**Drug-Free Sport**

**The Coach’s Role in Combating Doping**

A coach’s responsibilities in combating doping are essential to ensure the **integrity of sport**. In addition to developing physical skills, athletes also need a set of **personal skills and resilience** to face the challenges of competition. A **balanced approach** helps broaden athletes’ perspectives and prevents the pressure for results from compromising their well-being. However, when managing performance expectations becomes difficult, some athletes may turn to substances in an attempt to fill that gap. The coach's role is crucial in guiding athletes to become **positive, healthy, and well-rounded individuals**.

The influence of coaches places them in a **strategic position to fight doping** in sport. An effective coach can help **prevent the use of banned substances** and support athletes in dealing with anti-doping issues. While steroids are commonly associated with doping, coaches need to be aware of a much **broader range of substances and prohibited methods**, which may include social drugs, prescription medications, over-the-counter drugs, and supplements. Various factors can contribute to substance misuse among athletes, such as dissatisfaction with performance or the perception that competitors are using banned substances to enhance results.

Given the importance of the coach’s role in athletes’ decisions about doping, it is essential that they understand the **anti-doping policies and procedures**, which are based on the principle that doping goes against the **spirit of sport, fair play, medical ethics**, and can also pose risks to athletes’ health. These policies must protect athletes’ right to **compete in clean sport**, promoting health, fairness, and equality for all, while ensuring **coordinated and effective anti-doping programs** at both national and international levels.

To minimize doping in sport, the coach should implement a **comprehensive training program** that supports athlete development in all areas. It is also important to **alleviate pressure** whenever possible and look after the athlete’s **overall well-being**. Additionally, the coach must set an example by maintaining **healthy personal habits**, especially regarding alcohol and other substances. Coaches can also help athletes understand the effects of banned substances on health and performance, emphasizing that **using them is a form of cheating**. Practices such as smoking, excessive alcohol consumption, and use of other substances should be discouraged, as they contradict the principles of **healthy participation in sport**.

**Case Study**

The following case study provides a practical example:  
**James**, a talented high school rower, began losing races to competitors he used to beat. Faced with this, he **considered using steroids** to boost his performance, driven by his desire to maintain his reputation as a top athlete and by pressure from school and family.

However, James’s coach was always approachable and emphasized **moral values**. When James shared the pressure he was feeling, the coach listened carefully and reminded him of **anti-doping policies** and the **health risks** involved. The coach also highlighted the qualities that had made James a champion in the first place and suggested ways to **improve his performance naturally**. James decided **not to use steroids** and focused on preparing himself to reach his **full potential**. Although he was still outperformed by some competitors, he was **satisfied with his decision** and grateful for his coach’s support.

This case study reinforces the idea that **coaches have significant influence** over athletes’ decisions regarding doping. In addition to striving for their athletes’ best performance, coaches must be aware of their responsibilities concerning **anti-doping rules**. Reviewing anti-doping aspects in rowing is fundamental to ensuring that **ethical practices are upheld** and athletes are **fairly and healthfully guided**.

**The Complexity of Anti-Doping in Sport**

Anti-doping in sport is a **complex and strict field** that goes beyond the intentional use of performance-enhancing substances. It also includes the **inadvertent presence of banned substances** in everyday products that may lead to positive doping tests. Many athletes do not realize that commonly used items—such as certain shampoos, nasal sprays, supplements, and over-the-counter medications—can contain **compounds banned by anti-doping regulations**.

The **World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)** manages the **Prohibited List**, which includes substances banned **only during competitions** (like stimulants and steroids) and others prohibited **at all times**, regardless of competition (such as hormones and masking agents). For athletes, it is essential to:

**Read product labels carefully**;

**Consult with medical professionals** before using any medication or supplement;

Ensure their practices **comply with anti-doping rules** to avoid suspensions and career-damaging sanctions.

**Case Study 1: Unintentional Use of Banned Substances Due to Supplement Contamination**

**Scenario:**

A high-performance track and field athlete tested positive for a banned substance after an international competition. She claimed that the substance was present in a **dietary supplement** she regularly consumed, which had been purchased without the knowledge of her coaching staff. The investigation revealed that the supplement had been **contaminated during the manufacturing process**.

