

ADF POSITION ON DRUG TESTING FOR RECREATIONAL DRUG USE IN COMMUNITY SPORTS CLUBS

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PURPOSE: The purpose of this document is to articulate the ADF's position on drug testing for recreational illegal drug use in community sports clubs.¹ This position statement should be understood in the context of the Good Sports Illegal Drug Policy.

BACKGROUND: Several Good Sports clubs have asked ADF staff about drug testing. The South Australian National Football League has announced it will consider drug testing players in community sporting clubs following concerns reported by officials that drug use is widespread in some country league competitions (Drug testing considered, 2016).

Advocates say drug testing would prove whether a player has taken a drug; deter players from using drugs; assist former users to remain drug-free; and reassure parents that the club is doing everything it can to prevent drug use. However, the notion of drug testing individuals in community sports clubs raises a number of complex procedural, legal, technical, financial and social issues.

ADF POSITION:

- i. Sporting clubs can play an important role in preventing harmful drug use by promoting social cohesion, social bonding and healthy activities within a health promoting culture
- ii. Drug testing is not recommended for community based sporting clubs for reasons related to procedural, technical, legal, financial and social concerns
- iii. Sporting clubs should involve all their members in the process of adopting a comprehensive illegal drug policy as developed by Good Sports.

RATIONALE

Procedural issues: Drug testing is a two stage process that involves initial on-site screening via a POCT device (Point of Collection Test) with any positive sample subsequently analysed in a laboratory that (preferably) holds Australian Standards certification (Roche A, 2009). Drug testing requires a bodily sample (breath, urine, blood, saliva or hair) to be analysed for the presence of a specified drug or drugs. Depending on the sampling methodology, testing may be intrusive and raise issues of confidentiality and privacy. Collection of samples and their carriage to the laboratory must be closely controlled to ensure a rigorous and accountable “chain of custody”.

Technical issues

To gain the most reliable results, drug testing must be carried out by a professional service which can ensure the process of collection, storing and testing is subject to the highest standards.

Fallibility: drug testing can provide a ‘false negative’ and a ‘false positive’ result. A false negative fails to identify drug use and a false positive wrongly identifies that drug use has occurred. A device that is not calibrated correctly might produce an incorrect result and use of an over-the-counter medication or a prescribed medication can trigger a positive result (Roche A, 2009).

Equipment: drug testing equipment should be used that conforms to the standard adopted by the US Food and Drug Administration (Roche A, 2009). Equipment that does not meet the FDA standard may produce an unreliable result. Equipment must be calibrated correctly. The National Association of Testing Authorities, Australia, certifies laboratories involved in drug testing as well as calibrating their equipment and devices that are used in measurement and analysis (National Association for Testing Authorities Australia, 2016).

Limited application: a saliva (oral fluid) test can determine whether drug use has occurred within the previous 6-8 hours, whereas a urine test can identify that drug use occurred several weeks earlier, depending on various factors including the specific drug and dosage. The tests do not

indicate the state of intoxication, impairment or frequency of use. They cannot distinguish between experimental, one-off, episodic, regular, or problematic drug use; nor do they discriminate between illicit drug use and use of over-the-counter and prescribed medications (Roche A, 2009).

Substitution: individuals might evade detection by leaving the club, or switching to drugs for which they are not tested, or use of chemical substances that can act as a masking agent. This can expose individuals to harmful effects of the 'substitution' drugs or masking agent (Bright, 2013).

Financial issues

Sports clubs may lack funds for rigorous testing. A standard, single saliva screen which tests for 5 illegal drugs (cannabis, cocaine, amphetamine, MDMA and GHB) can cost between \$60.00-90.00 depending on the quality and integrity of the testing process (ADF Workplace Unit). In some circumstances a confirmatory test in a laboratory may cost \$250.00 (ADF Workplace Unit).

Legal issues

Drug testing might be challenged on grounds of privacy, procedure or methodology unless the sports club has an existing, comprehensive drug test policy that authorises drug testing of members by a competent drug testing service which employs high quality processes and procedures. Otherwise a member who tests positive might challenge the validity of the result, leading to disputation and possibly legal action. (Solutions, 2011)

Sanctions

In the case of a positive drug test the club will likely impose a form of sanction, whether warning, suspension or expulsion. Illicit drug use can be associated with severe personal difficulties. If public disciplinary measures are imposed those difficulties could be exacerbated, leading to continued drug use and/or mental health problems. Punishment might be counterproductive if the club member has low self-esteem, few interests or friends or little support outside the sporting domain (Roche A, 2009).

Social impact

Drug testing may be counterproductive to the club's effort to create a supportive environment for members. Random or targeted drug testing might be seen to demonstrate a lack of trust, undermine relationships, alienate members and create suspicion of the club within the general community.

Alcohol and Drug Foundation Recommendation

All community sporting clubs should implement the Good Sports Illegal Drug Policy process which ensures all members of a club have the opportunity of contributing to developing a comprehensive policy. The process includes club representatives liaising with local services that can assist the club to develop and carry out an effective policy. The most relevant services include medical, law enforcement and health services. The policy includes measures the club can adopt to prevent drug use and how it can respond effectively if and when a breach of the policy occurs.

Works Cited

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ⁱWithout being definitive, the ADF understands a community sports club is a non-profit body that offers all and any person the opportunity to participate in the club by playing sport, helping to organise activities, or administer the club, and though some players and officials may receive payment for their service, the club depends largely on volunteer labour and draws its members from a group of people living in the same geographic area or having a particular characteristic in common.