

The Anti-Doping Crisis in Sport: Causes, Consequences, Solutions

By Paul Dimeo and Verner Møller. Published 2018 by Routledge, London, United Kingdom. \$39.95. 174 pp. ISBN: 978-1138681675

Reviewed by Matthew A. Masucci, San José State University, USA

The Anti-Doping Crisis in Sport is essential reading for those interested in understanding the complicated history of antidoping regulation in contemporary sport. Far more than a chronology, this book is a thoughtful and articulate explication of the problematic state of antidoping institutions, enforcement policies, and testing practices. Unlike many academic treatments of the subject, the authors provide (often provocative) suggestions for how to move antidoping education and enforcement forward toward a more ethical and athlete-centered approach to policy and practice.

Paul Dimeo and Verner Møller, both prolific authors whose work has helped shape broader antidoping discourse, intentionally eschew an overly academic treatment of the topic in favor of an accessible and well-reasoned treatise on the problems inherent in the current antidoping movement. The purposefully accessible text is nonetheless exceptionally well referenced, and the major arguments are supported with ample research from the academy. The authors situate the book as helpful to students and scholars of sport studies, as well as those in sporting realms (coaches, doctors, policymakers, etc.) interested in the “politics and ethics of drug use in sport” (p. viii). In a perfect world, the target audience would be those in decision-making roles in the antidoping apparatus, as the coherent critiques of that system presented by Dimeo and Møller are unwavering and backed up with sound and logical reasoning.

The book, however, is much more than a takedown of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA). True to the subtitle *Causes, Consequences, Solutions*, the book aims to contextualize the current antidoping moment by helping the reader appreciate the antecedents, including political, economic, and ethical considerations, that led to the development of a more (presumably) impartial antidoping system. The authors argue that the system, which was intended to help promote fair competition and health protections for all athletes, has failed largely on both accounts. Moreover, considering the number of high-profile doping scandals that continue to plague high-level sport and the increase in number of recreational participants who have been caught using performance-enhancing products or techniques, it is no wonder that antidoping is in crisis.

Over the course of the book, Dimeo and Møller lay out an argument for the systematic failure of the antidoping system. From problematic science, to a one-size-fits all draconian compliance structure, to the well-documented dehumanization that is required of the system of antidoping as it is currently administered and administrated, the authors paint a compelling picture of a system that is broken

yet has become too big to fail. One example, which is often touted as a bedrock concept of the antidoping movement, is the concept of strict liability. Strict liability is the notion that “it is each Athlete’s personal duty to ensure that no Prohibited Substance enters his or her body” ([World Anti-Doping Agency, 2019](#), p. 18). While this may seem like an intuitive concept as it relates to antidoping, Dimeo and Møller point to the fact that there are over 300 drugs, most of which are legal and can be found in medicines or over-the-counter supplements, that lead to sanctions if consumed. Are athletes in a position, they argue, to memorize this list and then determine if the substances they are ingesting are free from drugs on the prohibited list? Are athletes mature enough to fully understand the strict liability rules as they pertain to the list of banned substances? Are nonelite athletes, who are often unknowingly subject to antidoping rules and testing protocols, even aware that they are at risk of a positive doping test for a supplement they purchased at their local health store? The problems with strict liability are but one of the many issues addressed in the book and are indicative, say the authors, of a broken system. Among other difficulties are the often dehumanizing methods of testing and tracking athletes, the social stigma associated with being labeled a “doper” (even if the charge is unfounded), the imperfect science of detection, and the slippery slope of legitimate use of prohibited substances for medical conditions.

For those interested in the discourse surrounding antidoping, the final two chapters will be of particular interest. Here, the authors explore ideas that have heretofore been presented as alternatives to the current antidoping strategies and finally make recommendations for what they call radical reform. Among the more controversial alternatives that have been offered is the legalization of performance-enhancing substances. One of the obvious challenges with legalization (even under a doctor’s supervision), say Dimeo and Møller, would be the potential health risks associated with unbridled use of potentially harmful substances. Moreover, the authors argue, what mechanism would be put into place to ensure the welfare of participants in this new anything-goes system? How would one be able to guarantee, for example, that an athlete was working under the supervision of a scrupulous doctor? Another alternative would be linked to a reformed education program. In spite of the fact that education is still a core tenet of the current WADA structure, researchers have argued for a more robust and nuanced education system. However, as the authors point out and as confirmed in the work of my colleagues ([Johnson, Butryn, & Masucci, 2013](#); [Masucci, Butryn, & Johnson, 2019](#)), this is an exceptionally complex issue, made even more challenging by the various individual, cultural, and national orientations to doping and athletic achievement in general.

In the final chapter, Dimeo and Møller present issues that they say must be addressed “if anti-doping shall be anything but an image enhancing public relations enterprise that regularly sacrifices careless, ill-advised, or unfortunate athletes” (p. 145). Considering that one of the presumed incentives for doping is the rewards that come from sporting success, a radical (and clearly unrealistic) solution would be to reestablish an amateur model of sport. The authors are quick to acknowledge that this is, perhaps, a naïve suggestion but also articulate that rejecting it out of hand would then force one to acknowledge that the true objective of organized