

# SPORTS UNIVERSITY MAPS BLACK MARKET FOR DRUGS

Understanding long-term trends can support campaigns for young people

by Kirsten Sparre



The German Sport University in Cologne combines black market research with surveys of young people's use of drugs including doping. Photo credit: Spomedial Project

A computer server sitting in the German Sport University in Cologne plays a central role in an attempt to uncover the contours of the local black market for drugs including those used for doping. Hooked up to the server are all customs offices in North Rhine Westphalia and as customs officers feed information into a special database programme (EIS) black market data are emerging.

The EIS database is the brainchild of scientists at the Institute of Biochemistry at the German Sport University in Cologne and has been developed in cooperation with the local authority pharmacist. It is part of a major drug mapping project which aims to disclose who in Cologne are using what kind of drugs and where the drugs are coming from.

"Everybody talks about the black market but the fact is that nobody knows much about it," says

sport scientist Michael Sauer who is in charge of the ambitious project.

## Help at hand for customs officers

Developed on a shoestring budget by sports student Svena Lüdke, the database helps customs officers trying to control packages arriving into North Rhine Westphalia at airports, harbours or travelling through the central European terminal for United Parcel Service based in Cologne. From 11 pm to 3 am alone, close to 150.000 packages pass through the UPS terminal and many of them contain drugs of different kinds.

Before the database it was difficult for customs officers to determine from the name of a confiscated product exactly what kind of drug they were dealing with. Now the name on the drug container is fed into the database which not only tells the customs officer what kind of drug it is but also how he or she should proceed with the case. It even provides the forms customs officers should fill in and file with the appropriate authorities as well as the letters to send to people who have had their drugs confiscated.

## Information for the long term

The by-product of this service is constantly updated information about the black market collected in one central place. From the data it is possible to

detect patterns in the types of drugs that are imported and where they are imported from.

United States, United Arab Emirates, India and Turkey top the list of countries where drugs are imported from. 10 per cent of the imports are anabolic steroids and from this 10 percent 90 per cent are nutritional supplements.

For customs officers and the police who are also getting hooked up to the system the advantage is that it helps them target their investigations. At the university, the EIS system serves different purposes.

"We see EIS as a long term tool which will slowly build up information about trends in the use of drugs," explains Michael Sauer.

## Widespread use of cannabis

The database is one part of the drug mapping project, the other part is a combined educational and survey programme.

Since 2004, Michael Sauer and a team of sports students with special knowledge about doping and drug abuse have been going into schools and youth centres to seek out the attitudes towards health, sport, drugs and body image amongst 15-25 year olds.

The team uses urine tests and questionnaires as tools. The questionnaires developed in cooperation between the Institute of Biochemistry and the Institute of Sport Sociology at the German Sport University reveal the attitudes and the urine

## Test EIS for yourself

Try out the EIS demo-version at  
<http://eis.dshs-koeln.de>  
 (in German)

Get more information on EIS by e-mailing  
[m.sauer@biochem.dshs-koeln.de](mailto:m.sauer@biochem.dshs-koeln.de)

# FRONTRUNNERS

## – more than a play

by Jens Sejer Andersen

tests the actual use of drugs amongst young people regardless of what they are prepared to admit to. The urine samples are tested anonymously but results are available for individuals on request through an elaborate coding system.

The tests have shown that young people use cannabis to a much higher degree than the scientists expected – use is widespread even amongst the most sporty students.

“Although cannabis can be used for doping purposes, our findings indicate that we have a drug problem more than a doping problem, in part because the use of drugs only becomes doping when it takes place inside a sports club or a federation,” says Michael Sauer.

### Young people want information

Matters of definition aside, the use of drugs still holds the potential of many pitfalls so after each survey session, the team gives free advice and information about drugs, drug abuse, side effects, nutrition and nutritional supplements.

Towards the end of the session, team members hand out telephone numbers so the young people can contact them again and get further information on an anonymous basis. The offer has been taken up at a surprisingly high rate:

“Generally young people scream for information. They are interested in their health and they look for real life people who can give them confidence in their behaviour towards drugs and nutrition,” says Michael Sauer.

### Timing is everything

The trick with information to young people is to time it right. Young men may be more interested in seeking information about anabolic steroids in the spring when they are preparing themselves to look good on the beach in the summer. And that brings us back to the EIS database.

“We use EIS to find out whether the black market can indicate what substances are abused. If you know what time a particular substance is on the black market you may be able to set up specific educational programmes,” explains Michael Sauer.

Fiction and reality intertwined when “Frontrunners” crossed the stage at Play the Game.

Written by Canadian journalist Laura Robinson, the play was based on the true story of 10 native Canadian boys, all outstanding running talents.

Having survived all kinds of abuse at residential schools they were forced to attend, the boys were chosen to run 800 kilometers with a torch destined for the Opening Ceremony of the Pan-Am Games in Winnipeg 1967. When they arrived at the entrance to the stadium, the boys were told to hand over the torch to a non-native runner – the idea of a First Nation person representing Canada was not acceptable for the organisers.

In 1999, the runners were called back and rehabilitated when the Pan-Am Games were again hosted by Winnipeg. After 32 years, they could

finally complete their mission and deliver the torch in the stadium themselves.

Laura Robinson was present then and decided to write the story of these men whom she describes as survivors. She later turned the magazine article into a book, the book into a play, and the play will soon become a movie.

Fiction or reality? The decision was not made easier for the audience at Play the Game, since two of the actors, Charlie Nelson and Fred Harper, were not real actors – but Frontrunners in reality. For them, telling the story of their lives on stage brought some meaning to the injustices they had gone through. For the audience, running with them took the breath away.

Frontrunners showed that sport is sometimes more than a play.

Read the full story of the Frontrunners at [www.playthegame.org](http://www.playthegame.org)

Two of the real Frontrunners, Charlie Nelson and Fred Harper (no. 1 and 3 from the left), acted in the play about their own lives. Others on the stage from left: Violet Clabaiosaj, Larry Nicholson, Bill Salter and Earl Quewezance.

