

# SPITTING IN THE SOUP



## INSIDE THE **DIRTY GAME** **OF DOPING** IN SPORTS

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MARK JOHNSON

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# INTRODUCTION

The story of doping in sports is packaged for easy consumption. As it goes, morally degenerate athletes cheat to win. Get rid of these creeps and sport settles back into a state of pure fair play. The falls of cheaters like Lance Armstrong, Ben Johnson, and Barry Bonds are object lessons topped with gratifying dollops of schadenfreude. The very presence of such deviants in elite competition is an affront to the rest of us who don't take shortcuts, and their collapse pleases us by confirming our own moral superiority.

But this tidy primary school version of events is itself a fraud. Like viewing the Grand Canyon through a toilet-paper tube, its good-versus-evil reductionism leaves out layers of historical context and economic sedimentation—most glaringly by ignoring the fact that drug-free play is a relatively recent moral precept forced upon sports whose participants have always been chemically enhanced. While every doping athlete is responsible for his or her own decisions, the story of doping in sports is more complex than solo agents cheating their way to the podium. In fact, the imposition of quasi-religious values regarding personal and moral cleanliness is a relatively new invention that elite sports are still

struggling to adopt. This book attempts to unpack some of the complexity that gets lost when a sportswriter has to meet the constraints of space and deadlines, or when a politician needs to appeal to the fearful instincts of his constituents.

Maintaining a good-versus-evil understanding of doping in sport allows us to turn our heads from our own role as members of a society that embraces performance-enhancing drugs and procedures. As I explore in this book, fans, athletes, governments, sports organizing bodies, and advertisers are all complicit in the championing of chemistry in the service of greater happiness and performance in life.

This context matters when considering doping in sports. The use of performance-enhancing drugs ultimately comes down to individual decisions, but to understand those choices, it helps to take into account contemporary society's gargantuan thirst for performance-enhancing drugs and procedures, as well as nearly 150 years of organized sports history—during two-thirds of which doping was *not* contrary to what we now call the spirit of sport.

Of course, when we dope in the course of our daily lives, we are (usually) not breaking any rules. Taking erythropoietin (EPO) to get ahead in a bike race is illegal, but popping a prescribed amphetamine like Adderall to improve focus and stamina in school or the workplace violates no regulations. Nor does taking Viagra to improve sexual performance. American society has repeatedly stated—via its embrace of direct-to-consumer drug pitches on television and its hands-off approach to a supplement industry that does over \$30 billion in annual sales, as well as its massive spending on cosmetic enhancement procedures—that it likes drugs that make us better than well, and it likes lots of them, thank you very much.

Today, Americans use more prescription stimulants than during the post-Vietnam speed epidemic, and over 6 million of these users are aged 4 to 17. This industrial-scale doping of American youth in the interest of better mental focus and higher output suggests that while anti-doping missionaries might claim performance-enhancing drugs are immoral

and that regulators know what is best for people, in practice, Americans take a more pragmatic stance. Their attitudes regarding performance-enhancing drugs outside of sports suggest that what is moral is not what is most chemically pure, but rather what is most productive.

While much of the daily coverage of doping in Olympic sports focuses on the drugs taken and the people who took them, the larger, more interesting, and most useful story is the context, the social values, and the historical events that shaped our contradictory responses to performance-enhancing drugs and technologies in sport and everyday life. The forces at play are as wide-ranging as the politics of national defense, the economics of sponsorship, insecurities over global empire and personal appearance, pharmaceutical marketing, and the redefinition of aging from a matter of fate to one of choice that empowered consumers can bend given the right medical technology.

Further, the wall between sports and society is permeable; the behavior of athletes affects the buying and drug-taking decisions of fans, and the political actions of fans can alter what athletes do behind closed doors. This book attempts to give a better understanding of this complicity and why it has never been in the interest of athlete, fan, or journalist to spit in the soup that feeds us all with the nourishing sustenance of money, entertainment, and—in the case of the Olympic Games—political clout.

Beginning with the ideals espoused by French aristocrat and Olympic founder Pierre de Coubertin, which were based on the chivalric romances he liked to read and his admiration for British public schools, in the 19th century, amateur sport was burdened with the idea that it could become a morally uncomplicated and uncompromised space in the midst of a fallen world. At the heart of this fantasy was the idea of amateurism—the belief that sport is the domain of the aristocratic leisure class, sealed off from the morally and genetically corrupted lower classes. When future Olympic managers came to realize the economic potential of the five rings, they eventually abandoned Coubertin's idea of preserving the spirit of sport and fair play in the amber of amateurism. Over time, the battle against professionalism in the Olympics was

replaced by a war against drugs. And this new struggle to keep sports pure was itself an echo of larger social anxieties about countercultural social and moral decay during the 1960s.

The rise of anti-doping concerns in the 1960s led to the emergence of a complex anti-doping infrastructure that today attempts to impose moral and physical purity on the sporting universe. With no actual Edenic state of fair play to refer back to, anti-doping moralists have fabricated notions of a pristine pre-drug era that their missionary efforts would resurrect. And to create a sense of fear to justify the sometimes human-rights-violating intrusions of an anti-doping infrastructure, anti-doping crusaders, with the help of the media, made up tales about the mortal dangers of drugs that were often out of proportion to their actual, clinically documented lethality.

