doping whistleblowing experience. Collecting and sharing doping whistleblowers' stories and representing their voices in literature presents a promising avenue for achieving this. Accordingly, we conceived this research to qualitatively explore the issue of whistleblowing on doping. We sought to achieve this by providing space for doping whistleblowers to share their stories and shed light on the whistleblowing experience from the whistleblower's perspective. We hope that by adopting this approach, we can increase understanding and appreciation for the behaviour and, in turn, that the findings will inform and shape evidence-based doping whistleblowing policies and practices. Moreover, this shift serves to create a new narrative in which whistleblowers are applauded for their actions and celebrated which further encourages shared accountability for sporting integrity.

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2. Background

Whistleblowing is considered the most effective means of exposing fraud in the public sectors (Brown, Hays, & Stuebs, 2016) and recognition for its effectiveness is growing in the sporting world. Significant resources are now being directed towards Report Doping platforms in an attempt to encourage whistleblowing on doping, including the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) Speak Up! Platform (WADA, 2017) and accompanying Whistleblowing Program (2016) which outlines the rights afforded to whistleblowers. The Speak Up! platform was created in response to the disclosure of doping in Russia and the visible lack of whistleblower protection and provision that ensued. Following this incident, an emphasis on intelligence-driven approaches to anti-doping has emerged (e.g., investigations) and the World Anti-Doping Code (WADC Article 10.6.1; WADA, 2015) further reinforces this shift by affording individuals the opportunity to have the length of their sanctions reduced (and/or removed entirely) for providing substantial assistance leading to an anti-doping rule violation. Although developments in whistleblowing policy have moved at pace, the literature base has not kept up.

Whitaker and colleagues (2014) investigated the willingness of individual (track and field) and team-sport (rugby) national level British athletes to blow the whistle on doping and noted a difference in the way each group approached the issue, with rugby players demonstrating more hesitation in comparison to their track and field counterparts. The authors underlined the significance of contextual factors (e.g., team versus individual sports, size/popularity of sport) in determining how individuals in sport approach the issue of whistleblowing. Building on this research, Erickson and colleagues' (2017) work with track and field student-athletes in the UK and US revealed that in situations of reporting doping, individuals are faced with a true moral dilemma – two equally valid and demanding moral options (Uys & Senekal, 2008). Reinforcing the concept of the morality of principle versus

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the morality of loyalty (fairness-loyalty tradeoff) in whistleblowing situations, doping whistleblowers must choose between (a) reporting the doping athlete to protect the rights of athletes at large to compete in doping-free sport (morality of loyalty; fairness) or (b) staying quiet to protect the doping athlete's athletic career, reputation and wellbeing (morality of principle; loyalty) given the social consequences associated with being labelled a ‘doper’ (Georgiadis & Papazoglou, 2014). Importantly, someone gets hurt regardless of the final choice. Ensuing from the true moral dilemma, individuals were hesitant to blow the whistle on doping despite being personally opposed to engaging with doping substances and/or methods. Insightfully, this hesitation appeared to be largely underpinned by individuals’ concerns regarding whistleblowing (potentially) damaging established relationships.

Beyond the doping-specific context, the fear of retribution (e.g., job loss, negative labels) constitutes a dominant deterrent to whistleblowing and, importantly, its deterrent effect is enhanced when an organisation lacks clear whistleblowing policies that protect whistleblowers (Rennie & Crosby, 2002). Consequences for whistleblowers in the public sectors are commonplace and regularly include: (a) being bullied, shunned, negatively labelled and discredited by others (Dasgupta & Kesharwani, 2010); (b) having one’s reputation, job and livelihood seriously jeopardised (Baron, 2013); and (c) being victimised by employers with lawsuits, job loss, defamation and disgrace (Rennie & Crosby, 2002; Uys & Senekal, 2008). Forms of retribution within the context of whistleblowing on doping have not been examined in the literature and therefore our understanding of this seemingly complex decision to report doping is unacceptably poor. Thus, it is important to consider what the experience of whistleblowing is like, the determinants of the behaviour and gain a sense of the prevailing whistleblowing culture in sport.

While empirical evidence related to whistleblowing on doping is limited, anecdotal evidence points to its complexity and reveals potentially significant ramifications for

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engaging in the behaviour. For example, Yuliya and Vitaly Stepanov, who blew the whistle on doping in Russia, have experienced life-changing consequences since coming forward with doping information. The couple and their young son had to leave Russia and currently reside – after multiple forced relocations – at an undisclosed location in the US. Regular retaliation stemming from the whistleblowing has ensued, prompting Yuliya at one point to warn the public, "if something happens to us, all of you should know it was not an accident" (Axon, 2016). Following the Stepanovs' revelations, Grigory Rodchenknov – the former lab director for the Russian Anti-Doping Agency and self-proclaimed mastermind behind the Russian doping programme (Ingle, 2017) – blew the whistle and corroborated the Stepanovs' allegations. Grigory also left Russia and remains under witness protection in the US (Harris, 2017). His life has been threatened on numerous occasions and Grigory's lawyer has been warned by US officials that they should assume Russian operatives are in the US looking for Grigory (Draper & Harris, 2017).

The lives of both sets of whistleblowers have been forever altered by whistleblowing on doping in Russia. As it stands, it is not clear who (e.g., WADA, IOC) is responsible or accountable for protecting and compensating doping whistleblowers, nor when/how to facilitate such provisions[1]. Moreover, it could be argued that the whistleblowing cases referenced here are unprecedented in scale and may not represent the experience of the broader sporting community. However, in the absence of an established whistleblowing literature base, we cannot draw a conclusion.