**Coach’s Ethical Stance**

**Education and Prevention:**

The coach must take an **active role in educating athletes** about the risks associated with supplement use, emphasizing the importance of consuming **certified products** and consulting the medical or nutrition team before beginning any supplementation.

**Crisis Management:**

In cases of **unintentional doping**, the coach should support the athlete throughout the defense process, providing **detailed information** about the training sessions and any prior guidance that was given. **Transparency** is key to demonstrating good faith.

**Establishing Procedures:**

The coach should implement protocols to avoid future cases, such as making it **mandatory to consult the technical staff** before consuming any new product. They should also encourage **label reading** and choosing **reliable brands**.

**Case Study 2: Intentional Use of Banned Substances Due to Competitive Pressure**

**Scenario:**

A young cyclist, under pressure to achieve better results and stand out in competitions, used **erythropoietin (EPO)**—a drug that increases the blood’s oxygen-carrying capacity. The coach discovered the use of the substance after noticing an **unusual improvement in the athlete’s performance** and directly questioning him.

**Coach’s Ethical Stance**

**Zero Tolerance for Doping:**

The coach must reinforce that **sports ethics are non-negotiable**, and that the use of banned substances not only harms the athlete’s health but also **violates the principles of fair play**.

**Support and Rehabilitation:**

Although the action must be condemned, the coach should guide the athlete to **take responsibility for their choices** and, if necessary, seek **psychological support** to manage competitive pressure. The goal should be to help the athlete **rebuild their career ethically**.

**Creating a Healthy Environment:**

The coach should work to **reduce pressure around results**, highlighting the importance of the **development process** rather than just final performance. They can also promote **lectures and discussions** on the impacts of doping in sport.

**Case Study 3: Unintentional Use of Prescription Medication**

**Scenario:**

A volleyball player was diagnosed with a respiratory condition and began using medication prescribed by her doctor. Unaware of anti-doping rules, she **did not inform the coaching staff** and tested positive during a doping control due to the presence of a banned substance in the medication.

**Coach’s Ethical Stance**

**Promoting Open Communication:**

The coach should create an environment where athletes feel comfortable **reporting any medication use**. This can be encouraged through regular meetings and **health check-ins**.

**Professional Consultation:**

The coach must work closely with the **medical team** to ensure that all prescribed medications are reviewed in advance. If necessary, a **Therapeutic Use Exemption (TUE)** should be requested from the anti-doping organization.

**Accountability and Education:**

Even if the use was unintentional, the coach must reinforce to athletes the importance of knowing anti-doping rules and their responsibilities as competitors. This includes **attending regular anti-doping training sessions**.

**Useful Information**

**TUE (Therapeutic Use Exemption)** is a mechanism regulated by the **World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA)** and implemented by anti-doping organizations worldwide. A TUE allows athletes to use substances or methods **prohibited by WADA** to treat specific medical conditions, provided that they meet **strict criteria**.

In the anti-doping system, the **athlete is always the main party responsible** for the use of banned substances. This responsibility is clearly defined in the **World Anti-Doping Code**, which establishes the principle of **strict liability**—meaning athletes are held accountable for any banned substance found in their bodies, regardless of how or why it was ingested.

The **DCO (Doping Control Officer)** is a trained and certified professional responsible for **collecting biological samples** (such as urine and blood) during doping control procedures.

**Sanctions and Penalties**

The **length of suspension** for an athlete who tests positive for doping depends on various factors, including:

The substance used,

The circumstances of the case,

The athlete’s history,

And their cooperation during the process.

According to the **World Anti-Doping Code (WADA)**:

Substances classified as **non-specified** (with high doping potential) usually result in **more severe penalties**, with standard suspensions of up to **4 years** for intentional use.

In the case of **specified substances** (like certain medications), penalties can be reduced, especially if the athlete proves that the use was **accidental**.

Athletes who demonstrate that the use was unintentional (e.g., **contaminated supplements or food**) may have their suspension **reduced to 2 years or less**, depending on the evidence.