This book investigates why the media and anti-doping infrastructure are also loath to spit in the soup that nourishes their own existence. For example, the story of European cyclists dying en masse in the 1990s from EPO is a myth—a fabrication that neither the press nor anti-doping campaigners examined for truth. Admitting that no evidence existed conclusively linking EPO to a supposed rash of endurance athlete deaths would expose as fraud a story that in many respects justified the existence of anti-doping regulators and sensation-hungry reporters.

We are not writing about a conspiracy. Today's anti-doping bureaucracies were built on a hope in the unseen, a religious sense that, given enough commitment and focus, athletes could return to a promised land where victory does indeed belong to the strongest rather than the best enhanced. No one set about with a master plan to create a self-sustaining anti-doping industry or ginned up doping stories to sell magazines and newspapers. The stigmatization of doping in sports—after nearly 100 years during which the act was unremarkably accepted, even praised, as a sign of professional commitment—is a natural progression of human events. By understanding these transformations, and the hypocrisies they hide, we can gain better insight into where anti-doping is today and where it might go tomorrow.



Understanding the broader context of doping in sports is not the same as excusing the behavior of those who break today's rules against performance-enhancing drugs. If this were the case, then all history would be confined to narrow condemnatory or celebratory biography. It would also be hopelessly constrained by the precept that unless the explored topic reinforces society's current values, that history should not be broached.

And this tension between our desire for sports stars to step into the sunshine wearing either a black or a white hat—villain or saint—gets us to the name of this book, *Spitting in the Soup*. The phrase comes from the French expression *cracher dans la soupe*. The closest English version of this idiomatic saying is “to bite the hand that feeds you.”

In the pro cycling peloton, a rider who threatened to expose a fellow rider who was doping would be scolded by his colleagues, “Don't spit in the soup.” That is, do not expose the sport's drug-charged reality and spoil things for all of us. Especially after the shadow of social stigma began to creep over pro cycling in the 1960s, exposing cycling's tacit agreement to carry on its long-standing chemical traditions would only ruin the sport that nourished and supported the riders. Speaking frankly would also putrefy the broth that fed a sprawling supporting infrastructure—a rolling family of coaches, managers, soigneurs, mechanics, doctors, and sponsors.

But spitting in the soup also applies to the “good” ones—the anti-doping activists, the sports organizers, the journalists, and we, the fans, who find that honesty about our own participation in a drug-dependent and drug-hysterical society is itself a way of spoiling that which improves us. Spitting in the soup is not limited to athletes—it includes *our* complicity. And the history of our mutual responsibility for a performance-enhanced world is what this book explores.

# THE ORIGINS OF DOPING

The morning of August 30, 1904, dawned hot and humid in St. Louis, Missouri. The United States was hosting its first Olympic Games, and it was as if an oppressive blanket had been lowered over the Mississippi River town for a signature event, the marathon. Fourteen miles into the 24.85-mile run (the 26.2-mile standard was not established until 1908),<sup>1</sup> runner Charles Hicks—British-born but representing the United States—doubled over on the side of a road in what a *Brooklyn Daily Eagle* reporter called “sweltering heat and clouds of dust.”<sup>2</sup> Along with the swampy conditions, Hicks and 31 other runners dodged a torture trail of unpaved roads and ankle-twisting rocks. Dust accumulated in powdery pools so deep it swallowed the runners’ shoes. There was one water stop—a well 12 miles into the course. Farm dogs added misery. A pack of snarling canines chased a black South African competitor off course. Meanwhile, running in cutoff trousers and street shoes, the race’s sole Cuban, a mail carrier named Félix Carvajal, scrounged fruit from an orchard along the way. The Cuban promptly puked up a gut full of pulp. In these conditions, turning to modern medicine was logical; refusing to offer it would have been ethically shocking.

A physician and Olympic chronicler named Charles Lucas trailed the 5-foot 6-inch, 133-pound Hicks in one of 20 race follow cars. While two of these support vehicles ended up flipped over in roadside ditches, the remaining parade kicked up so much dirt that runners had to periodically stop to hack their lungs free of crud. Press reports describe a California competitor named William Garcia found “lying unconscious by the roadside several miles from the stadium.” Garcia collapsed from a dust-induced stomach hemorrhage. As for Hicks, Lucas felt his charge was not the favorite. “There were three other men in the race who were better runners than Hicks, and who should have defeated him,” the doctor noted. “But they lacked proper care on the road.”<sup>3</sup>

“Proper care” meant drugs. When Hicks hit the wall 10 miles from the finish, he begged for water. Hicks’s Boston-based trainer, a football coach named Hugh C. McGrath, was in the car with Lucas. Hewing to cutting-edge fitness doctrines of the day, McGrath and Lucas denied the dehydrated Hicks’s pleas for water. Instead, they furthered his torture by sponging his mouth with distilled water. Three miles farther along, with other runners dropping out with cramps and heat exhaustion, Lucas had to turn to more sophisticated medicines. With Hicks’s pace reduced to a crawl, Lucas recalled that he “was forced to administer one-sixtieth grain of sulphate of strychnine, by the mouth, besides the white of one egg.”

Though we know it as a rat killer, strychnine was a common endurance sports drug at the turn of the 20th century. “Strychnine is a grand tonic,” novelist H. G. Wells exulted in his 1897 book *The Invisible Man*. In Wells’s opinion, the drug was a performance-enhancing wonder that took “flabbiness out of a man.” Strychnine affects the central nervous system, and when taken in small doses, it allows neurons to fire even when neurotransmitter levels are low due to fatigue. The result is a feeling of agitated energy. Indeed, swallow 100 milligrams of strychnine and your muscles will begin twitching uncontrollably. You will shiver with restless unease before respiratory arrest sets in. Although Lucas had another common chemical performance enhancer, brandy, in the

car with him, he kept Hicks on the strychnine with 10 miles to go, thinking it best if Hicks abstained from other stimulants as “long as possible.”

