

MANAGING FAN RELATIONSHIP AFTER A DOPING SCANDAL

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Abstract: *We all have idols in sports. People who make us wonder how they managed to become the best in their field. But there are also athletes who resort to novel and forbidden methods to skip training while trying to reach the top. What is doping and why is it banned in sports? The present paper offers a brief description of the doping phenomenon, a small review of the most famous doping cases in the history of sports, the consequences of such failure and how it influences the athlete's life, and finally a short study related to this phenomenon.*

Key words: *fans, sport, doping, physical, mental.*

1. Introduction

The term doping is often used in the world of sports. It refers to the use and administration by athletes of certain drugs or substances to improve their physical qualities and performance.

Although it has been a practice for a very long time, for several decades there has been an increased focus on drugs with the potential to improve without the need for individual work. Currently, the administration of these substances is prohibited. In the past, athletes were encouraged to use various drug therapies

for muscle recovery or strength enhancement [12].

In sports, we often hear about how talented an athlete is or how hard another works. Talent and work are two elements needed to reach the top and they complement each other to a certain extent. That's because a lot of work can make up for some lack of talent. The opposite is not possible. It's easy to be talented and fail due to a lack of professionalism. There are times when even extraordinary efforts gets you nowhere in sports, especially in the individual ones [15].

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However, doping has always been one step ahead of conventional medicine and detection techniques. New substances appear continuously, and until these are included on the prohibited list by WADA (World Anti-Doping Agency), they are perfectly legal for athlete consumption. There is also special treatment, which, if followed in detail, may leave no trace at the time of testing, even if there was also the use of prohibited substances.

In recent decades, the impact of the scourge of doping in sports has grown exponentially. Therefore, unfortunately, it is inevitable to talk about sports without talking about doping. From year to year, the fight against cheaters in sports to defend the rights of clean athletes and protect the integrity of sports values is intensifying.

Past practice has shown us that doping testing and the application of coercive measures on those who practice doping are not the most effective methods of combating this fraudulent behaviour in sports [14]. Rather, the conduct of rejection of doping, favour and respect for clean sport and a competitive environment with equal opportunities, is acquired through a coherent educational process.

2. Literature Review

2.1 Doping in sports

Each time, sport must play an important role both in protecting health and in moral and physical education [10], [7]. Athletes must be protected in their fundamental right to practice a clean, doping-free sport and, in this way, promote health, fairness and equality for athletes all over the world.

The term athlete refers to any person who participates in sports activity at an international level, defined as such by each international federation, or any person who engages in sports activity at a national level, registered with a sports club affiliated to a national sports federation, and any other the person who participates in sports activity at a lower level. Recreational sports practitioners are also included in this definition, without them having the obligation to provide information regarding their location and to request an exemption for therapeutic use [21], [22].

Doping is referred to the use of substances prohibited by the anti-doping agency to which the athlete belongs (USADA for example in America, and the National Anti-Doping Agency in Romania) with the intent to obtain a competitive advantage. Depending on the legislation of the respective country, doping substances can be bought from pharmacies/supplement stores or, most commonly, on the black market. The "doping" category also includes various methods of improving performance, such as blood transfusions [2].

For a substance or a method to improve performance to be classified as "doping", it must meet at least 2 of the following 3 criteria: improve performance, present a danger to the athlete's health and violate the spirit of sport [18].

The number of doping substances is very large, and their cataloguing is not the purpose of this article. Instead, a general classification is offered according to the fact they act.

- a) Narcotics and analgesics - Substances whose main purpose is to mask pain and fatigue. They have the disadvantage that they can mask a

- serious injury and the disadvantage that they are addictive. Ex: morphine.
- b) Anabolic steroids - They are compounds synthesized by humans in the laboratory, compounds that mimic the role of testosterone in the body, practically increasing the level of testosterone in the body of the person who uses it. Most of the prohibited substances fall into this category.
 - c) Hormonal peptides - Substances that aim to increase the level of one or more hormones in the body, such as growth hormone, insulin-like growth factor 1, etc.
 - d) "Blood" doping - Presupposes increasing the number of red blood cells to improve athletic performance, especially in endurance sports (cycling, etc.). Red cells carry oxygen to the lungs and muscles, a higher concentration in the blood will increase the aerobic capacity of the athlete. The most common methods of achieving this are through blood transfusions and erythropoietin.
 - e) SARMs or Selective Androgen Receptor Modulators - They are an alternative to classic anabolic steroids, having much weaker side effects, and being relatively new on the "market".

