



**RICHARD POUND, PRESIDENT OF** the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), points out that every sport has had its share of cheating, and there's little doubt every country has its share of doping in sports. China is no exception. Because the issue of doping—in U.S. baseball and the Tour de France as well as at the Olympic Games—has drawn much attention in recent years, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) and China have undertaken unprecedented measures to ensure a doping-free Olympics.

### How It All Started

China retook its seat on the International Olympic Committee (IOC) in 1979 after a twenty-one year absence because of the dispute over the “two Chinas” issue, and in the country's first appearance, it won fifteen gold medals. This impressive return performance in Los Angeles in 1984 did not arouse much suspicion about doping, in part

due to the absence of the USSR, which was boycotting the games. However, with the Seoul Olympics in 1988, Chinese athletes began to be implicated in a string of drug scandals, culminating at the 1994 Asian Games, where eleven Chinese athletes returned positive results from doping control. And at the World Swimming Championships in Australia in 1998, a Chinese swimmer was caught at the Sydney airport with a growth hormone in her luggage, and four swimmers tested positive at the event in Perth.

China's remarkable progress within a short time inevitably aroused suspicions of a systematic doping scheme backed by the government, reminiscent of doping scandals in the former East Germany and the Soviet Union. Compared with winning merely five gold medals at the 1988 Seoul Olympics, China won thirty-two gold medals

and grabbed the second position in the gold medal count a mere sixteen years later, at the 2004 Athens Olympics, claiming its position as an emerging sports superpower. In this relatively brief period, China tasted the sweetness of victory but also the bitterness of doping scandals. In fact suspicions of doping have lingered around every unexpected success that Chinese athletes have achieved, from the world-record-setting female distance runners coached by MA Junren 馬俊仁 in the early 1990s to the stunning performances of Chinese female swimmers at the World Swimming Championships in 1994.

### The Risks of Reform

To understand the history of drug abuse in Chinese sports, it is worthwhile to understand that China's return to the Olympic family coin-

## Performance Enhancement in Ancient Times



**T**he record of performance-enhancing drugs dates back to 400 BCE in Greece, when achievements in sports were first found to increase social status, political power, and economic well-being. Although the crown of olive leaves was the only “official prize” for an Olympic victory, records indicate that Olympic winners could gain great wealth from lucrative prizes awarded by their city-state. In addition to money, winners might receive homes, food, tax breaks, and even exemption from duty in the armed services. Because the stakes were high, athletes were open to any means that gave them the edge over opponents,

such as ingesting mushroom extracts, plant seeds, or any concoction thought to enhance performance.

During the Roman period chariot races and gladiator competitions filled the stands with spectators. Knowing that a victory could be their ticket to social and economic prosperity, competitors fed their horses potent mixtures of herbs and other plants to make them run faster. They also fed themselves herbal substances that acted as doping agents to make for a more intense and bloody battle, one that would satisfy the adoring crowds.

LIBBY ALBERS



Participants at a session of a 1984 conference on sports medicine and doping issues in Beijing.

cided with China's embarking on an unprecedented open-door economic reform, which brought about profound changes in every aspect of social life in China and also transformed the role of sports. Sporting success was identified as an instrument that could help create a new national image as part of the country's rejuvenation. Winning gold medals at international competitions, particularly the Olympic Games, was considered a way to achieve national glory. The overwhelming priority given to Olympic sports gave rise to a win-at-all-cost mentality at different levels of elite sports. At the same time, the meaning of sports success for individual athletes also changed dramatically.

In the early 1980s, a world championship brought an athlete only political prestige and higher social status, whereas twenty years later an Olympic championship meant the creation of a millionaire overnight. Prize money poured in not only from government rewards but also from the private sectors, in the form of commercial endorsements, for example. Driven by the win-at-all-cost mentality and tempted by overwhelming financial rewards,

some coaches and athletes turned to performance-enhancing drugs or other methods to gain an edge over their opponents. And so it was that doping seeped into China during the mid-1980s.

### **From Zero Tolerance to Doping Scandals**

Undoubtedly, China could not afford to have its reputation tarnished by the doping crisis, and certainly the crisis was at odds with the country's ambition as it bid for the Olympics in 1993 and 2001. China responded by seriously addressing the situation. The first doping control tests were carried out in 1990. A series of anti-doping regulations was formulated to curb drug abuse in sports. Remarkable progress was made from the mid-1990s when China began bilateral cooperation with some leading countries in anti-doping, such as Norway, Australia, Sweden, and Canada.