At the 20-mile mark, Hicks began to turn gray. Shock and heat exhaustion were shutting down his system. With his progress reduced to a walk-march on climbs, Lucas administered Hicks another “one-sixtieth grain strychnine,” two more eggs, and a mouthful of brandy. Stopping to warm a pan of water on the car radiator, Lucas and McGrath gave Hicks a sponge bath. The roadside cleanse, raw eggs, strychnine, and brandy had their effect. “He appeared to revive and jogged along once more,” Lucas reported.

In first place with 2 miles to go, Hicks began to hallucinate. He insisted the finish line was 20 miles away and begged for something to eat. After refilling their exhausted liquor canteen with booze from another support car, McGrath and Lucas gave their delirious runner brandy but no food. Two hills loomed between Hicks and Olympic glory. Reinforced with more brandy on top of the strychnine already coursing through his system, Hicks rallied, fought his way over the two summits, and took marathon gold.

At the finish, however, another athlete temporarily stole Hicks’s glory. Fred Lorz of New York City had arrived first, entering the stadium to thunderous applause, and had apparently taken the win. When it was later revealed that Lorz had hitched a car ride to the finish, Lucas excoriated the disqualified New Yorker, writing that he had nearly robbed Hicks, a newly crowned hero who was only “kept in mechanical action by the use of drugs, that he might bring to America the Marathon honors, which American athletes had failed to win both at Athens and at Paris.”

The position of the authorities was clear: Getting a ride in a mechanical conveyance was cheating. But taking an assist from chemical stimulants was commitment, a heroic glorification of country. After marathon failures at the first two modern Olympics in 1896 and 1900, the Yanks had turned to modern chemistry and delivered victory. Hicks’s doctor publicly celebrated the win as a show of American courage and vision—a Yankee unification of chemical science and personal moxie

in the interest of ultimate performance. In his post-race report, Lucas applauded drugs in sports: “The Marathon race, from a medical standpoint, demonstrated that drugs are of much benefit to athletes along the road, and that warm sponging is much better than cold sponging for an athlete in action.”

After the race, a team of doctors examined Hicks and the 17 other marathon finishers to compare their before and after physical condition. In his 1998 book on the Olympics and the American experience, *Making the American Team*, historian Mark Dyreson explains that these medical experts were motivated by national pride—“a desire to convince the nation that a scientific understanding of athletic technology could guarantee the progress of American civilization.” As we will see, the founder of the modern Olympics, Baron Pierre de Coubertin, linked the creation of his Games to the revitalization of French national character. In the third iteration of the Olympics, American doctors also hitched athletic excellence to national pride, attributing their boys’ success to a Yankee capacity to wed brave medical technology to bold national character. An athlete’s healthy body “is the safest guardian of morality and civilization” wrote James Edward Sullivan, chief of the Department of Physical Culture for the St. Louis World’s Fair, which ran in conjunction with the 1904 Olympics.<sup>4</sup> For forward-looking, scientifically minded Americans, combining modern chemistry with natural physical ability was a point of pride and distinction—evidence of the New World common man’s superiority. Alongside a World’s Fair that awarded seven gold medals for the best presentations on sports science, associating the application of pharmaceutical science to American athleticism with moral corruption would have thoroughly puzzled an attendee of the 1904 Olympics.

**FOR ROUGHLY** the first 100 years of professional sports, mixing drugs and human endeavor did not spark moral panic and social outrage. When an elite athlete turned to modern chemistry to increase output, it was evidence of an honorable commitment to a trade.

Pedaling a bike for cash got its start in the 1860s and 1870s, a time when bike riding was gaining momentum along with the Industrial Revolution. Easy-to-ride “safety” bicycles with equal-sized wheels replaced dangerous penny-farthings. Mass production made bikes affordable on a factory worker’s salary. Those same laborers organized cycling clubs, talented racers soon distinguished themselves, and promoters made a buck organizing races on the pine-board tracks called velodromes, as well as upon the world’s growing network of graded roads. A man could suddenly earn a living racing a bike.

The emergence of these sporting professionals could not have happened a century earlier. Before the second half of the 1800s, professional sports largely did not exist. In a predominantly agrarian world, demand for mass entertainment was too scattered across disconnected towns and farms to make a viable market. In 1830, 91 percent of the United States population lived in rural areas; not enough people had piled into cities to create the concentration of fans that would allow professional sports leagues to thrive.

By 1890, however, cities seethed. Beaten-down souls who expended their life energy in ironworks and factory lines hungered for diversion from their lives of urban misery and filth. At a time when garbage rotted in 8-foot drifts in front of New York City’s Lower East Side tenements, the percentage of the population living in American cities had grown to 31 percent. By 1920, that proportion exceeded 50 percent; for the first time, city dwellers outnumbered country folk. This demographic flip took place in large part thanks to immigrants arriving from eastern and southern Europe, and then cranking out babies in their new homeland. In Europe, rapidly industrializing countries like France and England saw similar rural-to-urban swings.

Until this demographic shift, sports were little more than folk games played in small villages. Before the spread of trains and telegraphs, sports lacked the standardized rules and regulations we take for granted today. Without trains to move large numbers of people between population centers, robust interscholastic competitions were logistically impossible.