Although there are other types of doping substances (beta blockers, glucocorticoids, etc.), these five are the most common in performance sports.

Depending on what type of advantage the athlete wants, of course, the substances used also differ.

We will start by saying that the reason for using a doping substance differs greatly from a user who practices a hobby sport to a user who practices a performance sport. Most of the time,

those who do not do performance sports and dope, dope to look better (usually trying to increase muscle mass as much as possible and adipose layer as little as possible).

For performance athletes, things are usually different. Depending on the sport practised and the physical attributes it requires, they will look for one or more of the following advantages:

- a. Recovery from an injury - One of the benefits of using doping substances is that they (especially growth hormones) accelerate the healing of an injury and prevent the loss of muscle mass during recovery. We are talking here about injuries involving torn ligaments, broken bones, etc.
- b. Increasing the body's ability to recover after training - Another very important benefit for performance athletes is that doping substances allow them to recover much faster after intense training, thus being able to train more often than they could normally. Regardless of whether we are talking about a sport that is based only on physical attributes (power lifting for example) or a sport in which the element of skill also intervenes (freestyle wrestling, judo, etc.), an athlete who can train more often is an athlete who has greater chances of success in the competition.
- c. Increase in muscle mass and/or strength - Most of the time, only an increase in strength is sought, less muscle mass. The reason is that, in most individual sports, the weight category is also a participation criterion. So athletes (especially those in contact sports) want to have as much strength as possible, with as little weight as possible, thus remaining in the

category they belonged to before. Going up in the category, they will meet stronger athletes, thus "denying" somewhat the increases in strength. All other variables being equal, a stronger athlete is a better athlete. Strength is the main physical attribute from which all others "derive" (explosion, endurance explosion, etc.).

- d. Lowering the level of fat – It is usually a benefit sought in bodybuilding or in cases where an athlete has to drop in a category. It is not a sought-after benefit as much as the others, because a very high level of stress usually comes with a drastic decrease in athletic ability.
- e. Increasing endurance –Some substances allow the increase of the athlete's aerobic capacity (obviously without adding muscle mass and/or fat), a very important benefit for those who practice a sport in which aerobic capacity is the limiting factor (for example marathon, cycling).

These would be the main advantages that performance athletes can obtain. Others could be listed, such as increased aggressiveness, greater resistance to pain, etc.

Many athletes do it simply because they have to do it, to be able to keep up with those who do it.

There is a moral outrage, but it must be tempered because the nobility of the sport is also perverted by other factors. Furthermore, if we choose to condemn sport doping, then we must also blame and concern ourselves with social doping. Athletes are, after all, the representatives of a society, also composed of "athletes", who run through life willing, often, to succeed by any means.

Today, there is immense pressure on the shoulders of athletes to obtain solid performances [1], [20]. This pressure originates from the managers, the fans, and the media which are always looking for extraordinary results. Athletes and managers should understand that there are no shortcuts on the road to success, and doping is a recipe for disaster [11].

So, beyond the moral dimension of the problem, we can look at the ban on doping from the perspective of logic. Each sport has its own rules, arbitrary, from the desire to reward certain skills and virtues through competition. The doping ban can be perceived as a simple law, for every sport. It just ended up being a global rule, adopted by all sports. So doping is against the rule. It is not forbidden to hire the best trainers and psychologists, to seek out the best diets or exhausting training volume because the rules do not provide for it. Doping means gaining access to an elite group by breaking the rules. It is similar to plagiarism or pollution, for example, other phenomena of social doping with which society are already familiar and tend to tolerate.

2.2. Famous cases of doping in sports

Although the controls of the anti-doping agencies are becoming more and more rigorous, the methods of doping and, very importantly, of masking doping are also advancing at the same time, usually one step ahead of doping detection techniques [13]. Even so, many athletes fail to mask their use of doping substances and are detected. Once they are detected, they are part of a legal process which will establish whether or not they will be suspended from participating in competitions in the sport in which they

are active. In most instances, once an athlete tests positive they are suspended for several years.

We are talking about the most famous cases of doping and the most famous athletes, whose careers were stained by steroid use!

Doping is found everywhere at the professional level (and not only), in absolutely all sports, even in those that do not require muscle mass, speed, strength, etc. Yesterday we were telling you how the athletes from the 1998 Olympic Games shooting test tested positive for doping with beta-blockers, but we don't stop there, did you know that there are also cases of doping in SAH?. It is interesting to see this expression. The idea itself is that doping is used on a large scale in sports, this article is not intended to denigrate the caught athletes, but only to show you what are the most known cases of steroid use in sports.

