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Individual and contextual factors in ethical decision making: A case study of the most significant doping scandal in Canadian university sports history

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ABSTRACT

This case study is written for instructors of sport management courses focused on ethics and integrity-related issues in team environments. The case highlights the real world example of the University of Waterloo Warriors varsity football that, in 2010, experienced the most significant doping scandal in Canadian university sports history, with a total of nine anti-doping rule violations asserted through the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport. This case study also incorporates the findings of an independent review of the Waterloo football program in relation to the use of banned substances, and includes first-hand accounts from Bob Copeland who was the acting director of athletics. These findings are then interpreted in the context of relevant theory related to performance enhancing drugs (PEDs) use. Along with the findings of this review, which included interviews with athletes, coaches, and administrators, the case study provides important insights into ethical decision making processes and leadership structures in a team sport environment. Particular emphasis is placed on the role that individual cognitive antecedents and contextual organizational factors (i.e., policies, leadership, ethical climate, and infrastructure) play in ethical decision-making processes.

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Teaching note

The use of performance enhancing drugs continues to be an ethical concern in North American collegiate sporting environments (Yusko, Buckman, White, & Pandina, 2008). The non-medical use of anabolic steroids has been shown to be associated with student-level characteristics including being male and participating in intercollegiate athletics (McCabe, Browner, West, & Nelson, 2007). This case study presents the story of a highly publicized doping scandal through the lens of an acting director of athletics. The aim of this case study is to challenge students to think critically about the importance of creating ethical team and organizational cultures. Students will engage relevant theory to offer explanations of the incident, as well as use theory to develop effective interventions and preventative measures that can be applied to team sports environments. The theoretical explanations offered in this case study are combined with the results of the independent review of the incident, which included interviews with coaches, athletes, support staff, administrators, and subject matter

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experts. After completing this case study, it is expected that students will have a better understanding of the multifaceted and complex nature of the problem of banned PEDs use among elite, university-level athletes.

1. Case synopsis

The University of Waterloo varsity football team was suspended for the entire 2011 season after eight players were found to be using banned performing enhancing drugs. An independent review was undertaken and the findings of this review offered important insights into how the culture of the sport, attitudes of players, and the policy environment may have contributed to this situation. This case provides an opportunity to examine why these behaviors may have occurred, and how they might be influenced in the future, through the application of organizational behavior theories.

2. Assignments and class discussion

This case incorporates scholarly research and several important theories that instructors can introduce to contextualize class discussion, and help students critically examine the decisions made by some student-athletes on the University of Waterloo football team to use banned PEDs. The independent review ([Appendix A](#)) also provides important context for this critical inquiry and discussion through interviews with players on the football team as well as coaches, support staff, and administrators. Instructors are encouraged to have their students read the entirety of the independent review to inform the discussion and assignments offered in this case study. Moreover, students should be encouraged to critically examine the recommendations of the independent review through their understanding and application of relevant scholarly research.

The overall pedagogical objectives are to encourage students to critically examine the interrelationship between both cognitive and contextual factors as they may influence a student-athlete's propensity to use banned PEDs. It is also important for students to acknowledge any limitations to these approaches as predictors of behavior, and to consider other research in the literature related to deviant behavior and ethical decision making. Students should come to better understand ethical principles (e.g., fairness, justice) and the complexity and nuances of managing ethical issues in team sports environments. From this critical examination, students should be equipped to strategically analyze the policy environments in other team sports contexts and offer recommendations to reduce high risk behaviors through appropriate interventions.

The complexity of issues in this case is most appropriate for students in senior level sport management courses who have completed introductory courses in organizational behavior and/or sports ethics. The case encourages small group discussion and reflection that can be facilitated by an instructor. The exercises can be completed individually or in small groups and instructors are encouraged to introduce other organizational behavior constructs that may assist students in developing a more complete understanding of the issues presented in this case. This case can be examined within an organizational behavior or strategic management course in sport.

2.1. Organizational behavior or strategic management courses

After successfully completing this case, students will be able to:

- (1) Identify and discuss how contextual factors (e.g., policy, leadership structures, and education) influence banned PEDs use by student-athletes in high performance team environments.
- (2) Identify and articulate how different individual factors (i.e., cognitive processes) may play a role in ethical decision making, including the decision to take banned PEDs.
- (3) Recommend policy, leadership, and educational structures informed by ethical principles, and which may limit or modify the propensity of student-athletes to take banned PEDs.
- (4) Identify and discuss how some student-athletes may rationalize the use of banned PEDs.
- (5) Understand the management implications of how sound organizational policies can foster an ethical, values-based culture.

Instructors can use this case to discuss how the use of banned PEDs may be influenced by individual cognitive factors such as moral awareness, moral judgment, and moral disengagement together with contextual organizational factors, including the policy environment, leadership structures, and educational programs. Rather than considering these factors in isolation, it is important for instructors to help students critically examine the interrelationship between cognitive and contextual factors in influencing a student-athlete's decision to use banned PEDs. As suggested by [Smith et al. \(2010\)](#), "an improved understanding of the contextual pressures and factors that influence athletes' and players attitudes to drugs in sports will be pivotal to understanding how drug policy interventions may modify players' propensities to take drugs" ([Smith et al., 2010](#), p. 182).

