

Winning Big without Performance Enhancing Drugs “Beyond the Zone”

The Sad State of Affairs

A-Rod MLB, Lance Armstrong UCI, David Ortiz MLB, Manny Ramirez MLB, Brandon Moore NFL, Von Miller NFL, German biathlete Evi Sachenbacher-Stehle IOC, Italian bobsledder William Frullani IOC, elite athletes testing positive for performance enhancing drugs, the list goes on and on.

The future of drug use in sport looks even grimmer when you look further down the ranks to future athletes!

A 2012 University of Minnesota study (Eisenberg, Wall & Neumark-Sztainer) found that teens are using steroids and muscle-enhancing substances at higher rates than previously thought. The study found that 5.9 percent of boys in the survey reported using steroids, while the rate among girls was 4.6 percent. The findings were surprising, especially since some of the steroid users were only in seventh or eighth grade.

Further a 2014 study (Blashill, Safren) has found that Twenty-one percent of gay and bisexual boys have used anabolic-androgenic steroids at least once in their lives.

Earlier unrelated studies have found that:

1. Among those who admit using steroids, 80 percent said they believed the drugs could help them achieve their athletic dreams
2. 65 percent of steroid users would be willing to use a pill or powder, including dietary supplements, if it guaranteed they would reach their athletic goals, even if it might harm their health
3. 57 percent of users said they would use it even if it could shorten their lives
4. About 6 in 10 users believe that professional athletes have the right to use steroids, and they think that using anabolic steroids for athletic purposes is legal

The use of drugs is all related to the “concept” of maximizing your ability to perform at your chosen activity. The belief is based in the belief that human performance can only be improved upon through artificial chemical induced means. Specific objectives can include:

Athletes Doping Objectives

Increase strength and endurance

Aid workout/injury recovery

Alter intensity and aggression

Combat exhaustion and fatigue

Reduce weight/bodyfat

Relieve aches and pains

Increase muscle mass/oxygenation

(Adapted from 8, 9, 10 references)

But does it have to be this way? Can drugs actually counter some performance? Is performance under drug use truly indicative of “ideal performance” for “specific athletic

activity”? Could some athletes reach max performance without drug use? Are drugs the only answer?

While there is no question “performance enhancing” drugs are the only way some athletes can perform and compete at an elite level, for example, “non drug-tested” body building, strongman, and other non-tested strength or endurance related sports.

Part of the dilemma of answering this question is are the “top” athletes who use and test positive for performance enhancing drugs truly “elite” athletes or are they in fact “mid level” athletes who use drugs to speed to the front of the pack by cheating! While this question would need to be answered through research or studying results, there are some definite answers to a few performance related questions of top performers.

1. Would someone have won the 1999 Tour de France if Armstrong did not cheat and use performance enhancing drugs?
 - a. Yes Alex Zuile 7 minutes 37 seconds slower
2. Would someone have won the 2000 Tour de France if Armstrong did not cheat and use performance enhancing drugs?
 - a. Yes Jan Ullrich 6 minutes 02 seconds slower
3. Would someone have won the 2001 Tour de France if Armstrong did not cheat and use performance enhancing drugs?
 - a. Yes Jan Ullrich 6 minutes 44 seconds slower
4. Would someone have won the 2002 Tour de France if Armstrong did not cheat and use performance enhancing drugs?
 - a. Yes Joseba Beloki 7 minutes 17 seconds slower
5. Would someone have won the 2003 Tour de France if Armstrong did not cheat and use performance enhancing drugs?
 - a. Yes Jan Ullrich 1 minutes 01 seconds slower
6. Would someone have won the 2004 Tour de France if Armstrong did not cheat and use performance enhancing drugs?
 - a. Yes Andreas Kloden 6 minutes 19 seconds slower
7. Would someone have won the 2005 Tour de France if Armstrong did not cheat and use performance enhancing drugs?
 - a. Yes Ivan Basso 4 minutes 40 seconds slower

Maybe Armstrong wasn't the true elite athlete?

Beyond the Zone

Can performance enhancing drugs actually hamper an athlete's performance and can athletes actually advance and expand training to reach new levels of performance in new non-drug related way?

Over the last 16 months I have been preparing to attempt a third world record, as in my first two world records attempts I have once again learned you can never take anything for granted and you constantly need to introduce new ways of pushing the envelope and thinking outside the box in training.

I do however still believe it requires training as the complete athlete. In my opinion the performance of the total athlete is comprised of:

1. Genetics
2. Body type
3. Visualization
4. Focus
5. Relaxation
6. Maximizing Activity specific technique or skill
7. Physical preparedness
8. Nutritional preparedness
9. Physical recovery
10. Injury avoidance
11. Mental performance
12. Training outside the box –pushing the boundaries training

In my opinion, which is based on no scientific research, but rather 17 years of practical hands on experience, repeated trial and error, two world records, 3 world championships, 2 national records, tons of training hours and reps and training with one of the top mental performance coaching in the world - Dr. Vietta “Sue” Wilson, these 12 separate but interconnected elements are the key to success for maximizing performance without performance enhancing drugs!

I believe that most elite athletes master or focus on 9 of the 12. Two of which they have no control over – genetics and body type. The 9 are:

1. Genetics
2. Body type
3. Visualization
4. Focus
5. Maximizing Activity specific technique or skill
6. Physical preparedness
7. Nutritional preparedness
8. Physical recovery
9. Injury avoidance

I do believe the key to performing at new levels of excellent without performance enhancing drugs are incorporating and perfecting the following “beyond the first 9”:

1. Mental performance
2. Relaxation
3. Training outside the box –pushing the boundaries of training

Mental performance – is not simply visualization, rather a combination of mind set, focus, visualization, relaxation and approaching the mental side of training from a totally new paradigm and outlook.

Relaxation – is not about “relaxing” in the traditional sense. It’s about learning how to perform at an elite level while under the same relaxed mode or setting of simple training. Breathing slower, relaxing certain muscles, enhancing lactic tolerance, strength and endurance. In some cases, slowing your world and enhancing the ability to perform faster and stronger while maintaining breathing, lower blood pressure and heart rate.

Training outside the box –pushing the boundaries of training – Training outside the box is just that. It’s about testing and retesting boundaries. It’s about new exercise combinations, intensity levels and basically forgetting about limitations and finding new ways to exceed them safely.

Will these 3 elements eliminate that reality of sport – that training is hard, a full time job and does not ensure success. No and I can honestly say from a personal perspective:

- Do I have exercise related pain almost every week – Yes
- Is training and competing getting harder - Yes
- Do I realize there are much stronger people then me – Yes
- Do I sometimes hate training - Yes
- Do I have terrible performance days - Yes
- Do I have short term training setbacks – Yes
- Do I realize it’s about the long term and there are no short cuts without consequences - Yes
- Will I turn to drugs – No
- Will I give up – No (However, at some point age will retire me)

Training and pushing beyond the zone is not easy. I am convinced however, that any athlete at any level can increase their performance by approaching their sport from a “total athletes” perspective, incorporating the 12 key elements above. While they may not all set world records, they will most likely live healthier longer lives drug free!

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Further Information

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