Below are some of the most famous cases of athletes who used various banned substances.

1994: Diego Maradona. The God of football as many call the former star of Argentina and the Napoli football team. Known for his extra-sporting style, no one was surprised by the doping cases. In 1994, Maradona tested positive for 5 different types of ephedrine. At the same time, 2 years before, he had been suspended for several months for cocaine use.

2012: Lance Armstrong. The famous American cyclist Lance Armstrong is known in the sports world for many things. He won the Tour de France 7 years in a row, won the battle with cancer... and tested positive for anti-doping. In 2012, the US Agency accused him of using performance-

enhancing drugs. In 2013, Armstrong confessed on Oprah Winfrey's show that he doped for all the victories in the competitions.

As a result, Lance Armstrong was stripped of all titles won after August 1, 1998, including 7 tours of France. Moreover, as a result of this scandal, Lance Armstrong lost sponsorship contracts worth tens of millions of Euros.

2016: Maria Sharapova. Idol for many young athletes in the world of tennis, Russian Maria Sharapova tested positive for the substance "meldonium" before the Australian Open 2016. She was suspended for 15 months.

2004: Adrian Mutu. Another famous case from Romania is that of the footballer Adrian Mutu. He first tested positive for cocaine in September 2004, when he was active at Chelsea under the command of Jose Mourinho. He suffered a suspension of 7 months, a fine of 20,000 pounds and the termination of his contract with Chelsea (one of the top 4 teams in England). In January 2010, he was found positive again, this time with sibutramine, being sanctioned with a 6-month suspension, many specialists considered that the cocaine episode ruined what could have been an exceptional career.

2009: Richard Gasquet. He claimed before the investigators that he was kissed by a woman at a party in Miami, and in this way, the cocaine would have entered his body. The ITF and the World Anti-Doping Agency called for a two-year ban for the Frenchman.

In the end, Gasquet received a one-year ban because he denied doping and because tests revealed a small amount

of cocaine. The decision was overturned after an independent tribunal found the incident to be accidental. Gasquet received a six-week ban from May to July 2009.

1988: Ben Johnson is a sprinter who won two Olympic bronze medals and one gold, which was later withdrawn. He set consecutive records for the 100 meters, both in 1987 and 1988, his record being 9.79 seconds. On September 27, 1988, 3 days after winning the gold, he tested positive for doping with stanozolol. He was disqualified and the Olympic title he won was withdrawn, as well as both records.

2005: Rafael Palmeiro Corrales, a former baseball player, one of the most famous, by the way. He won the Golden Glove 3 times. He is one of the few baseball players (only 5 in the world) who is a member of both the 500-home run club and the 3,000-hit club.

He was accused many times of using steroids, but he always denied it, even when he was under oath. On August 1, 2005, he was suspended by MLB, after testing positive for doping with stanozolol.

2.3. The relationship with the fans

The relationship of fans with sports teams or athletes is very important, being not only emotional or psychological, but as a reflection of the fans and the athlete's values. A doping scandal can ruin the athlete's brand, and the reconstruction of that brand is hard to set up [19]. Apart from the repercussions from the anti-drug agents, which can lead to life suspension for the athlete and exclusion from the competition for the club, the image of the

athlete or the sports team can be destroyed forever.

However, a disconnect between these values can create conflicts that can threaten fan identity and spur efforts to protect that identity, especially in the event of inappropriate athlete behaviour, some fans may try to justify their continued connection to the team or athlete and to protect their identity by using strategies of moral disengagement [16].

Thus, doping situations not only compromise the credibility of performance in sports but the victories obtained by athletes becoming questionable and questionable.

Leaving aside the reasons that lead the athlete to resort to the banned substance, whether it is financial gains, pressure to obtain better results or the mediatization of sports competitions, the effects on the relationship with the fans can be devastating [4].

Especially nowadays, when the relationship with the mass media plays an important role in the brand created by the athletes, a relationship that can very quickly influence the fans, it is important to build a strategy for coming out of such a scandal with as few repercussions on the images as possible, the relationship with the fans, the relationship with the sponsors and the financial gains of the athletes. Fans discuss on social media and other platforms about their favourite athletes [6], [9].

This strategy involves first of all the recognition of the mistake made and the apology, which demonstrates responsibility on the part of the athletes, humility and respect for all interested parties. This recognition must include several points: what happened, why it

happened, how it affected others, what is being done to fix it and how it will be prevented in the future.

