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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 performance 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

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