



Research paper

Doping control, providing whereabouts and the importance of privacy for elite athletes

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ABSTRACT

Background: To improve anti-doping efforts in sports, the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) introduced the World Anti-Doping Program, in which (among others) regulations for providing athletes' whereabouts are described. Because the effectiveness and efficiency of this system depends on the co-operation and compliance of athletes, the perspective of elite athletes is important. This paper answers the following research questions: What is the perspective of Dutch elite athletes on the current whereabouts system in general and how important is their privacy in providing whereabouts in particular? In addition, this study explores how far the whereabouts system can be developed in the future. Are athletes willing to accept greater invasions of their privacy in order to reduce administrative effort and whereabouts failures?

Method: A structured questionnaire was completed by 129 Dutch elite athletes registered in the national and/or international testing pool.

Results: The results of this study indicate widespread dissatisfaction with the whereabouts system. Most respondents support anti-doping testing in general, but many athletes feel that WADA's whereabouts system is unacceptable in several respects. In terms of physical privacy, there was a great dissatisfaction. Nearly half of the athletes felt that the '1-hour time slot' limits their freedom, but on the other hand, most athletes disagreed with the statement that the distinction between their sport and private life is disturbed. For almost one in three respondents, the whereabouts system has a negative influence on the pleasure they experience in being an elite athlete. In terms of informational privacy, almost all athletes had confidence in the confidential treatment of their whereabouts information.

Almost all athletes would accept giving their phone number to Doping Control Officials, but only half of the athletes would accept sharing their location on their mobile phone. Furthermore, almost two in ten of the athletes would accept wearing a permanent wrist or ankle bracelet or accept being implanted with a GPS chip in order to facilitate future anti-doping testing.

Conclusion: The current whereabouts system needs to be improved in order to increase athletes' satisfaction with the anti-doping rules. The athletes themselves need to be engaged in this process. The results of this study indicate that a majority of the athletes are not likely to accept a greater violation of their privacy than the current whereabouts regulations already entail.

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Introduction

For a long time in the past, doping tests were unsystematic and not very reliable, and consequently they were considered merely symbolic (Dimeo, 2007; Houlihan, 2004; Overbye & Wagner, 2013a). In order to improve this situation, WADA was established in 1999, "the aim of which was to develop, coordinate, and harmonize anti-doping policy and procedures on a worldwide basis" (Hanstad, Skille, & Loland, 2010; Hanstad, Skille, & Thurston, 2009,

p. 31; Wagner, 2009). Today, WADA strives to have a testing policy that ensures that athletes can be controlled at any time and at any place. Doping Control Officials must know where the athletes are in order to carry out random, unannounced, out-of-competition tests in addition to regular in-competition tests on the day of an athletic event. Therefore, in 2003, WADA introduced the World Anti-Doping Program, in which regulations for providing whereabouts were described (Hanstad, Smith, & Waddington, 2008; WADA, 2008).

Since the revised World Anti-Doping Code became effective in 2009, athletes have had to provide much more detailed information about their whereabouts. Athletes are required to specify one specific 60-min time slot for each day, during which they will be available at a specified location for testing (WADA, 2009a).

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For every day in the forthcoming quarter, these athletes have to identify where they will sleep, train, and compete in order to be located for out-of-competition drug testing at any time during those three months (cf. Dikic, Markovic, & McNamee, 2011). Athletes can also be tested without notice at other moments of the day, but at those times they cannot be charged with a whereabouts failure (Waddington, 2010, p. 257). If athletes fail on three occasions to provide their whereabouts (which can be any combination of missed tests and failures to file appropriate whereabouts information) within a period of eighteen months, the athletes can be suspended from competition (WADA, 2009b).

Because the success and credibility of the doping policy is partly dependent on the co-operation and compliance of athletes, it is important to understand the perspective of athletes on the whereabouts system (Alaranta et al., 2006; Bloodworth & McNamee, 2010; Dunn, Thomas, Swift, Burns, & Mattick, 2010; Sas-Nowosielski & Swiatkowska, 2007; Striegel, Vollkommer, & Dickhuth, 2002; Wagner & Hanstad, 2011). Moreover, the anti-doping system is likely to be more effective if it has the support of athletes (Hanstad et al., 2009; Houlihan, 2009, in: Waddington, 2010). According to Houlihan (2009, in: Waddington, 2010), athletes will be more effectively motivated to comply with an anti-doping program if there is a perception by those subject to the regulations that those regulations are reasonable, that they are reasonably implemented and that they are enforced fairly.