And universities and secondary schools are where sports like rugby, basketball, and American football first took root. Apart from schools within walking distance of one another, teams played in isolation using home-grown rules. The sequestered play and lack of leagues meant there was little need for standardized rules shared outside a local region.<sup>5</sup>

By the 1850s, railroads connected most British and many European towns. Telegraph systems along these rail lines moved information at previously unfathomable speeds. For millions of years of human history, the top velocity of long-distance information was limited by the speed of a carrier pigeon, horse, or wind-propelled boat. None had the electron's capacity to travel without pause across North America or the Atlantic. The first transatlantic telegraph message was sent in 1858. Three years later, telegraph messages linked the United States coasts. Messages that took weeks by ship or Pony Express now took minutes. In terms of accelerating news and binding people with shared experiences, the reduction of the transmission time for a round-trip message from 20 days to mere minutes was earthshaking. Wire services made national and international news local, and newspapers engaged nations in pro sports comradeship. When a San Francisco father read Chicago newspaper baseball scores to his son, they became part of a virtual community of fans who never saw one another, yet shared common interests and sports dramas.

Sports promoters saw francs, pounds, dollars, and pesos in this suddenly limitless fan base. Paris got its first velodrome in 1879 and built six more between 1892 and 1897. Such facilities were often financed by municipalities pressed to provide a social and physical pressure-relief valve for the unrest building in immigrant tenements. By 1899, nearly 300 cycling ovals were scattered across France. In Russia, in 1892, the roaring success of bike race ticket sales inspired a promoter to organize that country's first soccer game during a break between races at St. Petersburg's Semyonov Hippodrome.<sup>6</sup>

Track racing flourished in the United States. Reporting on a sold-out six-day race at New York City's Madison Square Garden in December 1912, the *New York Times* described a near riot when police tried to

eject fans who had bribed their way past door monitors. Forty-eight hours into the six days of racing, the *Times* described the infield as “one solid mass of humanity.”<sup>7</sup> In his history of American bike racing, *Hearts of Lions*, historian Peter Nye describes 38,000 spectators showing up in Springfield, Massachusetts, for the town’s annual Diamond Jubilee bike races, more than doubling the town’s population of 35,000.<sup>8</sup>

Given so many paying and wagering fans, stars took home astronomical sums. In 1914, Australian six-day megastar Alf Gouillet earned \$11,500 in prizes and appearance fees for a single race series. Earning \$5 a day, an assembly-line laborer in Henry Ford’s auto plant would need to work 2,300 eight-hour days—six years and four months—to earn what Gouillet banked in less than a week. And as cycling paydays increased, so did the interest in these new professional sportsmen. Snowballing media coverage rapidly drew more paying fans to the track.

At a time when the average annual wage for an African American was \$150, black rider Marshall “Major” Taylor unleashed a lethal sprint to scoop upward of \$850 for a day of racing—\$24,000 in today’s dollars. Taylor began making a living from cycling in 1896, a time when 600 pros were already plying their trade on velodromes across America. Managed by a Broadway theater producer named Billy Brady, Taylor captivated more than 30,000 fans per event at Madison Square Garden and Brooklyn’s Manhattan Beach velodromes. In return, Brady paid Taylor half the gate. In 1901, Taylor raced in 16 European cities for \$5,000, a sum 3,000 percent greater than most African Americans earned in a year. The 23-year-old killed it in Europe, winning 42 races during his tour. The highlight came when Taylor raced French world champion Edmond Jacquelin at the Parc des Princes Velodrome in Paris. Future Tour de France impresario Henri Desgrange promoted the event, and 30,000 spectators watched their French hero slug it out against the American sensation for a whopping \$7,500 pot.<sup>9</sup>

While track racing was the fan-friendly media darling of the day, pro road racing was also growing. In France, newspaper owners sponsored races to increase circulation. The burgeoning community of sports fans



(and bettors) was hungry for on- and off-field scoops on their athletic heroes. By organizing races, newspapers essentially created newsworthy events that in turn drew readers. This consumer demand allowed the papers to sell more advertisements for cars, tires, bicycles, and tonics. Inaugural road events included Bordeaux–Paris and Paris–Brest–Paris in 1891, Paris–Roubaix in 1896, and the Tour de France in 1903. Paris–Roubaix was founded as a way of publicizing track events at a new Roubaix velodrome and to increase sales of *Le Vélo*, the then-dominant French sports newspaper.<sup>10</sup>

In 1890, there were about 50,000 bikes in France. By 1910, there were 3 million. At the same time the bicycle industry was pumping out products, the automobile industry was also beginning to fire on multiple cylinders. With at least four French auto builders vying for business, and countless bike and bike accessory companies doing the same, there was a significant demand for advertisements to get products into French minds, creating pools of money and public demand that fueled the growth of pro cycling. It was a world of pay for play that offered dedicated and talented athletes, most drawn from the lower class, elevator rides to wealth and status.<sup>11</sup>

In the midst of this explosion of professional sports, athletes taking drugs to ply their trade was not the scandal it is today. Rather than report on drugs from a position of moral outrage and disgust, the press described athletes enlisting chemicals to extend human performance as an unremarkable matter of fact. Cycling did not operate under the disapproving glare of paternalistic anti-doping agencies and morally outraged fans. Nor did the press link doping with moral depravity. If anything, when newspapers wrote about doping, they did so to illustrate an athlete's exemplary commitment to his craft.<sup>12</sup>