3 Methodology and method

3.1 Philosophical underpinnings

[1] The WADA's Speak Up! platform (2017) and Whistleblower Program (2016) now outline WADA's policy and procedures for addressing whistleblowing cases that are reported directly to them.

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Heeding the words of Smith and McGannon (2017), it is important to outline the philosophical position we have adopted throughout this research. Working within the interpretive paradigm, we adopted a relativist ontology, which assumes that reality is socially and experientially influenced and shaped. Transactional/subjectivist epistemology was assumed, meaning that the researchers and participants co-created the findings as the study progressed.

3.2 Procedures

Informed by our philosophical underpinnings, a narrative research approach was adopted in an attempt to shed light on the experience of whistleblowing on doping. Narrative inquiry focusses on the stories that people tell about their experiences (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) and takes into consideration how these stories unfold over time (Smith, 2010). As Chase (2005) puts it, "narrative is a way of understanding one's own and others' actions, of organising events and objects into a meaningful whole, and of connecting and seeing the consequences of actions and events over time" (p. 656). There is a growing argument for viewing whistleblowing as a process that involves individuals going through several stages before deciding to take action and, at times, individuals may be required to whistleblow multiple times (e.g., Vandekerckhove & Phillips, 2017; Culiberg & Mihelic, 2017). Narrative inquiry therefore presents an ideal avenue for capturing nuanced understandings of this complex process. This co-constructed and negotiated approach contrasts starkly with previous whistleblowing research which has typically employed survey methodologies and hypothetical scenarios (Richardson & McGlynn, 2011). Whistleblowers are rarely invited to share their stories with researchers (Richardson & McGlynn, 2011) and no research to date has explored the lived experience of doping whistleblowers. This is problematic as an understanding of actual whistleblowers' experiences is necessary to advance the whistleblowing research field (Culiberg & Mihelic, 2017) and establish evidence-informed

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whistleblowing policy and practices (Richardson & McGlynn, 2011). Accordingly, in-depth interviews can provide valuable insights related to whistleblowing attitudes and behaviours (Winneker, 2016) and illuminate the doping whistleblowing process.

After receiving ethical approval from the host institution, a combination of purposive, convenience and snowball sampling (Smith, 2013; McNamee, 2012) was used to identify and recruit participants who were: (a) publicly identified for whistleblowing on doping, (b) a US or UK resident and (c) a minimum 18 years of age. Recruitment was limited to the US and UK based on a desire to facilitate face-to-face interviews (the first author regularly travels between the two countries). Our goal was to recruit one participant but owing to the multifaceted sampling approach utilised, three individuals were quickly identified and agreed to participate. The participant sample included two males and one female and they had each blown the whistle on doping in the professional sporting context. Further demographic details have not been included in an attempt to protect the participants' anonymity.

A face-to-face interview lasting between one and three hours (average 110 minutes) was carried out by Kelsey Erickson (KE) with each individual participant at a time and place of their convenience. It was possible to conduct in-person interviews with two of the participants, but one participant was located abroad during data collection so the interview was conducted using Skype video. This "computer-mediated" technique (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) allowed for face-to-face contact to be facilitated remotely (Schinke et al., 2017) and enabled us to overcome physical distances. Following each interview, KE recorded her initial reactions to the interview, including (a) how she felt, (b) observations of the participant (e.g., speed of voice, eye contact, etc.) and (c) things that stood out in the participant's story.

Participants were made fully aware of the nature of the research prior to participating, and strong emphasis was placed on anonymity and confidentiality (with all personal details

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being removed)[2]. Once consent forms were signed, data was gathered through unstructured interviews. This approach allowed KE to collect insights on the whistleblowing experience while also enabling the participant to report their own thoughts and feelings (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Each interview began with the open-ended question, "Can you walk me through your experience of reporting doping?" Follow up questions were then offered based on participants' responses (e.g., "what has happened since you reported?"). Throughout the interview, KE was open to exploring any points that the participant raised in relation to their whistleblowing experience; thus, providing participants with control over what was shared (Blodgett et al., 2011). Thanks to the approach adopted, the need for follow up prompts was limited.

3.3 Data analysis and representation

Researchers need to make informed choices and consider why a particular method is appropriate for certain research (Smith & Papathomas, 2017) and sport management researchers have been challenged to push the boundaries of traditional thinking and be innovative with how data (a) is generated and (b) represented (see Shaw & Hoeber, 2016; Stride, Fitzgerald, & Allison, 2017). Given our desire to shed light on the doping whistleblowing experience with a view to inform whistleblowing policy and practices, we have adopted a storytelling approach to this research. Stories were favoured given their ability to reveal links and connections across individuals' histories and provide insights into causes and consequences of behaviour (Carless, Sparkes, Douglas, & Cook, 2014). Storytelling also provides an opportunity to gain an emotive, accessible, visceral and embodied understanding of one's life when employed to gather, analyse, and represent

[2] While details of specific events and people have been removed, at the time of interview they were corroborated in publicly available stories.

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psychological research (Carless et al., 2014). In light of this, we have adopted a creative non-fiction (CNF) approach to representing our findings.

