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## **COMMENTARY**

### ***Are coaches anti-doping? Exploring issues of engagement with education and research***

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*Are coaches anti-doping? Exploring issues of engagement with education and research*

While the underlying mechanisms associated with doping are complex and multi-faceted, coaches have been highlighted as potential influencers in doping behaviors. On the one hand, coaches have played a role in facilitating or encouraging the use of prohibited substances or methods (PSM) (e.g. Dubin 1990, Laure *et al.* 2001, Underleiger 2001). Yet on the other, coaches are protective agents (e.g. Kirby *et al.* 2011) who acknowledge that they have a responsibility to prevent doping (Figved 1991, Fjeldheim 1992, Laure *et al.* 2001, Fung and Yuan 2006). Consequently, the potential influence of coaches is reflected in anti-doping policy.

The World Anti-Doping Code ([WADC]: WADA 2009) states that athlete support personnel (ASP)<sup>1</sup>, such as coaches, should be ‘knowledgeable of and comply with all anti-doping policies and rules’, ‘use their influence on athlete values and behavior to foster anti-doping attitudes’ (p. 113), and ‘educate and counsel athletes regarding anti-doping policies and rules’ (p. 99). As ASP, coaches are subject to sanctions if they violate anti-doping policy, including encouraging, assisting, aiding, abetting or covering up the use of PSM, as well as trafficking, possessing, administering of PSM or ‘any other type of complicity involving an attempted or actual anti-doping rule violation’ (WADA 2009, p. 25).

To aid coaches in fulfilling the anti-doping role outlined in the WADC, sporting and anti-doping organizations are expected to provide education programs to this stakeholder group (WADA, 2009). In this vein, WADA created The Coach’s Tool Kit in 2007, which evolved into the CoachTrue (‘Elite’ and ‘Recreational’) online anti-doping education programs in 2010. In the United Kingdom, the United Kingdom Anti-Doping agency (UKAD) launched an online anti-doping education program for coaches in 2012, Coach

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<sup>1</sup> According to the WADC, ASP are “any coach, trainer, manager, agent, team staff, official, medical, paramedical personnel, parent, or any other person working with, treating or assisting an athlete participating in or preparing for sports competition” (WADA, 2009, p. 128).

Clean. In brief, these programs provide information on the Prohibited List, Doping Control Procedures, and Therapeutic Use Exemptions through short presentations and case studies, as well as interactive ‘ethical dilemma’/problem-solving scenarios<sup>2</sup>. Despite these efforts, the research field surrounding anti-doping education for all stakeholder groups is in its infancy and is limited due to the scarcity of systematic program evaluations (Backhouse *et al.* 2007, Backhouse *et al.* 2009). What works, for whom, under what circumstances, and why is currently unknown. This situation is perhaps surprising given the volume and depth of research available in other prevention fields and the global spend on doping detection and deterrence. However, the emergent nature of doping prevention, coupled with limited budgets available for social science research, are feasible explanations for this absence of evidence.

While limited evaluation research has been conducted in this area, the WADA and UKAD have shared user numbers with us for two existing anti-doping education programs for coaches. At a national level, the UK had an estimated 1.1 million adults playing a role in coaching in 2008 (North, 2009). According to the Head of Coach Education and Development at sportscoach UK this has risen to an estimated 1.3 million (S. McQuaid, personal communication, 17 December 2013). Therefore, the 500 users of UKAD’s Coach Clean represent less than 0.04% of UK coaches (A. Batt, UKAD Head of Education and Athlete Support, personal communication, 12 September 2013). It must be noted that the program was specifically designed for coaches at Level 2 of the UK’s coach qualifications system. Applying the completion rate to this subset of the UK coaching population, the figure is still incredibly low at only 0.2% (estimated 213,000 Level 2 coaches in 2008).

At a global level, data for one branch of the WADA CoachTrue online programs

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<sup>2</sup> Justification for designing the programmes with this content, or these activities, is unclear due to a lack of information in the public domain regarding the development of existing anti-doping education programs. However, it is likely that the directives of Article 18 of the WADC (WADA, 2009) drive the current compliance-focused content. For example, the TUE module fulfils the TUE policy directive and the Health Consequences module addresses the health consequences of doping. Yet, it is noteworthy that existing anti-doping education programmes do not appear to consider some of the policy directives, such as the social consequences of doping.

shows that more coaches have engaged with anti-doping education. Since its launch in 2010, approximately 3000 people have engaged with CoachTrue Elite (L. Cléret, WADA Education Manager, personal communication, 20 September 2013). Unfortunately, usage data for CoachTrue Recreational are not monitored and cannot be considered in this article. While it is difficult to establish the exact number of practicing coaches worldwide, extrapolating from the UK data suggests that the global figure is in the region of tens of millions practicing coaches (Duffy 2010, Duffy *et al.* 2011). Therefore, it seems reasonable to conclude that the WADA program has also reached a very small proportion of its target audience.