The second step is communication and cooperation with the relevant authorities, the media and the public. This shows transparency, honesty and willingness to learn from mistakes. A good communication strategy should include the following elements: timely and consistent updates, factual and accurate information, a clear and respectful tone, and open and constructive dialogue.

The third step is to take action and improve the situation. This shows commitment, responsibility and improvement [17]. A meaningful action plan should include the following: concrete and measurable steps, realistic and achievable goals, relevant and credible partners, and continuous and regular feedback.

The fourth step is to reconnect and engage with stakeholders. This shows empathy, gratitude and loyalty. Avoid isolation, arrogance or manipulation, as these can alienate and antagonize the audience.

A smart engagement strategy should take advantage of the following opportunities: positive and authentic stories, creative and interactive content, social and community causes, and personal and emotional connections.

The fifth step is to monitor and evaluate the progress and impact of recovery efforts. This shows professionalism, adaptability and excellence. Avoid complacency, rigidity or negligence, as these can jeopardize brand reputation and trust. A rigorous evaluation process should include the following tools: data and analysis, surveys and feedback,

benchmarks and best practices, and strengths and weaknesses.

The sixth step involves learning from the mistakes made. This shows maturity, resilience and innovation. Avoid stagnation, repetition or regression, as these can limit your brand's potential and growth. A culture of continuous learning should promote the following values: curiosity and exploration, reflection and feedback, experimentation and innovation, and collaboration and diversity.

Several factors are involved that can tilt the balance of the relationship with the fans after such a scandal, being cases where an athlete has completely lost his credibility, in addition to ruining his sports career, or situations when the fans nevertheless showed empathy and stayed with him their favourite athletes [24].

Managers of the sports clubs or the managers of the athletes have a responsibility to create and sustain a climate that does not lead to doping [3], [5]. High ethical standards must be ensured and the pressure to obtain strong performances should not lead to corrupt behaviour [8], [23].

3. Case study of the ruined talent of Adrian Mutu

One of Romania's most talented footballers, Adrian Mutu had a career affected by a series of scandals and controversies alongside impressive achievements on the field. Analysing the life of the well-known Adrian Mutu makes us realize how even the most promising careers can be destroyed due to inappropriate choices. In this paper, we will discuss the highs and lows of Mutu's career, from their first years in Romania to

his turbulent time in the Premier League, his legal disputes with former teams and his problems with addiction and doping.

3.1. Adrian Mutu's Career

Adrian Mutu is often mentioned in the top lists of famous footballers from Romania. He was a skilled striker, with a strong technical sense and the power to change the fate of an event in a quick time. The career of the former Romanian professional footballer Adrian Mutu was characterized by numerous controversies, but also by impressive successes. We also learn from *Mighty Tips Romania* that this former player was part of the offers of many online betting houses. Many bettors have chosen to place tickets on this player over time. Even now when he is a coach, football fans use to bet on the team he is coaching keeping in mind his ability to lead a team. Some of his career highlights are listed below:

- Mutu started his professional career at Argeş Pitesti in Romania in 1996;
- In 1998 he moved to Dinamo Bucharest where he was noted as an extremely good footballer;
- Mutu joined Inter Milan in 2000 and was later loaned to Verona and Parma;
- Mutu was purchased by Chelsea in 2003 for an estimated £15.8 million. In his first three games for the team, he scored four goals and became one of the best players;
- Mutu tested positive for cocaine in 2004 and his Chelsea career ended abruptly. The team sacked him and handed him a seven-month ban;
- Mutu and Chelsea then engaged in a court battle over his sacking, which

resulted in him being ordered to pay the team £14.5m damage;

- In 2005, Mutu resumed his football career and played for Juventus despite suspension and legal problems;
- In 2010, Mutu received a nine-month ban after failing another drug test.
- During 2006-2011 he played at Fiorentina; In the period 2011-2012 he was part of the Cesena team;
- 2012-2014 was the period he spent at Ajaccio; in 2014 he returned to Romania and played for Petrolul Ploieşti;
- 2015 he played at Pune City;
- 2016 played at ASA Târgu Mureş;
- In 2018, he quit professional football and became a manager and then a coach.

Championship titles at top clubs have defined the impressive path of Adrian Mutu's achievements in the world of football. From the triumph in the Romanian Championship with Dinamo Bucharest to the remarkable successes in Serie A with Fiorentina, he has demonstrated a unique ability to contribute to winning titles and trophies.

