

[Get the Olympic rulebook out of our private lives and legalize steroids](#) [1]

Written by [Pete Spence](#) [2] | Friday 3 August 2012



We've seen quite a few sporting upsets at the London 2012 games so far. But what remains predictable are disqualifications for drug use, with an Albanian weightlifter and Uzbekistani gymnast being banned and some Chinese swimmers facing allegations of doping.

The reasons for cheating are clear. Performance enhancing drugs (PEDs) offer improved performance and detection is far from certain. A constant arms race between drug developers and those who test for them has led to a situation where even the World Anti-Doping Agency Director-General himself has [confessed](#) [3] that they are catching 'the dopey dopers, but not the sophisticated ones.'

Only users who poorly time their intake get caught, while those on more intelligent cycles can avoid detection at the games themselves. Simultaneously, the rules on what is allowed constantly change to account for new substances. At different times caffeine and Vitamin D have been prohibited. Bizarrely, blood doping is now banned while training at high altitude to achieve the same effects is permitted.

Many have responded by asking for greater international cooperation in cracking down on the drugs trade. There are alternatives, however. The Chairman of the IOC takes the view that a more stringent out-of-competition testing system, with a greater use of the 'whereabouts' policy, would improve detection.

Further restrictions on PED markets will not just affect performance athletes, though. The vast majority of users do so recreationally for aesthetic reasons. Growth in users has been dramatic in the past few years, particularly in poorer areas such as the [Welsh valleys](#) [4], where 60% of recycled hypodermic needles are from steroid use, not heroin use.

These users do not have the professional team that Olympians do, procuring drugs and ensuring their quality. As with mood-altering drugs, steroids are often cut with other substances, such as baby oil. The legal status of these drugs also means that users are often restricted to purchasing products developed for bulking up cows or the treatment of injured horses. Legalising supply would ensure that fitness enthusiasts could rely on brand strength for the quality of their drugs as they can do with legally available supplements now.

Many of the health complications that arise as a result of use can be put down to a poor circulation of information. Many learn how to use steroids by word of mouth or from internet forums. Moves to legalise the use of drugs would help to open the world of PEDs, so that those who do choose to use them can educate themselves to do so as safely as possible.

Steroid use is swelling, and whatever happens in the world of professional athletes, the rules of their games should not affect the lives of those outside them. We should ignore calls for tighter controls (especially when those who decide what is permissible change their definitions so often) as these clearly have not stopped the use of steroids skyrocketing in recent years. Rather, we should push for legalisation of all performance enhancing drugs so that those who are more vulnerable can be safer in pursuing their fitness goals.

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