Passport to remove suspicion

Sweden’s latest weapon in the fight against doping is a ‘blood passport’

By Karen Balling Radmer

Olympic drug testing methods are not working. Political considerations mean that not enough athletes are being tested. And moreover, according to members of the Swedish Olympic Committee, it is still too easy to cheat the system.

As a result of these concerns, and in an attempt to prevent athletes manipulating blood samples, the Committee has introduced a new system known as a ‘blood passport’. Bo Berglund, Chief Physician with the Swedish Olympic Committee, provides details of the scheme to the Play the game conference.

He begins by explaining why his committee believes that such documentation is necessary. While a sizeable staff of medical professors are doing their utmost to discover new ways of detecting this dangerous practice, he says, an increasing number are plying their trade on the other side of the moral divide – doing their best to find new ways of beating test methods.

In brief, blood doping involves increasing the amount of haemoglobin in the blood, which improves its ability to carry oxygen to the muscles. When EPO is used, ‘baby’ blood cells or artificial oxygen cells carry blood round the body, improving performance to such an extent that athletes are seemingly willing to risk their lives. And that, says Bo Berglund, is exactly what they are doing. Those who experiment with blood doping know how to begin a manipulation of their blood, but few know how to halt the process. Such a practice can end in death.

Although this method of doping has existed for a number of years, the Swedish Blood passport was only introduced after the Winter Olympics in Salt Lake City. There, Berglund was not alone in suspecting that blood-doped athletes managed to beat the system.

»The Olympic testing system uncovered three blood-doped athletes. Is that because there were only three? Or did some slip through the net?« he asks.

Berglund points out how easy it can be to cheat the Olympic testing system by detailing a variety of different methods. Athletes can arrive late, thus avoiding earlier rounds of testing, he says. They can simply hide. And they can also cheat the Olympic testing system by detailing a variety of different methods. Athletes can arrive late, thus avoiding earlier rounds of testing, he says. They can simply hide. And they can also cheat the Olympic testing system. For example, athletes can arrive late, thus avoiding earlier rounds of testing, he says. They can simply hide. And they can also cheat the Olympic testing system by detailing a variety of different methods. Athletes can arrive late, thus avoiding earlier rounds of testing, he says. They can simply hide. And they can also cheat the Olympic testing system by detailing a variety of different methods. Athletes can arrive late, thus avoiding earlier rounds of testing, he says. They can simply hide. 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