A full-fledged national anti-doping program was established by the end of the 1990s. Great attention was also paid to the quality of testing, with China's National Doping Control Quality System

receiving international certification in 2004. The annual total of tests soared from fewer than two hundred in 1990 to more than nine thousand in 2006, with more than half conducted as out-of-competition tests, the most effective means of detection. A groundbreaking government decree, Regulations on Anti-Doping, promulgated by the State Council, came into effect 1 March 2004. Despite their significance not being fully appreciated outside China, the regulations provided a foundation for government authorities to make concerted efforts to combat doping in sports.

At the same time, China took part in international anti-doping affairs, representing Asia on the foundation board of WADA since its establishment in 1999. China was among the fifty-one governments that signed the Copenhagen Declaration to recognize and implement the World Anti-Doping Code at the Second World Conference on Doping in Sport in 2003. In October 2006, China became the first Asian country to ratify the United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) International Convention against Doping in Sport.

### **Anti-doping Challenges**

Eliminating doping from sports is a long-term battle around the world. What are the complexities of the battle and the key challenges for China? First, the motivation for drug abuse is becoming more sophisticated and diversified, and doping is not restricted to elite athletes competing for gold medals at international competitions.

## Olympic Anti-doping Rules Get Stronger



In April 2008, the International Olympic Committee (IOC) announced on its website ([www.olympics.com](http://www.olympics.com)) the implementation of tougher anti-doping rules "as a clear demonstration of the IOC's commitment to ensuring athletes play fair in Beijing."

The new rules include:

- The provision that all athletes participating in the Olympic Games in Beijing will be subject to doping controls at any time or place, with no advance notice.

- The fact that athletes who miss a test on two separate occasions during the Games or on one occasion during Games plus two in the 18 months prior, will be considered to have committed an anti-doping rule violation.

- Possession of any substance from the list of prohibited substances would constitute a violation (previously only a selection from the prohibited list would have applied).

Doping appears to be seeping into sports for young student-athletes, compelling the sports authority to introduce doping control at national youth sports events. In recent years reports of positive results from doping tests conducted on high school students at the national university entrance examinations and at the Provincial Junior Games have increased. The world was shocked when officials of the Chinese Olympic Committee Anti-Doping Commission (COCADC) raided a training camp of the Anshan city sports school in northeastern China in August 2006, and seized in the headmaster's room prohibited drugs, including erythropoietin (EPO), testosterone, and hypodermic needles. The youngest doped athlete was only fifteen and the oldest eighteen, and they were preparing for their Provincial Youth Games.

To link such an incident to China's preparation for the 2008 Olympics would show a lack of knowledge of the Chinese sports system. China has a variety of domestic comprehensive

sports events, such as the National Games, the National Urban Games, and the Provincial Games. For many coaches and sports administrators at the provincial and city levels, the performances of their athletes at the local Provincial Games are not directly related to the national Olympic program but rather more often serve as stepping-stones in their own careers. How many gold medals a city wins at these local sports events and how many young athletes are scouted by professional teams determine the promotion of some team officials and coaches. Furthermore, the athlete population at these amateur sports schools is huge and technically outside the registered testing pool controlled by the national program.

Second, in Chinese cultural tradition the notion of food and medicine is nuanced. Sometimes medicine is food and food is medicine. Even an ordinary Chinese housewife will add some Chinese medicinal herbs when stewing meat or making a soup. The extensive

use of traditional Chinese herbs in food preparation and the complexity of their ingredients put Chinese athletes at high risk of drug abuse and make doping prevention and education more sophisticated.

Third, a national anti-doping organization (NADO) independent from sports and government has been identified as a key strategy to effectively fight doping in sports. With the 2008 Olympic Games on the horizon and the increasing international attention, China is under close scrutiny both in terms of its ability to control its athletes through the national program in the lead-up to the games and its handling of doping control during the games. No doubt more resources and expertise need to be dedicated to this effort, and an independent Chinese NADO would be a strong indicator of the country's commitment to doping-free sports. Other key issues faced by Chinese sports include the alignment of domestic policy with the World Anti-Doping Code and the control of the manufacturing and trafficking of illegal substances.

Some people may ask how China views doping in relation to its sports. A comment from a senior government sports official, quoted on the Chinese Olympic Committee Anti-Doping Commission website, may be the best answer: "China won 32 gold metals at the Athens Olympics. Evidence of doping-free performance was like a 33rd gold medal for the Chinese team, and without it, the other 32 gold medals would be meaningless."

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