In recent years, several systematic studies on elite athletes' perspective on the whereabouts system were performed. Hanstad et al. (2009) studied the perspectives of Norwegian elite athletes using a structured questionnaire that was conducted in 2006. In addition, in 2007, the British Athletes Commission (2007; in: Waddington, 2010) studied the perspectives of British elite athletes on WADA's whereabouts system. Although most athletes defended the necessity of doping controls, these studies indicated an outspoken dissatisfaction with the system of whereabouts in general.

These studies were published before the revised whereabouts system came into effect in 2009. According to Waddington (2010), because this revised whereabouts system places even more obligations on the athlete, future studies could reveal even higher levels of hostility by athletes towards the whereabouts system. In a more recent study with Danish elite athletes, Overbye and Wagner (2013a) showed ambivalent perceptions about the whereabouts system. On the one hand, there was a high degree of acceptance of the whereabouts system, as a 'necessary evil'. On the other hand, athletes indicated that the system interfered negatively in their everyday life and the joy of being an athlete decreased. The trust in the whereabouts system, especially how it operated in other countries, was remarkably low.

The current whereabouts system clearly constitutes (potential) invasions of the privacy of athletes, which, according to Schneider and Butcher (2001), could only be warranted by the need to protect others from serious harm. The question is therefore whether such invasions of the privacy of athletes can be justified and whether these justifications are accepted by athletes themselves. How do athletes perceive the whereabouts system, how does it affect their own interpretation of privacy, and how far are they willing to go with new technology to monitor their whereabouts?

Methods

Procedure and participants

Perhaps surprisingly, the number of athletes within a country that are required to share their whereabouts' information with anti-doping organizations is not exactly known. Athletes can be a member of the Registered Testing Pool of the National Anti-Doping

Table 1

Background information of athletes that were approached by email ($n=888$) and respondents with a whereabouts requirement ($n=129$).

	Athletes that were approached by email ($n=888$)	Respondents with whereabouts requirement ($n=129$)
<i>Gender</i>		
Male	441 (50%)	53 (41%)
Female	445 (50%)	76 (59%)
<i>Age</i>		
<20 years	Unknown	11 (9%)
20–30 years		86 (67%)
≥30 years		32 (25%)
<i>Sports</i>		
Olympic/paralympic	656 (74%)	113 (88%)
Other	232 (26%)	16 (12%)
Team	486 (55%)	43 (33%)
Individual	402 (45%)	85 (66%)
Unknown		1 (1%)
<i>Level</i>		
Top-8	610 (69%)	100 (78%)
Other	278 (31%)	29 (22%)

Organization, of their International Federation, and/or (at certain times) of a major event organizer such as the International Olympic Committee around the Olympic Games period. There is no central institution that monitors these requirements.

In order to create a representative sample of Dutch athletes with a whereabouts requirement, we decided to approach all Dutch elite athletes who were likely to have a whereabouts requirement personally by This was done in two separate mailings in order to accommodate for the different event calendars of different sports. Those who did not go to the London Olympic or Paralympic games were emailed in July 2012 (with a reminder sent in August); those who did were emailed in October 2012 (with a reminder in November). In total, 888 athletes were approached. At that time, 452 Dutch athletes had a whereabouts requirement with the official National Anti-Doping Authority of the Netherlands. It was estimated that a total of 500 Dutch athletes had a whereabouts requirement at some organization at that time.

The total number of respondents was 157 (out of 888 approached), of which 129 had a whereabouts requirement (out of an estimated 500). The estimated response rate of our respondents is thus 26%. These represented 32 sports modalities and one hundred of these respondents were so-called 'A-status' athletes, which means that they perform at the top-8 level of the world in their respective specialism. Background information of the respondents and of the total group of approached athletes is given in Table 1. Slight statistical differences were found in sports characteristics and level between the approached and respondent groups.

Questionnaire

A questionnaire was designed to gather data on athletes' opinions about the whereabouts system in general and the importance of privacy in providing whereabouts in particular. The questionnaire was partly based on the questionnaire used previously by Hanstad et al. (2009). Opinions were assessed using a 5-point Likert scale (strongly disagree, slightly disagree, neutral, slightly agree, strongly agree; or never, sometimes, regularly, often, always). Open-ended questions allowed respondents to add qualitative comments to their responses.

Data analysis

Findings are presented in terms of descriptive statistics. For each Likert scale response, the percentage of athletes agreeing or

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