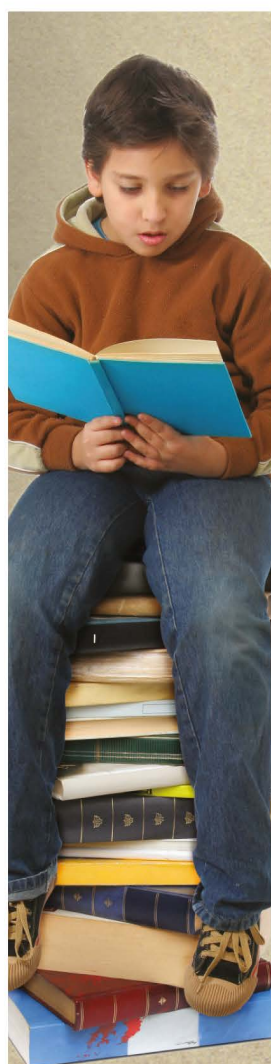


DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT
STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES **B**



Agriculture and Rural Development

Culture and Education

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Regional Development

Transport and Tourism

**RESEARCH FOR CULT
COMMITTEE -INTEGRITY AND
GOOD GOVERNANCE IN
SPORT**

BRIEFING



DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES
POLICY DEPARTMENT B: STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

CULTURE AND EDUCATION

**RESEARCH FOR CULT COMMITTEE -
INTEGRITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN
SPORT**

BRIEFING

This document was requested by the European Parliament's Committee on Culture and Education.

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INTEGRITY AND GOOD GOVERNANCE IN SPORT: FROM FAN WITH A TYPEWRITER TO SCEPTIC WITH A LAPTOP

Executive Summary

The author describes his progress from sports enthusiast to sceptic following repeated experiences, as a journalist, of frauds in high-level sports including athletics and swimming but especially cycling. These frauds involved performance-enhancing drugs and medical procedures and Walsh took the lead in exposing Lance Armstrong as a key beneficiary. The importance of asking the 'obvious question' to get to the truth is emphasised. Walsh stresses the role played by elected representatives and governments in a world where the governing bodies of sports have often proven inadequate to the task of maintaining fair play and good governance. In the case of cycling, and FIFA in football, it was government that initiated definitive action against fraud. Walsh argues that the nominees of governments to the presidency of the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) are the most effective. Walsh hopes, but is not optimistic, that a WADA investigation of doping will lead to the suspension from Olympic competition of any guilty national athletics federations, not just individual athletes. He further argues that doping in sport is a very high value fraud that governments should make a criminal offence. Finally, Walsh explains that he remains an enthusiast for sport – his scepticism is reserved for elite sports and the focus on hosting high profile events and increasing national medal tallies. He feels that this elite focus does not lead to any improvement in sport participation – even the contrary – and that getting people active should be the political priority, especially young people and those in socially-deprived areas where participation is lowest.

Introduction by the Policy Department

Mr Walsh is an award-winning sports journalist with a long track-record in directly addressing issues of fair play and good governance in sport. Most notably, perhaps, he raised difficult questions regarding the career of Lance Armstrong at the height of his fame, when others in the mainstream media and in sports governance were silent. (A story now portrayed in the film 'The Program', directed by Stephen Frears).

He is Chief Sports Writer of the Sunday Times (London) and, as such, a long-standing member of a team that has been at the forefront in exposure of doping issues and of alleged corruption in FIFA. Mr Walsh was invited to prepare a presentation to the Committee based on his significant experience and to give a personal and professional view of how the issues of fair play and good governance could be tackled.

Mr Walsh's original presentation can be viewed online in the Committee on Culture & Education web streaming. Link below, with Mr Walsh's contribution beginning at 16:07:45 - <http://www.europarl.europa.eu/ep-live/en/committees/video?event=20150914-1500-COMMITTEE-CULT>

Introduction

I have been a sports writer for thirty-seven years and I spent fifteen or sixteen of the previous twenty-two years *wanting* to be a sports writer. It is the only thing I ever wanted to do with my life and I do not think that I will ever leave it - I think I will do it as long as I live.