3.3.1 Creative non-fiction

Creative non-fiction (CNF) is a form of creative analytic practice that tells a story (Smith, McGannon, & Williams, 2015) rather than providing an account of research (Smith & Papathomas, 2017). The use of CNF has gained traction in the field of sport and exercise psychology (e.g., Schinke et al., 2017; Blodgett et al., 2017; Erickson, Backhouse, & Carless, 2016) largely due to its ability to provoke readers to think with the research rather than just about it (Smith et al., 2013). CNF stories are grounded in research data, draw on literary conventions, and are fictional in form but factual in content (Smith, Tomasone, Latimer-Cheung, & Martin Ginis, 2015). The term 'fiction' can cause tension for some scholars (Sparkes, 2002a), but the story presented here is largely in the words of the participants and is based on interview transcripts we gathered 'in the field.' We therefore consider it an example of CNF – a story based on actual data gathered by the researcher (Sparkes, 2002b). CNF was considered the most appropriate way to represent our data because it can: (a) protect anonymity, (b) elicit emotional reactions, (c) be useful for exploring taboo and silenced issues, (d) keep participants' words intact, (e) provide the possibility of portraying the complexity and ambiguity of lived experience, (f) be effective for knowledge translation, and (g) facilitate vicarious learning for readers (Smith et al., 2015; Schinke et al., 2017).

Given the high profile of our participants and our desire to protect their identities, we have created a composite CNF story – an amalgamation of multiple viewpoints presented as if it were one person's experience (Spalding & Phillips, 2007). This approach allowed us to draw together multiple experiences and weave them into a powerful single account (Schinke et al., 2017). The story is therefore meant to be read as a synthesised account rather than as quotes from one individual athlete's experience (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015).

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3.3.2 Creating the story

It is important to note that there is no formula or list of steps that must or should be followed when crafting a story, so authors are required to detail the rigorous process they have followed (Smith & Sparkes, 2012). In crafting this story, all interviews were audio-recorded (as agreed by participants) and transcribed verbatim by KE. Next, KE read each individual transcript multiple times, highlighting key words, quotes, and ideas that seemed to represent the individual whistleblower's experience. KE then examined the data and noted recurring patterns, trends, and interesting features (Stride et al., 2017). Following this process, segments reflecting common trends across the three transcripts were copied into a separate document that formed the initial story skeleton. Direct quotes were maintained from the interview transcripts wherever possible in order to present participants' spoken words (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015). Next, the story skeleton was compared to the notes KE recorded after each interview to ensure that the key points were accounted for in the story. Importantly, this included both common themes across the transcripts and notable unique features. Finally, the experiences and ideas contained in the narrative skeletons were linked together by writing around them so that a flowing representation of the combined narratives was produced (Erickson et al., 2016). The writing process was iterative and involved regularly moving back and forth between the individual transcripts, interview notes, and the unfolding storyline until a coherent story was shaped (Smith, 2013; Stride et al., 2017).

Once the initial story was drafted, KE reviewed it alongside each of the individual transcripts to ensure that it accurately represented the three participants' combined experiences. The story was then sent to a group of critical friends with a view to enhance the quality of the story and gauge reactions to it (Smith & Papathomas, 2017; Smith & McGannon, 2017). We also returned the story to each of the individual participants and invited them to openly critique and revise it (Blodgett & Schinke, 2015). This was done to

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ensure that participants were satisfied that the story adequately protected their identities (Sparkes & Smith, 2014) rather than to serve as a form of member checking to (inappropriately) establish rigour (Smith & McGannon, 2017).

3.3.3 Story structure

Stories do not tell readers what to think but invite them to join in and form their own diverse interpretations (Carless & Sparkes, 2008). Engaging fictional techniques (e.g., vernacular language, composite characters, dialogue, flashbacks/forwards, metaphor, and tone shift) are central to achieving this and enables the reader to participate vicariously in the story (Sparkes & Smith, 2014). Creating a composite story involved providing links between the three different accounts and making choices regarding what was included and excluded. The aims of the research (i.e., to shed light on and understand the doping whistleblowing experience) remained at the forefront of our minds throughout this process. However, we appreciate that different authors may have made different choices in relation to what to include or exclude. We have therefore attempted to be transparent in relation to how our story was created and why (Erickson et al., 2016).

3.3.4 Criteria for judgement

There is no predetermined or universal list of criteria for judging the quality of qualitative research so qualitative researchers must make informed decisions and use criteria from lists that are not fixed or predetermined (Smith & McGannon, 2017). For the purposes of this research, we examined multiple lists offered by leading scholars in the field (e.g., Carless & Sparkes, 2008; Smith et al., 2015) and reflected upon their rationales in order to shape our own. Ensuing from this, and considering our specific research aims, we suggest the following criteria (in the form of questions to be asked) for judging our research: (a) is the story believable; (b) does it create a space for silenced voices to be heard; (c) have the individual stories been brought together in a way that creates a meaningful account of the

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individuals' experiences; (d) has the story provided new knowledge or deeper understanding of the whistleblowing experience; (e) does the story move the reader to act; (f) does the story impact the reader emotionally; and (g) is the story accessible to a wide range of readers? We encourage the reader to use this list of questions to judge the quality of our research.