According to [Bovard \(2008, p. 364\)](#), "education alone is incompletely effective in changing behaviors." Therefore, education must be combined with other interventions including drug testing programs, penalties for illegal drug use, leadership structures, and policies that foster an ethical team culture. The role of each of these factors can be discussed in reference to the Waterloo football doping case, as well as how these contextual factors can be managed to reduce the

probability of banned PEDs use in the future across high performance team environments. The following questions can be used to guide a discussion of this case for an organizational behavior course in sport management.

- (1) The Waterloo football team was characterized by a hierarchical leadership structure, which is typical of many team environments in sport. Discuss the effectiveness of hierarchical leadership structures as they relate to the reporting of doping issues within a team environment.
- (2) What is the role of policy as it relates to developing an ethical team culture? What are some specific policy measures that might facilitate a more ethical team culture, and what are the limitations of policy in this regard?
- (3) Describe and critique the concepts of moral awareness, judgment, and disengagement as they relate to an athlete's decision to take banned PEDs.
- (4) Why is it important for administrators to understand cognitive processes as they relate to behavioral ethics outcomes in sport?
- (5) Discuss how policy and education can be used as tools to influence moral awareness and moral judgment related to a student-athlete's decision to take banned PEDs.
- (6) Discuss how athletes come to rationalize their decision to use PEDs.
- (7) There appeared to be tacit approval for PEDs use amongst some of the football players on the Waterloo team. Some of the players who were interviewed characterized banned PEDs use by others as being a personal, individual decision. Specifically, the authors of the independent review indicated "some comments even from players not using PEDs support the notion that the culture anticipates the use of banned substances to be a matter of personal choice" (Appendix A, p. 3). How can reference group opinions and peer approval regarding the use of PEDs be modified through policy, education, and peer leadership within a team environment?
- (8) Students could be asked to discuss the efficacy of threat appraisal as a deterrent in the case of the Waterloo football team. For programs where drug testing is negligible or non-existent, students could be asked to discuss the role and relationship of other inputs that influence a student-athlete's attitudes and behaviors towards PEDs. For example, Donovan, Egger, Kapernick, and Mendoza (2002) suggest six inputs including threat appraisal, incentive appraisal, reference group opinions, personal morality, and personality factors. It may be helpful for students to reference the final report of the task force on the use of performance enhancing drugs in football (Appendix B) in discussing this question. This report provides context for the Waterloo football doping issue as it relates to penalties for using banned PEDs, and the frequency of drug testing (both of which relate to the concept of threat assessment).

Sample assignments for this course might include:

- (1) Students could be asked to write specific policies and ethical principles designed to help facilitate an ethical culture in a team sports environment. For example, what policies might help facilitate a supportive environment for all players on the team to raise concerns about suspected PEDs use?
- (2) Students could be asked to develop an inventory of organizations that promote integrity, ethics, and values in sport (e.g., truesport.org). From this inventory, students could be asked to select one of these organizations and make a presentation to the class about the specific messages, strategies, and programs promoted by the organization.
- (3) Leadership is an important component in organizational behavior, as well as a construct that was examined in this case. Students could be asked to complete a two-part assignment as follows: (1) Provide a literature review of organizational behavior theory related to leadership concepts, with emphasis on the role and relationship of coaches and team captains; (2) Develop an organizational structure for the leadership of a team sport, with clearly defined roles and expectations of coaches and team captains. For example, this might include criteria for selecting captains, communication structures (between coaches and captains, and between captains and players), and accountability frameworks for players on the team.
- (4) Students could be asked to undertake an internet search of team suspensions in intercollegiate sport and to lead a class discussion or write an essay on the factors that led to the suspension. This discussion or essay should also incorporate the scholarly literature and theoretical constructs introduced in this teaching case.
- (5) Player orientations and educational programs are commonplace in team sports, yet many ethical issues persist. One reason may be that education programs focussed solely on deterrence or health consequences (in the case of PEDs use) have been shown to play a limited role in influencing behavior. Students could be asked to develop a peer-to-peer education program focused on moral awareness, and moral judgment.

3. Teaching points

We have suggested a number of possible activities and assignments for students to complete. Instructors are encouraged to first discuss the case through a selection of the discussion questions provided in advance of the recommended assignments. It is not necessary to have students complete all assignments or pose all discussion questions related to this case. The manner in which this case study is facilitated is up to the discretion of the instructor. Instructors may wish to introduce other discussion questions or assignments that incorporate other organizational behavior theories that apply to this case.

Appendix A

Review of the University of Waterloo Football Program in Relation to the Use of Banned Substances (August 18, 2010). Available online: <http://uwaterloo.ca/provost/sites/ca.provost/files/uploads/files/UW-Football-Program-in-Relation-to-the-Use-of-Banned-Substances-Report-August-2010.pdf>.

Appendix B

Task Force on the Use of Performance Enhancing Drugs in Football. Final Report (June 28, 2011). Available online: <http://www.cces.ca/files/pdfs/CCES-TaskForceFootballFinalReport-E-WEB.pdf>.

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