I was a kid who, at the age of ten, lived in a small village in the south-east of Ireland. I woke up about seven o'clock and all I could think about was reading our daily newspaper. I would go across to meet the milkman making his delivery - Jack Fitzgerald was his name - and with the crates of milk he also brought the morning newspapers. He would leave them outside the shop. I could not wait for the shop to open - I would wrestle a newspaper out from the tube, take it from the middle and read the sport pages.

So, a sports journalist is all I ever wanted to be. I started out in this profession as what I would now call a 'fan with a typewriter'. I was a fan of sport who had the privilege of earning a living from it. However, my perspective would change over time and you might wonder why. In a way, the answer is quite simple.

First disappointment with sport

I went to Seoul in 1988 to cover my first Olympics. Ben Johnson against Carl Lewis set up for us the greatest human race in all time. I wanted Ben Johnson to win. He seemed a kind of underdog character. The guy had come from the West-Indies, single mum, settled in Toronto. He was going to beat the big American. And I was on his side. A fan with a typewriter. Maybe two days after that race, a fellow journalist, Doug Gillon from Scotland, knocked on my door at three o'clock in the morning. And John said "Johnson tested positive". That test result changed our perspective on athletics at that time. But you can always find ways of rationalizing it away. Saying 'it was one guy, you know, it's not like that everywhere'. And you carry on.

Unbelievable Irish swimmers and a change of heart

I joined the Sunday Times in April 1996. I had worked for newspapers in Ireland before then. This was my Manchester United, my Real Madrid. The biggest newspaper I would ever work for. The first event they sent me to of significance was the Atlanta Olympics. And how lucky did I feel when one of the heroines of the Atlanta Olympics was a twenty-six year old Irish swimmer? She had been in international swimming for twelve years. Ireland in the entire history of the Olympic Games before that had won only four gold medals in all sports. Now, in the space of a week, Ireland had won a further three. Before that, we used to joke in Ireland that if one of our swimmers did not drown it was good result! Now we had a woman who had won three gold medals in a week. But the difficulty was, when you looked into the history closely, there were good reasons to doubt its integrity. And when I looked at it I saw reasons for not believing, and I did not believe. Three Irish journalists (Tom Humphries and Paul Kimmage were the other two) - all three of us said we cannot believe this. And we were seen as the bad people, of course. However, Michelle Smith would eventually get banned for a doping-related offence. And in my eyes the truth did very much come out in that story. But the story changed my feelings about sport.

Asking the obvious question

Now, if I could tell you a personal story that was hugely influential in my life. It is a story that I would love all of you to adopt in relation to any involvement you have with sport. It is a story that concerns the death of our twelve-year old son, John. He was killed riding his bicycle, hit by a car. As a family, because we have five other kids, we sat down and we decided the way we would deal with this is we would talk about John. We would remember him. We would not be reluctant to discuss all that he meant to us at all times. One of the things I wanted to do as John's dad was to find out things about him that I did not know. Because he really was a sports enthusiast, I went to his football coach, his rugby coach, and his Gaelic football coach. I went to his teachers and one of them told me a gem of a story.

She said that when John was seven or eight, she was reading the nativity play because, if you were growing up in rural Ireland as we were, you went to a Catholic school. And you heard the story of the nativity a couple of weeks before Christmas pretty much every year at that time in your life. So the teacher told the story of Mary and Joseph, including the part where the three wise men bring gifts of gold, frankincense and myrrh. And then, as Ms Toomey the teacher told them, Mary and Joseph went back to where they came from and they lived a very modest life because Joseph was just a humble carpenter and they didn't

have very much. Ms Toomey told me that John put up his hand and asked: "Miss, you said Mary and Joseph didn't have very much. What did they do with the gold and the other gifts that the three wise man brought? And she replied "John, I've been reading this story for thirty-three years, and nobody has ever asked about the gold. The honest answer is I don't know".

I thought when Ms Toomey told me that story: that is the key to journalism. You ask the obvious question, even if you think people are going to laugh at you. Even if it is going to make you the pariah. You ask it. If you do not understand how something is possible, ask! And I decided going forward, that is what I would do. I would ask the obvious question.

