

CHAPTER EIGHT

ROWING AT THE AIS

INTRODUCTION

8.1 Rowing was introduced to the AIS in Canberra in 1985, with the first rowing scholarship holders arriving at the end of April that year. Mr Reinhold Batschi was appointed as head coach. The aim of the AIS Rowing Program is:

to develop rowers to Olympic medal standard by offering a superior training environment to the elite rowers of the nation, and also through coach education and the Apprentice Coach Scheme to improve the level of Australian coaching talent.¹

8.2 Some indication of the general level of drug use by rowers is given by Table 8.1 which summarises data from the Survey of Drug Abuse in Australian Sport published in December 1982 by the Australian Sports Medicine Federation.

TABLE 8.1
USE OF DRUGS BY ROWERS
(Based on 133 respondents)

| Drug | Percentage using it | Survey page |
|-------------------------|---------------------|-------------|
| Vitamins | 68.4 | 77 |
| Anti-inflammatory drugs | 18.0 | 86 |
| Analgesics | 15.0 | 96 |
| Bronchodilating drugs | 25.6 | 108 |
| Diuretics | 6.8 | 118 |
| Anabolic steroids | 3.0 | 128 |
| Stimulants | 1.5 | 138 |
| Sedatives | 9.8 | 148 |

8.3 The Survey also found that 30.8 per cent of rowers knew other Australian competitors taking drugs to improve their performance and that 0.8 per cent of the sample intended taking steroids in the future, while 1.5 per cent were going to take stimulants and 3.0 per cent sedatives.²

8.4 The Australian Rowing Council, which has undertaken doping control at national championships since 1982 and has had the longest regular testing program of any sport in Australia,³ felt that the drugs of most concern in rowing are:

1. Anabolic - androgenic steroids in heavyweight rowers.
2. Diuretics in lightweight rowers.⁴

Although the use of stimulants has occasionally been detected during testing at international regattas, this has not involved Australians.⁵

8.5 As mentioned in the earlier part of this report, there has been one death in Australian rowing involving the abuse of diuretics and inappropriate nutrition and dehydration in an attempt to maintain unnatural lightweight status. Dr Webb said that he thought diuretic use would be the biggest problem that rowing has as a sport because, in terms of a rowing race, anabolic steroids are not really beneficial.⁶

8.6 While Dr Webb was able to point to instances of anabolic steroids being used in rowing, he said that:

there is not much point, with anabolic steroids, in having one member of the crew using them and one not.⁷

The Committee does not accept this and believes that anabolic steroids are as likely to be used by individual rowers as by individuals in any other team sport.

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8.7 No specific allegations were made about the use of drugs by rowers at the AIS. However Mrs Gael Martin, in discussing drug usage at the AIS, said that she had heard that anabolic steroids had been used in rowing. She emphasised however that 'That is just hearsay'.⁸ Because it had been informed such a rumour existed, the Committee called Mr Reinhold Batschi to give evidence. In addition to being Head Coach at the AIS, Mr Batschi is the National Coaching Director and Head Rowing Coach of the Australian Rowing Council.⁹

8.8 Mr Batschi made the comment that lightweight rowing is not an Olympic sport¹⁰ so that there would be no problems with diuretics at the AIS. He also mentioned that because rowing was a team event, anyone taking steroids would be quickly identified, because he would be 'behaving differently to the other guys'.¹¹ He said that to the best of his knowledge no rowers under his control would be using diuretics or anabolic steroids.¹²

8.9 Mr Batschi told the Committee that he did not think anabolic steroids would be helpful in rowing.¹³ The Committee accepts that this is true in so far as the event itself is concerned, but notes that the benefits of anabolic steroids may often relate to speedy recovery from training, increased desire for training and even a placebo effect, rather than a direct effect on competition.¹⁴ The Committee also notes that a paper 'Drugs and the Australian Institute of Sport: Guidelines for Staff', which was prepared for consideration at the 7 October 1987 meeting of the AIS Board, stated:

The following sports are considered by the Board to have a higher incidence of drug abuse with anabolic steroids:

- . rowing,
- . field events of track and field
- . water polo, and
- . weightlifting

8.10 Mr Batschi said to the Committee:

I personally have never done my homework on drugs. I refuse to read some of the literature on it. The more you get involved in it, the more you start believing in it, and you get tempted to do it. I have been loyal to my sport for the last 50 years and I just refuse to do it. I have been a professional coach for the last 15 years. I refuse to believe in it. I have proved so many times that it can be done without drugs.¹⁵

8.11 The Committee has noted this ostrich like attitude in some other coaches and staff members of the AIS. It is an attitude which does not seem helpful to the athlete or to the coaches, and which some might deem to be irresponsible. It can be contrasted with the view of Mr Merv Kemp who said to the Committee:

I thought it was part of my job as a coach to be informed about steroids. I could not very well give any advice to the athlete if I was in a position of total ignorance. To that end there are a number of books in the Institute of Sport about anabolic steroids and their use in sport.¹⁶

8.12 As someone having considerable professional responsibilities in rowing at a national level, the Committee would expect Mr Batschi to keep himself informed on all matters affecting his sport and those under his charge. By refusing to keep himself informed about drugs he is putting himself into a position from which he will be unable to offer effective counselling to his athletes, if only because they are likely to be better informed than himself. His attitude is also likely to make him more liable to miss any signs that drugs are being used, as he is unlikely to be sensitive to relevant indications; and it makes him more likely to participate in the inadvertent use of banned drugs - such as over-the-counter decongestants.

8.13 Mr Batschi's stance on this matter is particularly surprising given that a submission from the Australian Rowing Council, an organisation of which he is National Coaching Director, notes that the "Drugs in Sport" was incorporated into the coach and athlete education programme¹⁷ and refers to 'intensive education of coaches and rowers'.¹⁸

8.14 The Committee is of the view that the attitude exhibited by Mr Batschi and his ignorance of performance enhancing drugs are both to be deprecated in someone in his position. The Australian Institute of Sport should take steps to ensure that all its coaches are informed about drug abuse and are provided with the training necessary to enable them to provide effective counselling to their athletes on the use of performance enhancing drugs.

1. AIS Annual Report, 1984-85 p. 46
2. Survey of Drug Abuse in Australian Sport, Australian Sports Medicine Federation, December 1982, pp. 164-159
3. Evidence p. 403
4. Evidence p. 404
5. Evidence p. 404
6. Evidence p. 429
7. Evidence p. 420
8. Evidence p. 575
9. Evidence p. 1227
10. Evidence pp. 1227 and 1229
11. Evidence pp. 1230-1
12. Evidence p. 1232
13. Evidence p. 1227
14. Evidence p. 1354
15. Evidence p. 1228
16. Evidence p. 1182
17. Evidence p. 403
18. Evidence p. 404