Ethical Considerations – PDHPE task 6 of Assessment 3

What influence has drug use had on soccer?
The use of drugs to enhance athletic performance, also known as doping, is considered unethical by most international sports organisations as they affect one’s well-being and health, they are illegal, and they affect the equality of opportunity of the athletes. Soccer players may take drugs to enhance performance due to the pressure to succeed, community and media expectations, belief that their competitors are taking drugs, or even due to financial rewards for outstanding performance.

Stefan Matschiner, a former drug dealer and former athlete who took drugs, once said – “Doping is just as much a problem in football as it is in tennis, athletics and cycling. It’s part of daily life. I’ve worked with footballers. They use testosterone, EPO, ephedrine and stimulants”.

EPO, is one of many common drugs that is used to enhance the performance of an athlete. EPO is a naturally occurring protein hormone that is hidden by the kidneys during low-oxygen conditions. It stimulates the bone marrow stem cells in order to produce more red blood cells, which increases the delivery of oxygen to the kidneys. For this reason, EPO is commonly used amongst endurance athletes, such as soccer players to enhance their performance, as it increases oxygen absorption, reduces fatigue and improves endurance due to the increasing rate of red blood cell production. However, there are dangers associated with the use of EPO. It has many major side effects including, increased thickening of the blood - causing clotting, thrombosis, heart attack, and stroke. The biggest, most successful and well-known doping case in the 20th century involved the Italian soccer club, Juventus FC. During the late 90’s, the team was rolling with success, winning many competitions in a row. It was discovered two years later that the Juventus doctor was administering illegal substances to the players to enhance their performance, including the drug EPO. Luckily for the club and doctor, there was no punishment.

Another common illicit drug that is used to enhance performance is anabolic steroids. Anabolic steroids build muscle and bone mass primarily by stimulating the muscle and bone cells to make new protein. These substances can be injected or taken as pills. Athletes use this drug as it increases muscle bulk, muscle strength, speeds up muscle recovery time, and reduces muscle catabolism. Anabolic steroids allow the athlete to train harder and longer at any given period, and are commonly used by athletes involved in sports that require power. Soccer is a sport that requires power, thus soccer players have used anabolic steroids to enhance their power for game play. An enhance of power will enhance the player’s performance in a soccer game, as it will allow their muscles to work harder and for longer, further allowing them to sprint faster and execute the ball with greater force. Although, there are negative side affects in result of using this drug, including: decreased sperm production and sex drive, liver disorders, baldness, deepening of the voice, hypertension, and menstrual irregularities for women.

The use of illicit drugs to enhance performance in soccer will not only put one’s health at risk, but also increase the risk of suspension or banishment from the game, stripping off their records, and the diminishment of their reputation and the sport. For example, Abel Xavier, a former Portuguese soccer player was banned in November 2005 from soccer for 18 months by UEFA (an anti-doping organisation) for taking anabolic steroids after testing positive for dianabol.

Drug testing has become an increasingly large part of both professional and amateur soccer. A player can be called for a drug test at any time, in or out of competition. In soccer, they may drug test the winning team, suspected players with obvious symptoms or sometimes they will test by random selection from all the competitors.

The Australian sports Anti-Doping Authority (ASADA) and World Anti-doping agency (WADA) are two organisations that promote the notion of clean sports and are responsible for testing athletes for banned substances. ASADA follows the same code as WADA, which is a document that provides the framework for harmonized anti-doping policies, rules and regulations within sport organizations and among public authorities. Both organisations use methods such as urine and blood samples for drug testing in soccer. For both methods, strict protocols apply in relation to notifying athletes that they are required to provide a sample, how the sample is to be collected (which is usually split into samples, A and B) and the paperwork that needs to be completed. If the player’s samples are both positive, it means that they have taken drugs, and the drug-testing organisation are then notified whose responsibility it is to decide what penalties or bans are to be imposed. Blood testing is commonly used for the detection of drugs such as EPO, and urine testing can be used to detect the use of Anabolic steroids.
Thus, drug testing is becoming an increasingly integral part of sports competitions, including soccer. As new performance enhancing drugs are developed, new tests are developed to detect these, and the struggle to keep sports clean continues.