Lance Armstrong, the Tour de France

Now I suppose that in journalism I am probably known as the guy who did not believe Lance Armstrong. The guy who tried to tell people that it was not a story they could believe in. And I was inspired by John's question in the pursuit of truth in that story. From your point of view, as Members of the European Parliament, the question you should be asking is: 'If Lance Armstrong was doping from the very beginning, how could it take thirteen years for the truth to come out?'. Because I can say that in 1999, by the second week of Lance Armstrong's first Tour de France, it was perfectly obvious this guy was cheating. There was no great mystery, you did not have to be a super sleuth, you did not have to be a great investigative journalist. You just had to use common sense. Look at it! Ask some obvious questions!

There was a young French guy in the race, nicknamed "Monsieur Propre" as in "Mr Clean". Everybody knew he was against drugs. Everybody knew he did not do drugs. Everybody accepted that. So they gave him a nickname to ridicule him. When he said: people in this race are still doping, especially the top guys, he was bullied. The guy who bullied him most was Lance Armstrong. Why would Lance Armstrong choose to bully a guy who was clearly a non-doper? Moreover, there were lots of other reasons for knowing that Armstrong was not what he said he was. Yet it took thirteen years to be acknowledged. Why?

The answer is: because the people who were the custodians of sport did not act. I do not mean only the world governing body of cycling, although they had a leading role, I mean also television. I mean the journalists. I mean the sponsors. Surely the sponsors and media should not have wanted to put their money into sports which were corrupt, and to build up 'heroes' that corrupted the sport? But, in practice, everybody was looking the other way. They all had their different reasons and mostly their reasons were to do with commercial interest. From the newspapers' point of view Lance Armstrong's success was a good story. On television it improved ratings. Sponsors sold more products and the world governing body got a sport that was growing in popularity and resources. So Lance Armstrong was not properly scrutinized. All those years passed before the truth came out. So what I would say to you, as Members of the European Parliament, is: understand the significance of the Lance Armstrong story.

One stark consequence of that story is that for a period of seven years, 1999 to 2005, there is no winner in the record books of the Tour de France. The last - and only - time that happened before was the Second World War. That is what doping did to the Tour de France. It took away as many years as the Second World War took away.

Remember that, with doping, stopping it is an easy thing to talk about, but it is very difficult to beat this problem in practice. Consider it like a monster whose head you cut off and, no matter how many times you cut off its head, it regrows.

The need for scrutiny and action by elected representatives and governments

You may think that you do not have the power to address this issue. "What can we do? We are just elected representatives, not governors of sport". However, in my view you are the most important people. You are the people who can effect real change. The fact is, it was a government - not the sporting authorities - that took an interest in the drugged-up circus that the Tour had become. People in authority said we have had enough of this - cycling is not policing itself, we need to give them help. The first official investigation of the Tour came from the French Customs and police. They helped show that the Tour had been entirely fraudulent as a sporting epic.

FIFA and other cases of unfair play and misgovernment of sport

This is not just about cycling, of course it is not. For years and years, those of us observing sport felt that with FIFA, something was not right - and that is the least that could be said. If someone were going a bit further they might have said: there is corruption in FIFA. And yet FIFA seemed to be above the law. They are not above the law. We now have a Swiss investigation into corruption in FIFA and a US investigation - suddenly FIFA is talking about serious change. You could say in the metaphorical sense that they have been brought to this at the barrel of a gun. And yes, that is the case.

Making doping a criminal offence and the role of governments

But it takes elected representatives, in my view, to make these kind of decisions. I totally agree with the move to make doping a criminal offence in every country. It should be. The level of fraud can run to tens of millions of pounds. **In no other area of life would we allow people to get away with stealing this amount of money.**

And if I could say something that is, in a way, quite flattering to the governments and politicians. I am a journalist, I cover sport, I cover anti-doping quite a lot. You can see how it works with the President of the World Anti-Doping Agency. The governments get to decide the President one time, the next time it's the IOC. I am much more comfortable every time with the person that the governments nominate. They are much more likely to be strong, to be absolutely ready to "go for it" in relation to anti-doping. They are less likely to be compromised by political considerations - which is ironic, given that you would expect the sporting people to be detached from 'political' considerations. They are not because the commercial imperative is huge.