4 The story

A composite story is presented here encompassing the experiences of three doping whistleblowers. While the events that unfold in the story are real, they do not chronologically, or temporally, represent each individual's experience (Smith, 2013). Rather, the three experiences have been combined to convey a coherent order of events. The aim of the story is to shed light on the doping whistleblowing experience from the perspective of the whistleblower with a view to inform bespoke doping whistleblowing policy and practice. What emerged from the interviews was an indication that blowing the whistle on doping is a process rather than an event with a clear start and finish. In an attempt to depict this, the story has been presented in sections which represent the multiple steps that participants detailed in relation to the whistleblowing process.

"The whole process isn't a case of report it and stop. It's a case of report it, and that affects my life until now."

4.1 Step 1: "It's not black and white"

In your head you think, "it's black and white. This is simple. How could someone not know?" But we lose context and we don't have context unless we are there. A lot of things that make sense from the outside are completely jumbled and messy when you're in it yourself and even looking back you can be like, "oh yeah. Of course, that was off or wrong." But in that moment, it's hard to identify. So, step one as a whistleblower is actually coming

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to terms with what you saw or what you experienced. It sounds really simple to do, but it took me – it took others I know – months to actually come to terms with, "oh yeah that was shitty. That broke some rules, or most likely broke some rules." Looking back now, there were signs earlier – a lot of really small things that just kept adding up – but I literally would never have put it together. I started to look back on everything and see everything and I was like "holy shit." And that's the reality – most of the time it's not, "I saw some guy inject testosterone. Here's a picture and video recording of it – here's everything;" it's not black and white like that. I think acknowledging that is really important. Step one is coming to terms with the fact that what you saw was wrong.

Then, before you step forward, you essentially do this risk assessment scenario. I remember debating for months, "do I move on with my life? Yeah, this really sucks, but if I don't say anything no one will know; they'll just keep doing stuff but I can go do what I want and do things the right way and learn from it and not have any trouble or drama or repercussions or anything like that." That's one option, and I'd probably say that's the easy choice to make. Especially if you're young; it's a lot easier to be like, "that sucks, but I have my whole life and career ahead of me." But then the other side of it – the part that eats away at you – says, "yeah, but it's still wrong." Or, "this doesn't feel good. This doesn't settle with me." From the outside perspective, it's easy to say, "it's wrong. Go tell," but when you're stuck in it and you have no resources to go to, it's basically this internal battle where you debate these things because no one else understands it. No one understands what you go through because it's such a rare thing. There was no one for me to look to. I really didn't know where to go or what to do. There were maybe three people in the world who I'd heard of who had blown a whistle on something. I couldn't reach out and call them to figure out what the best course of action was! So, I was basically sitting there going, "well this is my

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pro-career and then this is what's going to happen if I don't report." You sit there for hours thinking, "is it worth it? I've put this much of my life into this already." It's hard.

So, I guess before blowing the whistle, it's this internal struggle that goes on for a really long time. That was probably the most difficult part. From the moment that I realized doping was happening, I would just always say, "I'm never going to go public with it until I retire because I know it will just sink my career." The only thing I was thinking was, if anything, "I'm just going to quit." If you say that people cheated and you didn't cheat, the fear of everyone thinking that you cheated will keep you quiet. I knew I hadn't cheated, but I knew everyone would think I was. And I understand that. Of course, anyone is going to think that. That will keep a lot of people silent. I've dedicated my whole life to this so to have people just dismiss it? I knew that would happen if I came forward, but I didn't want it to. So, I never thought about reporting it – going public or talking to anyone. Not even going to my national anti-doping organisation (NADO). I just wanted to move on and get as far away from it as possible. Either be able to move on with another team, or just quit. I just wanted to get my life back. So, I tried to move on with my life. I tried to forget about it for a long time. Unfortunately, I couldn't.

Staying quiet put me in this world where I was lying to everybody and I started thinking, "why? Why am I protecting people who did shady stuff and treated a bunch of people like shit?" Over time, shit eats away at you and you feel like you have to do something. I felt like, I know the truth and no one else is doing anything about it. I don't *want* to, but I know what it's like to be robbed of an opportunity from someone who's cheating. It got to the point where it was going to eat me alive to know that I could have done something and I didn't. So I thought, "it's time. I'm just going to tell the truth and whatever happens, happens. I just need to get this off my chest." It was just kind of brewing and then finally I

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had my tipping point and I was like, "fuck it! I've got to do something with this. I'm going to tell somebody."

If only it was that simple.

Instead, whistleblowing is a process.

The next question was, "okay, who do I tell?" In one sense, you have your NADO, which makes sense to tell. But in today's climate it's like, "well who do I trust? Do I trust my NADO? Could I go to my national governing body (NGB)?" It's hard to talk about it, but the NGB, until you have anything to do with them, they are – and NADOs as well to a certain extent – they are this huge monster that no one wants anything to do with because they are labelled that way and if you're in contact with the NGB it's because you've done something wrong. There's this big stigma around them. You don't want anything to do with the governing body, which is hard. You just assume they're a bit bad. On top of that, I don't know who these people are. I don't know who to trust. I was questioning, "who do I give this information over to and then trust to take care of it and understand things? I can't just tell anyone because they don't understand how big it is." The other side of it is, they don't know you. They don't know your background, so they could say, "do we trust this person? Is s/he making this up?" It's just a shit show of who to trust and no one really knows. It's almost like you live in this paranoid world where you don't know who to trust.