With big money and enormous fan interest at stake, professional cycling needed to deliver spectacle, drama, and heroic suffering. Riders took drugs to help make that happen. On December 16, 1900, the *New York Times* described a high number of injured riders dropping out of a Madison Square Garden six-day race. Even after competitors “had been liberally dosed with stimulating drugs,” the *Times* reported, the infernal

pace of racing and crash-sustained injuries were too much. Rather than helping riders gain an advantage over their competitors, drugs dispensed during turn-of-the-20th-century bike races were described as aids meant to merely keep the riders upright during grueling multiday events.<sup>13</sup>

Indeed, in the context of sports competition that then prevailed, doping was an outrage only when it impeded performance. A report from the November 26, 1894, edition of San Francisco's *Morning Call* newspaper dramatized the immorality of go-slow doping. A story titled "Doping a Racer" described a British horse trainer named Dan Danson who was caught poisoning a racehorse to force the animal to run slower than its normal pace. Concerned that such subterfuge would scare away horse-racing fans, the anti-doping police didn't mess around. Danson was executed. The *Morning Call* described another doping-to-go-slow case involved Clipsetta, a horse that was wiping up tracks in the American South. The paper recounted Clipsetta's early demise by way of the needle: "The night before the race this fiend in human form, by some means, gained access to the stable" and injected the horse with drugs. On race day, "the splendid filly died in awful agony."<sup>14</sup>

While society frowned on doping to maim a horse, giving a steed stimulants to accelerate it was no big deal. In a 1901 piece titled "'Dope' an American Term" the *New York Times* described "shrewd turfmen" using drugs to "get more speed out of certain horses" than bettors and bookies thought the animals had in them. While chemically maiming a horse was unethical, the *Times* reported that few believed using stimulants to speed up a horse "was either discreditable or dishonest."<sup>15</sup>

With time, the term *doping* made its way from the stables into vernacular speech. "To dope" became shorthand for slowing down or speeding up an animal or person. Doping to retard performance had negative connotations. Doping to push performance carried little judgmental baggage. An October 19, 1903, *New York Times* article, "'Dope' Evil of the Turf: Jockey Club Stewards Keenly Watch for Horse Druggers," described sleuths hanging out on paddock rails looking for any sign of drug-induced slowness. "The amateur detectives are on the lookout not

for the good of racing, but for the benefit of their own betting operations,” the paper explained. Doping was immoral because it was bad for the gambling business. The same piece suggested doping was an American invention that ultimately made its way to the Old World. Commenting on the spread of this novel American method for rigging horse gambling to England, France, and Austria, the *Times* observed that “there has never been coined a term which has attained the popularity that the one ‘dope’ has achieved.” The neologism *doping* “implies impropriety,” the paper explained. Its use to slow down a horse in the interest of fixing a race was not seen as “legitimate and fair.”

Due to whispers of these artificial efforts to slow down a horse, the track-going public was becoming convinced horse races were rigged. “Nearly every regular visitor to the tracks can point out half a dozen or more men who are known as ‘needle doctors’ and who are asserted to make a profession of ‘doping’ horses for trainers who are not familiar with the uses of drugs,” the *Times* warned in the October 1903 story. However, even with spies trying to get the inside dope on the condition of horses, it was not always easy to identify which long-odds horses might have been doped to go faster and which favorites had been doped to slow down. Indeed, according to the *Oxford English Dictionary*, the phrase *to dope out*, a variation on the more modern expression *get the inside dope*, entered common usage about this time as a colloquial way of saying you had privileged information.

John Gleaves has written extensively on the history of horse doping. A professor at California State University, Fullerton, where he teaches the philosophy and sociology of sport and the history of human performance enhancement, Gleaves’s research suggests that the drugs those horses were getting probably had no actual effect on their performance. “This was just hocus-pocus,” Gleaves told me when I visited him at his university office not far from Disneyland. “They actually believed they were speeding horses up and slowing them down, but they were using things like mercury and rosemary and tincture of thistle—crazy stuff. And that didn’t make the horse go any faster.”

When not using syringes, trainers would sometimes drill holes in a horse's leg, pour in supposedly performance-crushing toxins, then hide the drug-stuffed cavity with leg wrappings. Newspaper descriptions of innocent animals being subjected to these cruel methods also soured public attitudes toward the notion of slow doping. "You are not going to get a guy to lay a dollar bet if he thinks the race is fixed," Gleaves noted. And without the thrill of money on the line, horse racing does not draw wagering fans; as Gleaves pointed out, "If you don't have gambling, horse racing is not that interesting." Left unchecked, horse doping could undermine the sport's economic calculus—taking money out of the pockets of gamblers and putting it into the wallets of track and horse owners.

