



*Ten meters' drugs transactions from only one pharmacy was a convincing piece of evidence presented by Donati*

# Doping – not just for the professionals

Large quantities of illegal sports drugs are regularly smuggled for sale among amateur athletes. Some are even destined to fall into the hands of children

By Karen Balling Radmer

**F**orget the top athletes. They are, and always will be, heavily involved with sponsors, many of whom are directly responsible for the production of illegal drugs.

Instead, the focus should be firmly fixed on saving children and young athletes from being introduced to the many varieties of hormones and steroids available on sport's black market.

So sounds the message from Sandro Donati, the head of research in the CONI, Italy's Olympic Committee.

Along with Swedish Chief Detective Inspector Gunnar Hermansson, he detailed a network of hormone smuggling gangs with connections stretching from Italy to Russia and from Korea to South America.

»Year after year,« Donati says, »police confiscates a growing amount of illegal performance enhancers, – especially anabolic steroids destined for sale on the black market.«

Customers are numerous, and include young athletes, members of fitness clubs and schoolchildren. Even in a country such as Sweden, where the law forbids all forms of doping, many children know exactly where to get

hold of hormones and other banned substances.

»It is possible to buy these kind of pharmaceuticals without prescription in most countries in Asia, Africa and South America,« points out Gunnar Hermansson.

»Even in Europe, some Mediterranean countries permit pharmacists to sell bulk quantities of anabolic steroids and testosterone products directly to private individuals with no questions asked. This illegal trade is global, extensive and lucrative. However, unlike the smuggling of narcotics, very few countries interfere in this illegal drugs trade.«

»The smuggling of anabolic steroids and testosterone derivatives is extensive, and has been on the increase over the last two or three years,« he continues.

»Most of the hormone products on the European black market come from the EU or from East European countries like Russia, Poland, Bulgaria and Romania. Another popular source is Thailand.«

Despite tougher regulations of the legal sale of hormones, Gunnar Hermansson explains that illegal alternatives continue to appear on the black market in large quantities.

This, he claims, can only be due to the fact

that manufacturers are willingly over-producing for the black market.

Unlike steroids, he says, the trade in illegal growth hormones has not yet made much impact on the market. This is due to the fact that their manufacture is strictly regulated. However, Hermansson adds that criminals provide their own answer to this regulation – in the form of armed robberies.

»The illegal doping trade is increasing, and the supply from legal and illegal manufacturers seems to be unlimited,« he asserts.

## Shocking information

For 20 years Sandro Donati has fought against doping and until now mainly focused on elite sport. However, during recent years he has come to realise that despite numerous disclosures and high-profile prosecutions, doping is still on the increase. This is not only the case amongst professionals, but among amateurs and young athletes too. Presenting his findings to an audience of shocked journalists and researchers, Donati says:

»The amateur doping presents a serious health risk. Top athletes have doctors to help them control the dangerous side effects of doping, but amateurs do not.«

In cooperation with the Italian legal authorities, Sandro Donati has recently been involved in a large-scale investigations into hormone smuggling, spanning many different countries across the world.

The prosecutor in Bologna alone finally closed the case after a total of 41 people had been arrested and a huge amount of illegal substances confiscated.

The investigation involved listening in on telephone conversations, which in turn led to the breaking-up of a large dealers' network concerned with the supply of substances to fitness centres.

## Sad conversations

The phone conversations tell a saddening story (see box):

»Hundreds of thousands of amateur athletes are involved,« says Donati. »Every day there are countless tragedies.«

For Sandro Donati, the recordings prove that neither the dealer nor the buyer has much idea of what they are doing, meaning an overdose of steroids or hormones is a real possibility.

Other recordings contain examples of trainers ordering large quantities of drugs for their athletes, or grim examples in which the dealers have no idea that the drugs they are peddling can kill. During the investigation, six bodybuilders were known to have died.

A total of 119 fitness centres were involved in the Bologna investigation and illegal drugs with a market value of well over five million Euros were seized.

In all, 101 different substances were involved. The case uncovered a network comprising of 287 dealers, including athletics coaches and doormen at discotheques, encompassing 15 countries including Australia, the USA, Germany, Russia and Spain.