4.2 Step 2: "People need to know"

I guess getting to that point of stepping forward – the threshold I crossed was, "okay. I just need to get this off my chest. I'm going to send an anonymous tip to the NADO and then, whatever. Someone knows something." So, I sent an email on their tip line without any name at all – just sent it out into the ether and then sat there for a week or so and was like, "this sucks. I don't know if anything happened to it." So, the next step was, "I'm going to send it and I'll attach my email address to it," and each step you make requires another

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internal turmoil to go through. So, I sent that out there and got a reply saying "we'd love to talk to you."

When I got the response, I didn't want to risk myself and my freedom and finances and all that stuff, but eventually you just say, "you know what? It'll be stronger and it means more if it has my name and my face to it and consequences be damned." I was scared to go because I was afraid that somehow someone would find out that I went to the NADO. I was petrified that I was going to lose my contract. I was so paranoid. So, I didn't tell anybody, but I met with someone at the NADO. I was there for probably four hours. I cried a lot, I felt guilty about the whole thing. I felt like I was betraying people that I care about because – it's so fucked up – but even though I think they're cheating, I still care about them because I know them as people. It's so hard. You've been through so much with these people. And that was the hard thing to describe to the NADO, because they're like, "why are you crying?" And I'm trying to explain, "because I feel like I'm betraying these people. They're my friends. They're my family. I spent years with them and it sucks." It's just hard. It's not as simple as, "I saw someone cheat." I think a lot of people neglect to realise that you're a person, not just an athlete. It's so much more complicated than people think. It's not black and white.

Anyways, after I reported I assumed the response would be, "we're going to get to the bottom of this." I imagined I would go in, I would tell them about the people they need to talk to, they would talk to those people, and then they would have what they need and it would be done.

Wrong.

Instead, it's two months later and there has been nothing but complete radio silence. In your head you're going crazy thinking, "do they give a shit? Are they going to do anything? Does this really matter?" By that point, I was absolutely certain that nothing was

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going to be done. There was no contact. Nothing. I was so angry and I went into a bit of a spiral. You've just thrown your entire career – or it feels like you're throwing your entire career – out the window, and they just disappear off the face of the planet. I was getting pretty pissed off because I've ruined my sports career and they've done absolutely nothing about it. My life is getting ruined while you guys are just sitting around. You kind of just get the feeling that what you've done is a bit pointless and you've thrown your life away in return for them not giving a shit about anything. It makes you question, "are these the guys I should trust? Or are these not the guys I should trust?" It sows seeds of doubt where you're thinking, "I gave them some shit that was interesting but you know, maybe not?" And you also start to wonder, "for goodness sake, is it still corrupt?"

Eventually I decided that if the NADO was not going to do anything then people at least needed to know so, "fuck it. Let people know." The logical thing would have been not to do that but, again, you expect (a) the NADO has the information, then (b) relief on my end. But there's no relief because no one knows you did anything. And no one knows that there's investigations or anything. So, I was just like, "screw it." Let's just deal with it. Deal with it in the public and if that's all, that's all. But at least people can make their decisions.

Things really changed when I went public.

There was no turning back.

4.3 Step 3: "It has totally changed my life"

Honestly, the whole experience has just sucked basically. Yeah. It's been really sucky. That's kind of the bottom line. I don't even know how to describe it. Let's put it this way, I wouldn't want even people I don't like to go through some of the shit I went through.

Why would I say that? Because all I've had is loss since I spoke out. I haven't gained anything from reporting. All I've had is stress and anxiety and loss. It's just stressful. I am not confrontational. I am not a vocal person, but now I have to be. I have to stand up for

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myself. I would rather not be like that, because it's just not the way I'm wired. But it has totally changed the direction my life has gone. I have to stand up for myself and speak out. It's tiring. I'm not controversial. I swear, I'm like so vanilla but that's how I'm labelled now and it's just changed everything about my life.

When it all comes out publicly, half the world hates you. I have people who I was friendly with who now think I'm the worst person ever. There's always going to be the 20% that are like, "what the fuck are you doing? You should not have done that!" I think the hardest thing for me is going through comments and things like that on media pages and just going through some of the stuff people say. Yeah, I think that has been the hardest thing – the constant harassment. I mean constant. It just gets so old. I would say that's been the hardest thing for me because I don't like to fight with anybody and it's just non-stop. I feel like whenever I do anything – whenever there is a newspaper article – then these people get vocal again and as much as I know they're crazy, it's still exhausting. It's like – I'm damned if I do, I'm damned if I don't. If I don't answer reporters' questions, what am I trying to hide? If I do answer, I'm an attention-whore that just won't shut up about it. And when I'm getting harassed on social media or whatever – it's just me. It's not me and five other people; it's just me. I feel like I'm just standing alone.

So, naturally, in the beginning, I think I felt sorry for myself. I let my emotional roller coaster control what I was doing. I was letting myself be railroaded by something that I had no control over. I spent two or three months essentially just living in a bar with my friends. The thing you have to realize is, it affects you as much as it affects the person you've blown the whistle on. At the end of the day, it's mentally crushing. The mental, emotional turmoil is a definite consequence of whistleblowing. I went through nights where I'd just sit and talk for hours and hours about what I was feeling and why it wasn't fair. And on top of that, I worry about stupid stuff. I worry about being sabotaged. I'm paranoid now. I'm paranoid about

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everything. I'm paranoid about if something was off when the drug testers came to test me. I'm crazy, right? But that's how I think – they're going to try and make me look bad at some point. In my defence, I had my computer hacked and emails and stuff wiped off of it before I went public. There was a chunk of time where stuff just disappeared off my computer. Some of it I'll never get back but some of it I had happened to forward to my family who had saved it but – these people are crazy.