Written and enforced by the powerful Jockey Club, the first American anti-doping law passed in 1897. Designed to protect the gambling industry, the law gained an enforcement mechanism when horse racing introduced its first dope tests in 1912. The checks were theoretically able to identify the presence of cocaine or opium in a horse's saliva. While there is little evidence to suggest the tests worked, the Jockey Club's message that the sport now had technology to root out drug-hobbled horses was a strong signal to track gamblers that their bets were square.<sup>16</sup>

Thoroughbred racing became concerned about doping's financial harm at the same time pro cycling boomed in the United States. Beneath the 1903 *Times* piece on the evils of horse doping was a report on a new cycling record set at the Parc des Princes velodrome in Paris: 52 miles, 918 yards in one hour. A column to the left held more cycling stories, but the scandal of the day involved a protest over the winner of a 100-mile race in upstate New York. Riders were upset because the victor, M. Eustes of the Brower Wheelmen, "took pace from an automobile." Getting a draft from a car was cause for moral outrage.<sup>17</sup>

During the period that racing authorities clamped down on go-slow doping at hippodromes, plenty of money was being wagered in velodromes at six-day bicycle races. The winner of these events was the man who could grind out the most laps over 144 hours. On December 10, 1897, four days into a six-day event at Madison Square Garden,

the *New York Times* reported that race leader Charles Miller had covered 1,606 miles. According to the story, the Chicago rider's face was "drawn and haggard," his eyes "sunk deep and inflamed." He had slept only four hours since the race had started four days earlier. "His trainers are scarcely able to keep him off the track for a single hour's sleep each day," the paper marveled. While it was common knowledge that competitors turned to artificial stimulants to fuel these monumental endurance efforts over what the *Times* called "six days of agony," newspaper reporters saw no reason to lump human drug taking in the same category as horse doping.<sup>18</sup>

As to the question of why cyclists racing at Madison Square Garden were not given the same anti-doping scrutiny as horses across the East River in Queens at Aqueduct Racetrack, Gleaves told me the public and officials assumed human athletes were always going to attempt to win. If a cyclist wanted to throw an event, he didn't need to take drugs to soft-pedal or feign fatigue. At the dawn of pro sports, corruption had little to do with doping to go fast; instead, it was performance-slowng subterfuges that corroded fan confidence. The most famous example from team sports arose when Chicago White Sox players conspired to throw the 1919 World Series. That eight players were banned for life from baseball suggests just how seriously the sports world took performance-degrading strategies that threatened ticket sales.

The assumption was that you would only dope human athletes to improve their performance, Gleaves told me. In six-day races, both the public and promoters wanted riders to go faster and harder. If it made for more exciting bike racing, the consensus was "We want you to dope them all. We want them all to go fast," Gleaves said. There was no fear that riders were surreptitiously doping themselves to lose. "Every cyclist there is trying to win because that's how they get paid," Gleaves observed. Doped cyclists presumably went faster, and that was all good for track racing at the turn of the century, so few complained about "ethical" violations. A professional cyclist's crowning moral obligation was to seek victory with all his might. For the first century of profes-

sional sports, doping to go faster fulfilled that professional obligation and illustrated just how malleable ethical connotations were in regard to doping.

Echoing the differing attitudes toward drugs that either retarded or enhanced performance, a six-day write-up in the *New York Times* on December 12, 1903, described performance-enhancing drugs as a logical and correct aid for the riders. Some 1,600 miles into that winter's event at Madison Square Garden, the paper described a French rider reaching for a bottle containing the antiseptic carbolic acid when he was meant instead to get a hand up of performance-supplementing beer. Averting disaster, the rider's trainer, Tom Eck, grabbed the rider's hand and swept the carbolic acid to the floor, smashing it. The *Times* reports that afterward the French athlete "was profuse in his thanks to Eck."<sup>19</sup>

As word of this minor drama spread across the infield and made its way up to the cigar-smoke-shrouded fans, it twisted into a rumor that trainers were poisoning certain riders with drugs—horse racing's old doping problem. Although alcohol and other stimulants were perfectly acceptable for six-day riders, even the hint of the administration of output-retarding drugs was cause for scandal.

Three days earlier, a *Times* sportswriter covered the specter of riders being doped in the old victory-crippling hippodrome way. After fans were spotted handing riders champagne, a rumor flew "that some of the contestants were being drugged." That is, riders were allegedly being doped to slow them down. As the news washed all the way up to the nosebleed seats—becoming more salacious with every uninformed retelling—whispers became shouts. With some riders so exhausted they were falling off their bikes midrace, the notion took root that partisan fans were feeding riders champagne laced with poison. This was an outrageous breach of sporting standards, a go-slow chemical wrench in the gearworks of fair play. Although the hysteria seemed to be little more than the work of overheated imaginations, the paper commiserated with the athletes, pointing out that at 1:00 a.m. the zombie-like riders "seemed sadly in need of a stimulant."<sup>20</sup>

From the days of the first professional races in the 1870s, pro cycling was a sport for the working classes, and the competitors were the same laborers who saw alcohol and stimulants as a necessary tool for enduring the remorseless nature of their work and the hard-fisted bosses who ruled the mines and factories. Endurance sports like cycling and marathon were spiritual brethren to the labor of extracting coal or threshing wheat; going without the substances available to help grind through your days was illogical, even unprincipled. As Gleaves told me, if it involved working for money, fans and the press did not stigmatize taking drugs to improve your efforts. By and large, the public was “OK with laborers taking stimulants to do their job better, whether it’s going into the coal mine, whether it’s going out to the farm field, or whether it’s going out to your bicycle.”

At the same time that cycling was taking off as a profession, cocaine and caffeine were mixed with all manner of popular alcoholic and non-alcoholic drinks, most famously in Coca-Cola, which in the 1880s began bottling the invigorating Peruvian coca plant and West African kola nut and selling it as a patent medicine. During the same era, at least seven other companies sold variations of Vin Mariani, a mixture of Bordeaux wine with coca extract that was first concocted by a Corsican pharmacist.

