Scrap world records based on doping

by Kirsten Sparre

For the sake of children, scrap all world records that are based on the use of doping. That is the new and controversial suggestion from Sandro Donati.

In Donati’s view, accepting world records set by doping users is yet another example of corrupting influence on children and young people from a sports system based on business values. It is time to humanise the system through a careful examination of current world records in individual sports such as athletics, swimming and weightlifting.

“Special commissions of experts should be appointed to examine the list of record holders, study their historical context, their national backgrounds and then cancel all suspicious records which is probably all of them,” says Donati.

Eliminating records based on doping will be a tribute to truth but also a question of opening up a sports system to younger athletes where they can get good results without the use of drugs.

“The IOC and international sports federations are not for people, they are against people. They use people because these kinds of records are not human. They know very well that behind these records there is sophisticated doping not only for the record holder but also for number two, three, four and five in the ranking,” Donati says.

Such a system leaves only one road open to young athletes: to increase the use of doping to live up to the expectations of business-driven sports organisations.

“We cannot say to children that this is the future of sport. We must hand down to younger athletes sports that are truly practicable, and that is infinitely more important than protecting the image of record men and women and the organisations behind them,” Donati believes.

Sport breaches UN Convention on CHILDREN’S RIGHTS

by Michael Herborn

According to pedagogy professor Richard Bailey from Roehampton University, child athletes need to be treated more like children and less like athletes if sport is to be good for them. From the world of elite sport, however, there are countless examples of children being stretched beyond their physical capabilities, used solely for their sporting talents, even to the expense of their education.

In the West, we might assume that examples of this are limited to developing nations or nations with lower general respect for human rights thresholds. However, this is not the case. From his research, Bailey has found evidence of sports breaching 19 articles in the UN Convention on the Rights of the Child, including the right to protection from sexual exploitation and abuse, the right to education and the right to freedom of expression.

Included among them was Article 31, the right to leisure, play, and participation in cultural and artistic activities. Breach of this right goes hand-in-hand with the professionalisation of child sport. When sport stops being about play, sport is very rarely about enjoyment – it becomes something children are obliged to do, not something they choose.

Swept under the carpet

Bailey recalled a discussion he had with an unnamed English Premier League football coach in 2007 on the situation.

“Most of the kids don’t actively choose the pressures of top-flight football. I mean, they do at the start, but that’s really a dream they’re buying,” said the coach.

“They turn up when they are seven or eight saying ‘I want to be like Beckham or Gerrard’, but they don’t know what it means. How can they? They are only babies. Next thing they know, they are pushed to give up their education and to do everything for football. And the irony is we know that most will never make it.”

For many in the sporting world the problem appears to just be swept under the carpet, even at the very top of the sporting world.

Bailey pointed out that when Matthew Pinsent, a four-time gold winning Olympic rower, complained about abuse of young Chinese gymnasts, even IOC chief Jacques Rogge tried to dismiss the issue as being blown out of proportion, justifying it in terms of cultural relativism.

“Everything is interesting”.

Bertil Valderhaug, Aftenposten, Norway.