What else?

Coming forward has changed how I'm perceived and who wants to work with me. Before reporting, I had a contract that basically just needed signatures and they pulled it after all the stuff came out, which is my fault – I'm the one that spoke. I think it was just the fact that there was so much risk associated with me. No one wants drama, right? And, unfortunately, I am labelled 'drama'. It looks like I've been involved with some form of scandal. I think I will forever have the doping scandal over my head as, "do I want to hire this athlete? Yes. But then do I want my team to be even slightly associated to anything doping? No." There's a specific audience that would hire me now. If a team hires me then that puts them in the spotlight as having something to do with anti-doping and it's a lot easier for a team, or any form of organization, to be completely separate from that. If I was to say something about doping and then their team get caught doing something even marginally wrong, then that would blow up in their face to the point that they wouldn't have a team anymore. So, there's always going to be the doubt as to what benefit and cost/risk I bring. So yeah, it definitely complicates the contract side of things. Losing contracts has been hard. Obviously. Who wants to lose contracts?

Then there's the fact that people will always question your trust. They know that if they do something wrong, there's a chance that I'll report again. That has been made clear to me. For example, I got injured last season and I was taking painkillers. You should have seen

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the look on the trainers' faces and the things they would say to make it completely clear that what they were giving me was just paracetamol – they were shit scared. They presumed that I would drop them in shit for absolutely anything. Same thing when I get sick; now they bring the package of whatever they are giving me and make me read it and Google it. As a whistleblower, you have to build trust with people rather than assume trust. Along those lines, no one wants to be seen with you because they know they get labelled. It's that 'stay well clear' kind of thing. I think it's just a mind-set. It's, "stay safe, keep your nose clean." It's natural. Think about it, if someone in your town was caught up in a murder case, you wouldn't go and spend lots of time with them and discuss it with them, would you? You'd probably not want anything to do with them. It makes sense, but it puts you on an island versus everyone else.

One thing no one ever really talks about is the fact that as a whistleblower, your life is on hold. You can't sit there and be like every other person and be like, "here are my goals three, five years down the line. Here's what I want to do to accomplish that." You don't have the full deck of opportunities that everyone else has because you came forward. That's the reality of it. I mean, I'll never coach athletes with a particular sponsor – it'll never happen. At the same time, my future athletes will not get a contract offer from that sponsor. Guaranteed. So, it impacts other people too – those associated with you. You're putting them in a situation where they might have to defend you or might have someone you know talk shit to them about it. That sucks. The same goes for family and friends. I've had more arguments about me stepping forward – whether it's with parents, brothers, sisters, partners, best friends – you have these blow up arguments on stuff cos they're trying to look out for your best interests. Actually, it's tougher to see close people deal with it than yourself because you can process it and come to terms with it and rationalise it – it's not as tough for me as it for my family. It

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causes strife and I think that's something that you don't take into consideration. It wears on everybody.

Also, knoing about doping puts you in a weird situation when you're still in the sport because it changes the perspective you have of it. It's easy to almost go through these depressed states where you're like, "well this shit sucks. Why am I doing this?" You almost lose your "why" and your purpose on things. If you don't watch it, it's really easy to go down this path of bitterness and just have bitterness towards everybody – towards sport, towards everything. I don't want to be this bitter, chip on my shoulder, can't enjoy the sport person. I love the sport. But, as bad as it seems, you do feel like the sport kind of owes you some sort of helping hand. I mean, I'll have really good days where I'm like, "yeah it's just how the world works. It was just unlucky." But, then there are days where I feel like sport owes me so much more. I still feel bitter now in the sense that I've missed out on what could have been my professional sports career because of it. I could still be competing professionally, living my dream. But, I reported doping. So, it affects the amount that I'm willing to invest in sport personally. Before this experience, sport would run my entire life. Whereas now, I don't trust sport enough to let it run my entire life anymore. If I'm honest, the fire is not as bright as it was before because I've seen what professional sport is actually like. When you've seen the dark side of it, it's not as appealing as you think when you're 19, you know? I guess I just doubt a lot more than I realistically should. Don't get me wrong – I love the sport! I just only trust it 80% now compared to 100% before. Actually, I think that's what fuelled a lot of my anger in the beginning – the fact that I had this idea of how amazing being fulltime and being professional would be. It's hard to get brought back down to the level where it's actually at – to reality – and I think that's probably the most painful thing. It's hard when sport isn't actually what it portrays. I wouldn't say that the sport has changed though, more that I've grown up and learned how sport works. I now understand that people are hungry to win and

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there's always going to be a small percentage of people that are hungry enough to break the rules.

I used to think that when it was over I would be so happy. But now I think I'll just feel so relieved. I don't even know that I'll feel happy. The truth is, I don't even want to see them get sanctioned. I just want them to not compete. It's so weird. I mean, I want justice and I know that means they have to be sanctioned but, human to human, I feel bad. It doesn't make me feel good. It's not like if they get sanctioned then I'm going to be so happy. It's just a shitty feeling. It's a shitty feeling to know that you're essentially ending someone's career. That feels bad. Even the biggest drug cheat of all time – Lance – is a person. With children and with a mom. It sucks. I wish it wasn't so hard.