Notable performances at the European level have cemented Adrian Mutu's reputation as an elite player. During his time at Chelsea, his appearances in the Champions League were marked by spectacular goals and decisive assists, helping to strengthen the team's prestige in European competitions.

His contribution to the national teams was an essential chapter of his career. Making his mark with crucial goals and outstanding performances, he was a visionary leader at European Championships and World Cups. The notable statistics reflect his profound influence on national performances and bringing glory to Romanian football.

During these international competitions, Adrian Mutu confirmed his legendary status, and his contributions were essential for the evolution of the national team. With a strategic vision and indisputable talent, he was the engine of Romania's successes on the international stage, becoming a symbol of dedication and performance.

3.2. Controversies and challenges

In 2003, Adrian Mutu was transferred by Chelsea London, a team that paid Parma the sum of 19 million euros. Bringing Mutu to "Stamford Bridge" was one of the first transfers made in the Abramovich era. The Romanian striker had a brilliant debut under Ranieri's command. Mutu managed to score the winning goal for the Londoners in his very debut match against Leicester, 2-1. After a few months, Ranieri was sacked and replaced by Jose Mourinho, who had been warned by the Italian coach about Mutu. A few weeks after the appointment of the Portuguese, Adrian Mutu tested positive for sibutramine in an anti-doping test. Following this result, the Romanian was fired from Chelsea. The English asked Mutu for damages of 17 million euros, winning all the lawsuits against him. Moreover, the Romanian striker was suspended for one year from his sporting life.

He failed a second drug test in 2010 and was suspended from football for nine months.

The cocaine scandal and the suspension constituted a difficult period in Adrian Mutu's career. Chelsea's positive cocaine test sparked controversy and led to a suspension. This challenge called into

question his behaviour and the harshness with which such incidents are handled.

The impact on Adrian Mutu's career and reputation was substantial. The suspension marked a tumultuous period, affecting transfers and contractual relations.

In 2018, he announced his retirement from professional football. Throughout his career, he played for different teams. Mutu continues to enjoy popularity in Romania, although he has a long history of disciplinary difficulties. He was one of the best Romanian athletes of his generation and played 77 times for the national team, contributing 35 goals.

3.3. Adrian Mutu's Current Career

After ending his career as a professional footballer in 2018, Adrian Mutu started a career in coaching. In 2019, he was appointed head coach of the football team of the University of Craiova, from the First League in Romania.

He managed to bring the team to second place in the ranking in the 2019-2020 season, and in the following season, they reached the third preliminary round of the Europa League. In April 2021, Mutu was dismissed from Craiova University after a series of poor results. In August 2021, he was appointed head coach of United Arab Emirates football team Al Wahda FC. Currently, Adrian Mutu is a coach at the Rapid Bucharest team.

However, Adrian Mutu took responsibility, highlighting the fact that even successful people face personal challenges.

In his post-career, Adrian Mutu made a notable transition to the non-player role. His involvement in various aspects of football, including coaching and

managerial roles, underlined his desire to contribute to the development and promotion of the sport. He has shown that his experience can bring significant value off the field of play.

Continued involvement in football after retirement has cemented Adrian Mutu's position as a respected figure in the football community. His roles in sports organizations and engagements in educational projects showed not only his dedication to football but also his commitment to nurturing the future of the sport and the younger generations of footballers.

In conclusion, the life of Adrian Mutu, with moments of glory and challenges, which upset even the best online sports betting houses, illustrates the complexity of the world of football. His remarkable transition after retirement shows his dedication to the evolution of the sport.

4. Conclusions

There are many discussions regarding the ethics of steroid use, both sides of the barricade having arguments. Those who support doping argue that in performance sports where phenomenal amounts are at stake, athletes should be allowed to reach their absolute limits, no matter by what means, thus allowing an athlete to compete on an equal footing with others whom they are endowed "from nature". There is also the argument that a doped athlete can offer the public a much better show than a non-doped one.

The researchers are in completely agree with the argument that doping is not in the spirit of sport and can endanger the health of athletes. It's not fair play to let doping go free, even if many athletes might be doing it. It would be unfair to

those who want to compete fairly and could make them vulnerable to doping themselves just to keep up with others. Additionally, allowing doping would not ensure an equal competitive environment.

Regardless of which side of the barricade you are on, the laws at the moment say that doping is prohibited, laws that, if you break them, there is a very high chance that you will suffer the consequences.

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