In 1896, the popular American sports and outdoors magazine *Outing* ran a two-page advertisement touting the performance-enhancing qualities of *Vino-Kolafra*. A mixture of wine and kola nut extract, the beverage was pitched as a coach-sanctioned drug. Headlined “A New Factor in Athletics. The Banishment of Fatigue,” the ad cited “the rapid pace of life and the limitations of human endurance” as obstructions between Americans and success. Explaining that the tonic is used by “athletes of our leading colleges,” and illustrated with drawings of rowers, divers, hurdlers, racewalkers, and shot-putters, the advertisement quoted Yale University trainer M. C. Murphy. The drink kept his college athletes “braced, and besides giving the system an immediate lift, improves the general health.” Many decades before performance-enhancing drugs would be stigmatized as potions of anti-fair-play devils, this Ivy League

coach had no reason to be ashamed about recommending *Vino-Kolafra*. It “certainly is a remarkable drug,” he stated in an effort to get more Americans—college athlete and office worker alike—marching down to the local shop to load up on the stimulant.

Research on cocaine’s effects on physical output went back decades. In 1876, the august *British Medical Journal (BMJ)* published a study by Sir Robert Christison on the performance-enhancing effects of coca leaf. The British doctor was inspired to take up his research after reading German zoologist Eduard Pöppig’s 1835 book *Travels in Chile, Peru, and on the River Amazon*. Based on five years of field studies in the Andes, Pöppig described Peruvian natives banging out 50-mile hikes fueled on nothing but coca leaves. Cocaine, Pöppig concluded, “has a really wonderful power in supporting the strength under prolonged fatigue without food.”<sup>21</sup>

Using the traditional Peruvian spelling *cuca*, Christison’s *BMJ* piece recounted the tale of a 62-year-old Peruvian miner who worked “at laborious digging five days and nights without food, or more than two hours of sleep nightly, his only support being half an ounce of *cuca* leaves every three hours.” Another European researcher, Dr. T. I. von Tschudi, reported that when he was working in the 14,000-foot Peruvian highlands, coca leaves allowed him to “climb heights, and pursue swift-footed game, with no greater difficulty than in similar rapid exercise on the coast.” In sum, von Tschudi encouraged, “the moderate use of *coca* not only is innocuous, but may even be conducive to health.”<sup>22</sup>

A medical professor at the University of Edinburgh, Christison was so intrigued by these South American reports that he began his own investigations, often using his students as human cocaine rats. In one study, he had two young scholars walk 16 miles. Their only meal was breakfast at 9:00 a.m. After their 16-mile ramble, Christison denied the famished students food and instead gave them tea made from an eighth of an ounce of coca mixed with carbonate of soda and a dash of plant ash. After downing the Peruvian infusion, Christison marveled that “hunger left them entirely, all sense of fatigue soon vanished.” Indeed, even after an all-day



walk and no postexercise food in their bellies, the students were so revitalized by their Peruvian tea that they left to promenade Edinburgh's high street for an hour "with ease and pleasure." Coca, it seemed, removed fatigue and revived a tired person's "ability for active exertion."<sup>23</sup>

In a subsequent 1875 study, Christison asked 10 students to walk 20 to 30 miles without eating. At the end of their starvation hikes, the scholars drank a coca infusion. Christison reported that four subjects got moderate relief, four complete relief, and two felt no effect at all. "No disagreeable effect was produced at the time or subsequently, except that a few felt a brief nausea after their dose, owing probably to the form of the infusion in which it was taken," he concluded.<sup>24</sup>

Christison also tested coca on himself. He walked 15 miles without chewing coca and reported that the task left him physically ruined and "unfit for mental work." Two days later, he did the same 15-mile walk, but this time with a coca assist. Christison had plenty of good to say about the drug's enhancing powers: "I was surprised to find that all sense of weariness had entirely fled, and that I could proceed not only with ease, but even with elasticity." In two subsequent tests, Christison climbed 2.5 hours to the summit of a 3,000-foot mountain, then chewed coca leaves in preparation for his descent. Again the coca eliminated fatigue. "I went down the long descent with an ease like that which I used to enjoy in my mountainous rambles in my youth," the doctor raved. "Chewing coca removes extreme fatigue, and prevents it," Christison concluded. "No injury whatever is sustained at the time, or subsequently in occasional trials."<sup>25</sup>

As if athletes needed more justification to make this wonder drug part of their training table, Christison also recounted how a coca leaf infusion helped a cyclist. He described one M. Laumaille making a 760-mile bike ride from Paris to Vienna in 12 days. Sixty miles from Vienna, Laumaille was a physical wreck, demolished by days of bogging through "a road of fluid mire." Although Vienna was within striking distance, the French velocipedist wanted nothing more than to flop down in the muck and sleep, but then he reached for a "small supply of the liqueur de

coca, an Indian tonic.” After swigging this Peruvian booster, Laumailé reported his strength flooding back. Encouraged by this report, along with his own studies, Christison concluded his piece by expressing his hope that pharmacists would get to work to create an over-the-counter cocaine solution, and “without looking for a patent.”<sup>26</sup>

Sixty-five years later, scientists still praised the use of performance-enhancing drugs in sports. In 1941, Springfield College professor, exercise physiologist, and sports science researcher Peter Karpovich defined the prevailing non-judgmental attitudes toward performance-enhancing drugs. In his “Ergogenic Aids in Work and Sport,” Karpovich rounded up current research on the physiological effects of substances, including alcohol, cocaine, amphetamines, hormones, pure oxygen, fruit juices, and sugar. Published in the *Research Quarterly of the American Association for Health, Physical Education, and Recreation*, Karpovich’s study urged readers to avoid the term “doping” when referring to performance-enhancing drugs and athletes. “At present its use is objectionable since it connotes an administration of drugs akin to opium,” Karpovich cautioned. That is, a drug that made one soporific—think horses with holes in their ankles—and was worthy of opprobrium, unlike compounds that made you lively.<sup>27</sup> To avoid this negative association, he recommended calling performance-enhancing drugs—as powerful as cocaine and as benign as fruit juice—ergogenic aids.