We have recently completed a program of research that has provided some insight into the limited uptake of existing anti-doping education programs for coaches. Over a six-month period, a number of coaching populations were invited to participate in a study that aimed to explore the effectiveness and impact of an existing online anti-doping education program (CoachTrue Elite)<sup>3</sup>. Populations included personal contacts, students studying Sports Coaching degrees within UK universities, coaches of UK university sports teams, National Governing Body personnel (acting as gatekeepers who contacted coaches associated with their organization on the researchers' behalf) and populations reached via the social networking site Twitter. Due to the nature of recruitment, it is difficult to calculate a response rate but at the very least, 250 coaches were invited to take part in the research. Yet, only 31 coaches agreed to participate (i.e., began the pre-program questionnaire). Attrition resulted in only 12 coaches being included in the final analysis and, within this final group, completion of the program modules ranged from 43% to 100% ( $\chi=87\pm 19\%$ ). Therefore, program engagement does not necessarily equate to program completion; compromising the fidelity of the intervention.

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<sup>3</sup>For the purposes of the study, effectiveness represents the extent to which the program fulfils its intended purpose—an increase in knowledge of specific doping-related topics. Investigating impact involved gathering coaches' opinions and perceptions of the anti-doping education program's influence on a number of doping-related matters, including their knowledge, capabilities, and feelings of being equipped to work with their athletes/players on doping-related matters.

The experience of conducting this study corroborated our discussion of the user data; coaches are not engaging with anti-doping education programs. It is plausible that coaches are not aware of these programs and this could limit uptake. However, our findings demonstrate that even when coaches are made aware of anti-doping education programs, they are reluctant to engage with them. Notably, some coaching populations invited to participate displayed a 0% response rate and a number of individuals or organizations advised that they did not wish to participate because anti-doping was '*not relevant*' to them. A lack of relevance was justified through the sport, competitive level or age group that the individuals coach or the organizations they represent. Mazanov et al. (2013) experienced similar difficulties in Australia when attempting to recruit ASP for their study on the knowledge, attitudes, and ethical stance of ASP in relation to doping. They experienced an overwhelming response from ASP that anti-doping 'had nothing to do with them' (p. 3). Moreover, a number of key professional bodies (e.g. Australian Physiotherapy Association) were unwilling to distribute the study invitation to members as they deemed the issue to be of no concern to their members.

Coaches are, at the very least, a source of information on doping-related topics (Laure *et al.* 2001, UKAD 2010, Backhouse & McKenna, 2012). Beyond this, current anti-doping policy prescribes coaches a prevention and compliance role, whereby coaches are vulnerable to sanction if they violate anti-doping rules and regulations. It is therefore paramount that coaches are made aware of their roles and responsibilities under the WADC, but this commentary has highlighted that this is not happening in large numbers.

Enhancing the existing anti-doping education delivery system at international and national levels might begin to address the issue of reach on a more focused and consistent basis. For example, the WADA are working to strengthen their relationships with sporting organizations, coaching bodies, and universities to increase input and endorsement of their

program by these parties. Similar steps are being taken at a national level, where UKAD have engaged in discussions with coach employers and deployers (e.g., NGBs) to encourage them to integrate the Coach Clean program into the coach certification process. One of their central aims is to raise coaches' awareness of the program across all sports and coaching domains to ensure that anti-doping efforts are recognized as a matter that is not limited to elite sport contexts (A. Batt, personal communication, 28 January, 2014). However, for now, the online program remains a chargeable extra and the cost implications may limit its take-up.

While steps can be taken to increase engagement with anti-doping education among coaches, our own experiences of the reticence of coaches to engage with an intervention evaluation raises questions about the appropriateness of the underlying assumptions of current anti-doping programs and policy. Namely, that all stakeholders, including coaches, will engage with anti-doping efforts of their own volition. In line with the theories of learning in adulthood (Merriam & Caffarella, 1991), if education content is not perceived as being relevant, coaches are unlikely to be motivated to commit finite resources (i.e., time, effort, and money) to developing their knowledge and understanding of anti-doping, let alone applying it in their every-day coaching practice to fulfil a policy-prescribed role. At present, it appears that some organizations' primary motive for creating and implementing anti-doping programs for coaches is to comply with policy.

Going forward, policy makers, alongside researchers and anti-doping and sporting organizations, must work in partnership to provide programs that develop coaches' capabilities to operate within their 'policy-prescribed' role. In addition, if the aim is to improve coaches' "buy in" to anti-doping education and anti-doping efforts more broadly, they might give consideration to the needs of coaches in relation to their own perceived role and their day-to-day coaching practice. Therefore, research investigating the relevance of anti-doping education and anti-doping role perceptions among coaches is warranted. Such

research is timely as emerging global policy within coaching (i.e., the International Sports Coaching Framework, ICCE, ASOIF & LMU, 2013) has recognized the potential influence of coaches in relation to doping and has signalled the need to provide anti-doping education programs to this key stakeholder group.

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### **Notes**

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