It's going to sound crazy, but even after everything that has happened, I don't really regret going public. I hate the way it has changed my life and the negative things that it's changed but, I feel free. It can't affect me anymore. I mean it does, but it's different. Before reporting, I was drowning and hating sport. I just felt, "I hate this sport. It's a bunch of fakers." I was just kind of surviving. After I spoke out though, things kind of turned around. It was like this burden had been lifted for me personally. That alone has been worth it for me; that I don't have to carry around their secrets anymore. It would kill me. Carrying that around – I hated it. I hated always lying and putting it on me. I don't have to do that anymore. I don't have to carry around that crap. Mentally, it has freed me. Clearing my conscience and being able to tell myself my own story is immense. It was such a big deal in my life and it's something that I'm very proud of. As athletes, we would do 99.9% of anything to win. That is our job. I'd like to think that the whole thing tested me, and I passed. A lot of people would question or fail that test. I was willing to throw my career away purely to be the person that I want to be. How many people can say that?

5 Discussion

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The aim of our research was to give voice to the experiences of doping whistleblowers, and in doing so, inform evidence-based doping whistleblowing policy and practices. We hope this story will resonate with the reader and facilitate deeper understanding of the whistleblowing experience and its effect on the whistleblower. Given the absence of evidence in relation to whistleblowing on doping in sport, we were committed to making this research accessible to audiences beyond academia (Smith, 2013). That is, the people and organisations with the power to bring about change in their club, sport or institution. As a starting point, the stories were shared with the participants. Their reactions were both encouraging and challenging at the same time. After reviewing it, one participant said, "obviously there was so much of my story in there that it was pretty personal." Another stated that, "it definitely represents what I experienced" and the final participant responded with, "that sounds amazing." We were encouraged to find that all three participants felt the story represented their personal experience, especially considering it was a combination of all three accounts.

The challenging aspect of the participants' reactions came from one whistleblower who said, "it will be important to stress that these are real life experiences by real people." Indeed, this story represents real doping whistleblowers' experiences and, consistent with previous research in the sport setting (see McGlynn & Richardson, 2014), their collective voice demonstrates that they encountered professional and personal consequences associated with their choice to whistleblow. Given the impact of whistleblowing on human lives depicted in this story, we commit to sharing the story in such a way that it galvanises action so that the whistleblowing experience can be improved moving forward. To begin, this story highlights for the first time in literature that the doping whistleblower is (a) faced with the fairness-loyalty tradeoff and (b) experiences retribution for whistleblowing.

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Our research substantiates Waytz and colleagues' (2013) argument that whistleblowers are faced with a fairness-loyalty tradeoff. Becoming aware of doping behaviour did not immediately result in reporting doping but, rather, the whistleblower had to make a conscious decision to report knowing that it would (likely) impact personal relationships. The severity of this decision is underlined in that the whistleblower was in turmoil even during the act of whistleblowing ("I felt guilty about the whole thing. I felt like I was betraying people that I care about") and these emotions endured to the present ("I feel bad. It doesn't feel good…it's a shitty feeling to know you're essentially ending someone's career"). These statements demonstrate the whistleblower's appreciation for the importance of loyalty and that they feel they jeopardised it by reporting (i.e., adhering to the fairness moral). Importantly, the story also extends the complexity presented by this tradeoff by highlighting the need for considering the consequences of whistleblowing for the whistleblower themselves. This extra element – the need to consider one's own welfare – perhaps adds another form of rationale and justification for adhering to the loyalty norm. Ultimately, choosing to report doping is an active step towards ensuring clean sport and benefits the sporting community as a whole. Yet, it comes at a cost to the (a) doper (i.e., sanction) and (b) the whistleblower (e.g., reputational damage, emotional distress, etc.).

For the first time the potentially devastating impact that whistleblowing on doping can have for the whistleblower is storied. The whistleblower indicates that whistleblowing "affects you as much as it affects the person you have blown the whistle on". Notably, the whistleblower assumed they would encounter negative repercussions for reporting prior to actually whistleblowing (e.g., "just sink my career" and "assume I cheated") and initially these anticipated consequences served as justification to wait to report until after their career ended. However, the individual ultimately did whistleblow and as anticipated, they faced retribution for their behaviour. Consistent with the wider whistleblowing literature (e.g.,

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Dasgupta & Kesharwani, 2010; Baron, 2013; Rennie & Crosby, 2002; Uys & Senekal, 2008), the whistleblower was shunned and distanced from family members, peers in and out of sport, and the public/media; had their trustworthiness questioned by peers; experienced financial/career consequences in the form of lost sponsorships and contracts; and experienced emotional distress.

While the forms of retribution faced by the whistleblower are generally consistent with existing literature in the public sectors, it is worth noticing areas where our findings extend the literature. First, emotional distress potentially impacts athlete whistleblowers more significantly than non-athlete whistleblowers since an athlete's livelihood and career is based on their physical performances. Not being in a positive emotional state can therefore have direct implications for their physical performance and, in turn, jeopardise their career and financial livelihood. Second, the fear that the public will assume you were doping if you report doping also appears to be a unique whistleblowing feature in sport. By reporting doping, one (potentially) raises suspicion about how you would be privy to that information without being a part of it? Drawing unnecessary attention to yourself in the doping context is not a particularly beneficial action within sport. Thus, providing incentive and rationale to *not* report doping. Comparable concerns are currently not documented in the wider whistleblowing literature and therefore warrant further attention by sport researchers.