As for the ethics of using drugs to improve performance, the highly influential Karpovich saw no fair play compromises if drugs did no harm. “It may be stated here that *the use of a substance or device which improves the physical performance of a man without being injurious to his health, can hardly be called unethical*,” Karpovich explained.<sup>28</sup>

In 1956, Karpovich would write one of the first scientifically rigorous books on strength training and athletic performance. As a Russian field medic during World War I, Karpovich had been imprisoned during Joseph Stalin’s dictatorship. He escaped to the United States in 1925 and became a citizen in 1935. Karpovich combined the scientist’s belief in challenging received wisdom (including his own) with a doctor’s

obligation to do no harm. Thanks to his research that revealed weight lifting athletes were both quicker and more flexible than non-weight lifting athletes, in the 1940s, Karpovich rejected the prevailing belief that weight training made athletes slower and stiffer—an old wives' tale that, as we will see later in this book, persisted into the 1970s, when the San Diego Chargers football team incorporated anabolic steroids and weight training into their NFL preseason workouts and the 1980s, when baseball players embraced the same practices.

For Karpovich, performance-enhancing drugs were part of a holistic athletic preparation package and morally indistinguishable from proper diet, massage, sport-specific training, and rest. "All these means are available for everyone, and they may be used if so desired," he explained in 1941.<sup>29</sup> That said, Karpovich's Hippocratic oath ensured he was not a universal drug pusher. In cases where he could find no evidence of ergogenic benefit, he would steer athletes away from certain drugs. Writing about the amphetamines frequently distributed to World War II soldiers, Karpovich proposed that "in spite of rumors that Benzedrine has been responsible for an improvement in athletic performance, no scientific evidence has been presented as yet." Regarding hormones such as testosterone, Karpovich noted that as of 1941, research "leads to a hope that hormones might increase muscular strength and endurance in normal people." After mentioning research indicating that cocaine can increase cycling endurance, Karpovich cautioned, "Since cocaine is a dangerous, habit-forming drug, its use in athletics cannot be recommended." Likewise, he warned that the stimulant Benzedrine is a "dangerous drug and its excess may lead to insomnia, hypertonia, and circulatory collapse."<sup>30</sup>

Karpovich's publications and the widespread adoption of his theories of sports medicine that prevailed throughout the first century of pro sports capture the striking lack of moral hysteria in popular and scientific culture regarding drugs in sport. Performance enhancement through drugs was a matter of professional practice and scientific opinion, not individual moral degeneracy. The physiologist's counsel

regarding drugs was based on their efficacy and their potential to cause physical harm, not still-dormant social constructs regarding drugs and moral ruin. Using drugs to improve performance was only a problem when those drugs were so powerful and addictive that they could harm the athlete, not because they violated a spirit of fair play or threatened society's social order. In the years following World War II, however, these neutral attitudes began a slow, halting transition—an early creep toward today's anti-doping fanaticism.

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Mark Johnson's previous book for VeloPress, *Argyle Armada: Behind the Scenes of the Pro Cycling Life*, recounts a year in the life of the Garmin pro cycling team. Having covered cycling as a writer and photographer since the late 1980s, Mark often focuses on the business of pro cycling—a topic that frequently intersects with the sport's long history of doping. Along with U.S. publications *VeloNews*, *Velo*, and *Road*, his work is published in *Cycling Weekly* in the United Kingdom, *Vélo* in France, and *Ride Cycling Review* and *CyclingNews* in Australia as well as general-interest publications including the *Wall Street Journal*. A category II road cyclist, Mark has bicycled across the United States twice and completed an Ironman triathlon. A graduate of the University of California, San Diego, he also has an MA and a PhD in English literature from Boston University. His other passion is surfing, which he does frequently from the home he shares with his wife and two sons in Del Mar, California.



# **DON'T HATE THE PLAYER. HATE THE GAME.**

Doping in sports is a history of good versus bad. Or so the story goes.

Truth is, athletes have doped to do their jobs since the dawn of organized sports. But cleaning up drug-soaked sports has been a mission at odds with the spectacle-hungry interests of advertisers, Olympic organizers, governments, reporters, and fans, none of whom want to spit into sports' nourishing broth of money, power, and national pride.

In *Spitting in the Soup*, Mark Johnson traces the shocking trail of hypocrisy that belies the tidy myth of clean athletes fighting corrupt deviants. Journalists spin false claims about amphetamines and EPO. Cold War governments treat anti-doping as an inconvenience. Olympic organizers dismiss the pursuit of clean sports as a budget-breaking nuisance. And U.S. lawmakers tie themselves in knots to enrich snake-oil supplement makers while railing against performance-enhancing drugs as a stain on the American Way.

*Spitting in the Soup* is an eye-opening tour through the ethical, social, and economic clamor that arises from our ongoing efforts to create a sporting island of chemical purity in the midst of a drug-dependent world.

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