The athlete’s **history** also matters:

First-time violations may receive lighter penalties,

While repeat offenses may lead to **8-year bans** or even **lifetime suspensions**.

**Intentional use** to enhance performance results in harsher punishment. On the other hand, athletes who **cooperate with investigations** or report doping practices may be eligible for **significant sentence reductions**.

In cases of **supplement contamination**, suspensions may be reduced to **6–12 months**.

If an athlete fails to declare the use of a prohibited medication for legitimate medical reasons but proves medical necessity, the penalty may range from **3 months to 1 year**.

In addition to suspension, athletes lose **any results obtained** while using the substance, including **medals, awards, and ranking points**. They also face **damage to their careers and reputation**.

**Additional Considerations**

It is possible for certain banned substances to be present in **cosmetic products**, such as shampoos. However, the likelihood of **significant absorption** into the body leading to a doping violation is extremely low in most cases. Still, there are specific situations that deserve attention.

**Nasal sprays** may contain substances listed on the **WADA Prohibited List**, depending on their ingredients. While many nasal sprays are safe for athletes, it is essential to **check the components** and consult professionals before use, especially during competitions.

Some substances that are **prohibited in sport** may be permitted **outside competition periods**, as long as they are not on the “always prohibited” list. The **WADA Prohibited List** specifies which substances are banned **at all times** (in and out of competition) and which are banned **only during competitions**.

It is critical that athletes **inform their doctors** that they compete and are subject to anti-doping regulations. This communication is key to **prevent doctors from prescribing medications** that contain banned substances—even if those medications are needed for legitimate health reasons.

**Assessment: Drug-Free Sport**

**Multiple-Choice Questions**

**Easy**

**What is the main role of ABCD?**  
A) Organize sports competitions  
B) Coordinate and implement anti-doping actions in Brazil ✅  
C) Provide supplements to elite athletes  
D) Lead physical training for Olympic athletes

**What does TUE stand for in the anti-doping system?**  
A) Unique Training Authorization  
B) Therapeutic Use Exemption ✅  
C) Temporary Unique Autonomy  
D) Technical Use Authorization

**Who is primarily responsible for the use of banned substances in the anti-doping system?**  
A) The coach  
B) The doctor  
C) The athlete themselves ✅  
D) The Doping Control Officer (DCO)

**What does the DCO do in the anti-doping system?**  
A) Trains athletes to avoid doping  
B) Coordinates national anti-doping programs  
C) Collects biological samples during doping control ✅  
D) Supervises supplement manufacturing

**In the case study, what did James's coach do to help him avoid using steroids?**  
A) Encouraged the use of strong supplements  
B) Reinforced moral values and suggested healthy performance strategies ✅  
C) Ignored the pressure the athlete was feeling  
D) Advised James to stop competing to avoid pressure

**What substances found in nasal sprays could cause anti-doping issues?**  
A) Vitamin C  
B) Stimulants like ephedrine or pseudoephedrine ✅  
C) Essential minerals  
D) Common antibiotics

**Why is it important for athletes to tell their doctors that they compete?**  
A) To receive priority medical care  
B) To avoid being prescribed medications containing banned substances ✅  
C) To improve performance through specialized treatment  
D) To get discounts on medical consultations

**Medium**

**In the case study of the young cyclist who used EPO, what was the coach’s ethical stance?**  
A) Ignored the situation and focused on results  
B) Reinforced sports ethics and promoted discussions about doping impacts ✅  
C) Encouraged controlled use of the substance for better performance  
D) Immediately removed the athlete from the team

**What was the coach’s approach in the case of the volleyball player who used a banned prescription drug?**  
A) Permanently removed the athlete from competitions  
B) Created an open communication environment and encouraged professional consultation ✅  
C) Ignored the unintentional use and continued normal training  
D) Recommended alternative medications without medical advice

**Hard**

**What does WADA consider when determining the length of an athlete’s suspension for doping?**  
A) Only the type of competition in which the athlete was caught  
B) The substance used, intent, history of violations, and cooperation by the athlete ✅  
C) The athlete’s nationality and sport  
D) The quantity of substance detected, regardless of context