Based on the story presented here, the current whistleblowing culture in sport appears to be more likely to deter someone from whistleblowing than to encourage them to whistleblow. In order for whistleblowing to effectively complement the constrained detection-deterrence approach to anti-doping, the culture surrounding it must change. So, what can be done to shift the pendulum from discouraging to encouraging whistleblowing on doping?

5.1 Practical implications

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The first and arguably most important step for changing the culture and narrative around whistleblowing on doping is to design and implement evidence-based anti-doping whistleblowing policies. Whistleblowing policies are commonplace in the public sector but rare in the sport doping context. Consequently, resources for reporting doping exist largely in the absence of policies designed to protect those who engage with them.

Based on the story presented here, protection for the whistleblower must be at the centre of a doping whistleblowing policy. This would include protection for an individual's athletic career, sponsorship deals, contracts and physical and emotional wellbeing. That said, the global sporting context presents a challenge in this regard because retribution for whistleblowers could come from various organisations (e.g., NADO, NGB, sponsors). This means that even if the organisation that the whistleblower reported to (e.g., NADO) had an established whistleblowing policy it would not necessarily be able to protect a whistleblower from retribution launched by external individuals or organisations. This reality reiterates the importance of changing the culture surrounding whistleblowing on doping. We need to shift the focus from the messenger to the message and view whistleblowing as the beginning of problem solving rather than as problem causing (Richardson & McGlynn, 2011). Propagating whistleblowing as a positive act is the most prevalent approach taken to encourage whistleblowing in the public sectors (Brown et al., 2016) and should be promoted within sport.

Alongside implementing whistleblowing policies, this story highlights a need for whistleblower education in sport. Whistleblower education should serve to teach (a) individuals how to whistleblow, (b) what their rights are as whistleblowers, and (c) the multifaceted benefits of reporting doping in sport. Providing whistleblowing education can help change the whistleblowing culture because it: (a) signals that an organisation values whistleblowing, (b) increases the likelihood that individuals will report wrongdoing, and (c)

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reduces retribution to whistleblowers by sending the message that the organisation will protect whistleblowers from such behaviour (Caillier, 2016). Each of these factors represents an important step towards establishing trust between athletes and sporting organisations which, based on this story, is an important factor in encouraging individuals to whistleblow. Given the varying benefits of whistleblower education, and consistent with the approach adopted by government agencies (Caillier, 2016), we would encourage organisations to include education provision as a requirement within their whistleblowing policies.

Finally, whistleblowing policies should include the appointment of an independent individual that sporting personnel can contact with queries and/or concerns related to whistleblowing. Our story highlights the emotional turmoil that the whistleblower experienced from the moment they realised they had witnessed doping; therefore, an independent and suitably trained contact should be available at all times (before, during, after whistleblowing). Independent advice is considered a vital aspect of fair and effective whistleblowing procedures within the public sector (Vandekerckhove & Lewis, 2012) but no comparable provisions exist within sport. That fact that basic questions of how, when and to whom to whistleblow were raised in our story points to the need for basic whistleblowing information and guidance within sport. Questions of this nature could be answered quickly and satisfactorily by an independent contact and, in turn, increase engagement with whistleblowing. In addition to providing practical whistleblowing information, the independent person should also familiarise the potential whistleblower with available sources for emotional support (e.g., psychologists, welfare officers, ombudsman, etc.). The emotional tension experienced by the whistleblower stemming from the fairness-loyalty tradeoff is undeniable and having emotional support from the moment one becomes aware of doping through to the time at which they no longer feel the need or desire to engage with such support should be made available to all. Who the ideal ‘independent person(s)’ could or

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should be is beyond the scope of this paper, but one possibility worth considering is the viability of situating an independent body within the International Testing Agency given their recent emergence on the global sporting scene. There is also scope for establishing whistleblowing-specific sport ombudsmen.

6. Conclusion

We hope the story presented here will spark honest and action-oriented conversations about whistleblowing within the global antidoping and sporting community. In acknowledging and accepting the inherent challenges associated with whistleblowing, the sporting system then has a collective responsibility to act to bring about change in the structures, processes and practices that currently frame whistleblowing policies. As participants highlighted, blowing the whistle on doping is not a one-off event whereby you report wrongdoing and walk away. Rather, it is a complex and ambiguous process that involves (a) identifying doping, (b) making the decision to report, and (c) dealing with the repercussions of reporting. As the story illuminates, there can be long-term consequences for whistleblowers and these must be mitigated by evidence-informed whistleblowing policy and practices. Creating a culture where individuals feel empowered and encouraged to speak up, rather than one where they anticipate facing retribution for their courage, requires collective action, and this starts with critical conversations that raise the voices of those who seek to protect the rights of athletes to compete in doping-free sport.

Sport and anti-doping is at a pivotal crossroads and given that whistleblowing policies and practices are embryonic, we have a unique opportunity to shape them through a real whistleblowing narrative. More specifically, we have the opportunity to use our story to ensure that whistleblowing policy and practice is not removed from those it is designed to help. Thus, we are challenged to acknowledge the shortcomings in current whistleblowing policy and practice that shaped the (negative) whistleblowing experience outlined in this

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story. In acknowledging these shortcomings, we are then compelled to take purposeful steps towards ensuring future whistleblowers are not faced with the same challenges. Only then will we realise the potential for whistleblowing to complement the detection-deterrence anti-doping approach and serve as an effective deterrent for doping in sport.

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