WADA commission report

There is a really interesting case going on at the moment. The WADA independent commission report is soon going to be available. It is, for the most part, an investigation into the corruption in Russian athletics. Anybody who has studied this case knows the athletes who doped, who won medals, gold medals at the London Olympics and all the world championships over the last number of years. Russia was almost a dominant

country in athletics. They did not do so well this year, because now the heat is on and they cannot really do the things they were doing. However, at the 2013 World Championships, for only the second time ever, they got more gold medals than the US. Since then the investigation has happened. There is an outstanding whistle-blower who has provided evidence the like of which no whistle-blower in sport has ever come up with before. WADA has got a great deal of evidence and it points to the fact that the athletes were being told by their national coaches, by the national anti-doping laboratory, by the national anti-doping agency, that in certain circumstances, if you were good enough and if you were a medal-ranking candidate, cheating was OK.

What should happen in this case is that a message should be sent out to the world making it clear that if a country does this then they can expect to be banned for a certain period of time. The sporting body of the country should be suspended from participation, not just individual athletes. Unfortunately, I do not think that is going to happen. Russia should be suspended. If fair play was operating we'd be saying to Russia: you cannot do this and get away with it.

The current president of WADA has been nominated by the IOC. I am not sure that it is in the IOC's interest not to have Russia at the Rio Olympics next year, so I remain doubtful that Russia will be suspended for the 2016 Games – as it should be.

What is really important: participation in sport

After thirty-seven years as a sports writer I am now the sceptic with a laptop, no longer the fan with the typewriter. But what I have also learned about sport is that it is still beautiful. It is still a tremendous activity. And 'activity' is the word because it does not really matter what the activity is. If kids are doing organised dance they do not necessarily need to be playing organized sport. Any physical activity - trampolining, whatever activity, it does not matter. We need our kids active. And that is one part of the lifestyle we all feel they should have.

On the other hand, there is a myth that we have been sold for years and years and years, and we continue to get it shoved down our throats. And that is that, if we put on the Olympic Games then it will inspire the youth to take up sport. That does not happen. We saw it in every Olympics before London. Participation levels at the country that hosts the Olympics fall after the Olympics.

And I look around at the landscape now and we talk about the two great Italian tennis players who have just been in the final in the US Open, and my only question is - will the fact that two Italian tennis players got to the US Open final, will that mean more kids in Italy playing tennis? Certainly, it will for the next few weeks. But will there be an increase in the facilities, will there be an increase in the number of coaches, will there be an increase in the number of organized competitions to get the kids going? I am not so sure. Because I know that in the UK almost ten billion pounds were spent on hosting the Olympic Games. And I know that the latest numbers on participation levels in the UK are down. And I know that the biggest fall-off in the numbers of people not playing sport is amongst the lower socio-economic groups, the people living in socially deprived areas. So sport now is almost becoming - in terms of playing sport, being active - something for the middle classes and the better off, certainly in the country where I now have my home, the UK.

And still we do not seem to understand that the medal tables are nothing. They are irrelevant to real success in sports policy. Whether the UK finishes ahead of Russia or Russia finishes ahead of America, or both finish ahead of China. How does that impact on the quality of children's lives? Sadly, it is our leaders and politicians who see medal tables as important when they are not.

There are a lot of things going wrong with sport and I do not think that we can sort them all out. I do think we can do far more than we are doing. For that, we need to change the mind-set. The mind-set, for you as elected representatives, should be that you know that what happens at elite level does not really matter. Rather, what happens at grass-roots level is what we all should be obsessed about. And it is a numbers game. We need more people active. And I would love you to take from my little contribution that we need to legislate for the kids who are not having the opportunity to play and participate in sport. Because that is where we are failing. And unless we do something radical, I do not see how we are going to turn it around.

DIRECTORATE-GENERAL FOR INTERNAL POLICIES

POLICY DEPARTMENT **B** STRUCTURAL AND COHESION POLICIES

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