

Wiggins slammed for ‘unethical’ use of drugs

On yer bike! Wiggins won eight Olympic medals and the Tour de France. He is retired. © Getty

Was sport better before doping took hold? Until recently, Bradley Wiggins was a cycling hero. In an increasingly familiar turn of events, he has now been accused of misusing medical drugs.

When, back in 2012, legendary cyclist **Lance Armstrong** was outed as a doper, people were outraged. Among his fiercest critics was Team Sky, the outfit behind the equally renowned cyclist Bradley Wiggins.

Now it is Wiggins’s turn. Ever since his medical records were **leaked** in 2016, a cloud of suspicion has hung over the achievements of Britain’s most successful Olympian. Yesterday, a **committee of MPs** announced that he, too, has taken performance-enhancing drugs.

The furore centres on Wiggins’s use of triamcinolone, a substance that athletes may take only to treat a medical condition. Wiggins officially took it for his asthma. According to the MPs’ report, however, he used it in quantities that suggest a less honest motive. The MPs also accuse Team Sky’s boss of misleading them about these practices.

Both Wiggins and Team Sky “strongly refute” the allegations. In any case, the report makes it clear that they have not broken any rules, but simply “crossed the **ethical** line”. One thing is certain: the team’s reputation for honesty and transparency lies in tatters.

Doping is as old as sport. The Ancient Greeks ate sesame seeds to boost their energy levels; the winner of the 1904 Olympic marathon was fuelled by brandy and rat poison. But

this has only become a major issue in recent decades, as medical technology has improved and skyrocketing prize money has raised the stakes in sport.

Nowadays, athletes can take steroids to bulk up, stimulants to sharpen their alertness, diuretics to conceal the other drugs, and much more. Penalties have become harsher, but the sheer variety of doping methods makes it hard for the authorities to keep up.

The world was reminded of a more innocent age on Sunday, when Sir Roger Bannister died. Bannister found fame by running the first **four-minute mile** in 1954. Not only did he not cheat, he **barely trained**, subsisted on a diet of pilchards and stew, and retired from running at 25. He became a neurologist and helped to create the first test for anabolic steroids in athletes.

Were sports better in Bannister's day?

Dope for the best

For sure, say some. Athletes like Bannister weren't in it for the money, but to demonstrate their raw talent and strength of character. Now, sport is based on a secretive drug culture, and it's impossible to tell skill apart from medical enhancement. Competitors who can't or won't dope lose out, and everyone else loses faith in the system.

That's nostalgic nonsense, reply others. Doping is bad. But it happens for a good reason: today's athletes are desperate to win. This makes sport more competitive and exciting, even if you take out the dopers. No wonder cycling is enjoying record popularity right now.

YOU DECIDE

1. Are sports getting better or worse?
2. Should athletes be banned from using all drugs, including those that genuinely help with medical conditions?

ACTIVITIES

1. Imagine you are interviewing Bradley Wiggins today. Come up with five questions for him. (They do not all have to be about this scandal.)
2. In pairs, choose your sporting hero, and explain your choice in a two-minute presentation to the class.

SOME PEOPLE SAY...

“If you have nothing to hide, why not show it?”

Bradley Wiggins

What do you think?

Q & A

What do we know?

Wiggins got permission to take triamcinolone for medical needs three times between 2011 and 2013. An anonymous but “respected” source told MPs that he actually used the drug to boost his performance. On another occasion, Wiggins was given a mystery package, which the MPs believe may have contained more triamcinolone. If it did, and Wiggins took it, he broke anti-doping rules.

What do we not know?

What was in the bag. Team Sky says it contained a legal decongestant, but claims that the records that prove this were lost when one of the team’s laptops was stolen in 2014. Some have also questioned Wiggins’s medical history — he doesn’t mention asthma in his 2012 autobiography. That said, the cyclist must have convinced a panel of experts to give him permission to use the drug.

WORD WATCH

Lance Armstrong

Armstrong won the Tour de France, cycling’s most important race, a record seven times. However, after he admitted to long-term doping, he was banned from the sport and stripped of all his titles.

Leaked

A Russian hacker group named Fancy Bear stole confidential data on athletes’ medical records and substance use from the World Anti-Doping Agency.

Committee of MPs

The Digital, Culture, Media and Sport committee. Its report, “Combatting Doping in Sport,” also questions the integrity of other major sports figures, including runner Mo Farah.

Ethical

Ethics are the moral guidelines that individuals follow in order to lead a good life. Laws are based on ethics, but the two do not always overlap.

Four-minute mile

Bannister’s time was 3:59.4. His record only stood for 46 days. Hicham El Guerrouj holds the current record at 3:43.13.

Barely trained

Bannister only ran during his lunch breaks and took weekends off. He took a strong stance against dishonesty — he once said that he would consider it cheating to talk to his coach on the day of a race!

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