The largest quantity of such drugs ever discovered by police was confiscated in Belgium in July 2002. A total of 550 kilos of illegal anabolic steroids were seized – drugs intended to be distributed in six different nations.

### New models for sport

As part of a wide-ranging solution, Sandro Donati proposes that new physical activity models should be designed for children and young people, supervised by specially trained personnel.

Not least, he adds that the media should consider shifting its focus by concentrating less on results and elite athletes. At the same time, he points out that information campaigns can play a big part by warning of the dangers of doping.



“ *It was quite simply the best conference I have been to for many years* ”  
*Ivan Waddington, Sports Director, United Kingdom*

## For men or horses?

Phone conversations intercepted by the police in Bologna reveal the daily tragedies in the drug market, told Sandro Donati and gave a few samples:

1.

Buyer: 'Listen... this week I'll start on the VIS (Testovis). How much should I use a week?'

Dealer: 'Eh...two'

Buyer: 'Only?'

Dealer: 'Two boxes...four hundred milligrams'

Buyer: 'Only?'

Dealer: 'Then take three....'

Buyer: 'When I took Viron [Testoviron] I used to take four a week, you know that eh?'

Dealer: 'I know, but how could you do it? They're so big!'

Buyer: 'So they are'

Dealer: 'Eh...take six...otherwise you'll go mad. They are two centilitres each, eh!'

Buyer: 'And on which days?'

Dealer: 'Mondays, Wednesdays and Thursdays'

Buyer: 'All right...what about 'W' (Winstrol) – still three?'

Dealer: 'Yes. On the other three days. Tuesdays, Thursdays and Saturdays.... You might even do...on Sundays...'

2:

Buyer: 'Hi... listen... I wanted to tell you something'

Dealer: 'Tell me'

Buyer: 'It's about that diet [of anabolic steroids] you prepared for me...'

Dealer: 'Yes?'

Buyer: 'Well... but... it's... it's for... for horses!!!'

Dealer: 'Yes, of course! That's why it's even better than the other one.'

Buyer: 'How do you mean "better"? Hello?... Hello?'

Dealer: 'The composition is the same, but the stuff is better... I know, I know, I know!'

Buyer: 'Are you sure?'

Dealer: 'Absolutely sure... don't worry. These phials are better than the other ones!'

Buyer: '... Bye bye, my girl friend is coming!'

# Supplements: A High Price to Pay

Many dietary supplements contain undeclared substances that are often dangerous

By Marlene Jensen

»Dietary supplements are regarded as being a safe and legal alternative to doping. However, if you believe that, it's time to think again. You're making a big mistake,« says Christiane Ayotte, a Canadian researcher, professor and doping expert. »And you are not alone. Millions of people across the world use dietary supplements every day.«

To highlight the problem she refers to a recent investigation of 634 different products from 15 nations, which found that 289 contained substances not declared on the packet. Of these, for example, 34 contained testosterone. However, despite the dangers, most countries have little in the way of legislation forbidding the sale of these products.

»None of these supplements were deemed illegal,« she continues. »As long as no more



than ten percent of a given substance is contained in the supplement, producers are not legally obliged to list it on the packet.«

She adds: »You don't need a prescription to purchase dietary supplements, and you choose your own dosage – that is a dangerous combination.«

As a medical requirement, Christiane Ayotte points out that dietary supplements are often simply not necessary. Sportsmen and women

maybe have need for extra vitamin C, iron and calcium – but that is all. Despite this, the market for such supplements is enormous. In the USA alone, such products were responsible for a turnover of 31 billion dollars in 1999. A quick search on the Internet shows reveals countless examples of protein powders, vitamins and minerals for sale online. Even in the supermarkets, dietary supplements are freely on sale side-by-side with other foodstuffs.

»It is important that consumers to demand to see documentation.« Christiane Ayotte continues. »They should insist that governments recognise the importance of regulations and controls. If, after using dietary supplements, you are found guilty of doping, you can try to claim you didn't know what you were doing – but that will not alter the fact that you are accountable.«