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Abstract

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"Effort, Talent and Fair Play – How to protect the values of sport and the privacy of athletes in an era of gene doping".

Sport competitions are, for obvious reasons, focused on winning but winning is not everything. Of fundamental importance is also how you win. Sport activities recognize and evaluate both effort and natural talent. There is a deeply embedded notion in sports that effort pays. Only those that endure long periods of hard training will reach the victor's stand. However, personal talent is also a celebrated characteristic of sport activities. A long-distance runner may not be fit to be a shot-putter since a certain body shape is essential and a swimmer not fit to be a football player for lack of good ball handling. Effort can sometimes compensate for talent, e.g. a comparatively short jumper can still be competitive with an appropriate technique, but even so success is still a matter of both natural talent and effort.

All kinds of sport activities presume a pre-competition agreement about rules. Whether it is the neighbourhood children playing football in the school yard, or athletes competing in the Olympic games, the game cannot start before there is agreement about the rules that apply. The intention of these rules is to make sure that it is effort and talent that determine who wins, nothing else. In this sense, doping equals cheating, as it constitutes a breach of the pre-competition agreement. New methods for improving mental and physical capacity by doping are continuously invented and tried. The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) and its national counterparts are trying to keep pace with these developments by inventing new methods for discovery. Traditional doping techniques have aimed at improving effort, mainly the capacity to train harder and longer. More recently, developments in genetic medicine has suggested new methods of gene doping intended to improve both effort and natural talent.

A development of standards for detection of gene doping can be seen as a natural continuation of efforts to preserve the fundamental values of sport. They may be acknowledged as part of the pre-competition agreement of rules and supported by a sense of fairness deeply rooted among all social beings. Each individual has an interest in enjoying the seclusion of a private sphere while at the same participating in community with other people. If this double interest is recognised there is no objection in principle to include gene tests as part of the rules of fair play.