



## Doping Athletes

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The use of performance-enhancing drugs by professional athletes not only leads to serious challenges in maintaining a level playing field in competitive sports but also raises broader ethical issues and concerns.

Some of these concerns were highlighted in 2015 when the former world number one tennis star Maria Sharapova was banned from competitive play for two years by the International Tennis Federation (ITF) after she tested positive for the banned substance meldonium. The Court of Arbitration for Sport subsequently reduced her sentence to 15 months. Meldonium, an over-the-counter Latvian drug known to dilate blood vessels and increase the flow of blood, may contribute to improving an athlete's physical endurance.

Her case was made more complicated by her claim that she was taking the drug for health reasons, a claim viewed with skepticism among other athletes and ultimately rejected by the Independent Tribunal appointed by the ITF to review the case. Former British Olympic sprinter and world championship bronze medalist Craig Pickering described the real pressure that top athletes can face:

"I would bet my life savings that Sharapova was taking this

medication because of its purported performance enhancing effects... Athletes are always going to push the boundaries in order to have a chance at success. That is what happens when you introduce competition."

In competitive athletics, the supposition is that competitors are beginning *on a par* with each other, which means that no one has an "unfair" or "unjust" advantage over another going into the competition. At the starting line, they arrive as equals in the sense that they arrive with whatever they were endowed with at birth, and whatever they may have managed to become through practice, hard work, and discipline.

Cheating through doping involves an attempt to step outside these rules and suppositions, and play a different game, one that circumvents or removes the "on a par" assumption without revealing the fact. In this sense, cheating through doping is wrong because it is a form of lying, a form of presenting one's initial endowment as if it were "natural," and the result of athletic discipline, even though it really may not be so at all.

Several of Sharapova's

# Making Sense of Bioethics

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opponents expressed frustration at what they took to be a further injustice, namely, that in April 2017, she was given a wild card re-entry into World Tennis Association (WTA) tournament play in Germany. They insisted that she should, at a minimum, have to work her way back up from whatever her ranking had declined to after more than a year of tournament inactivity. Others, such as fellow player Eugenie Bouchard, perceived the doping transgression as even more serious, and argued that Sharapova should be banned from playing for life:

“She's a cheater and so to me... I don't think a cheater in any sport should be allowed to play that sport again. It's so unfair to all the other players who do it the right way and are true. So, I think from the WTA it sends the wrong message to young kids—cheat and we'll welcome you back with open arms.”

Some commentators have noted how event organizers typically like to include big name draws like Sharapova in their line ups, and former number one player Caroline Wozniacki opined that, “obviously the

rules are twisted and turned in favor of who wants to do what.” Others have expressed concerns about corporate sponsors and advertisers continuing to promote high profile sports personalities after they have been suspended for doping, individuals who may already be among the wealthiest athletes in the world. It seems fair to conclude that doping constitutes a form of cheating not only of one's competitors, but also one's fans, oneself, and the integrity of the sporting activity itself.

Through an honest pursuit of the athletic crown, meanwhile, we encounter the possibility of transcending who we are in limited, but important ways. The self-directed training and preparation of the athlete helps develop and hone a host of important personal qualities: strength, coordination, endurance, drive, agility, discipline, quickness, vigilance, cleverness, vision, and daring. This draws us towards an authentic perfecting of our bodies, our character and ourselves — an inwardly-directed order and discipline that arises from deep within — and forms us in such a way that we reach beyond where we ever thought we could reach, and through that personal stretching and growth, come to experience a true

measure of human fulfillment. That's something that doping athletes sadly cheat themselves from fully experiencing.

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