

The Olympics: Here Come the Steroid Games

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To attribute weighty moral codes to athletes has always been a silly pastime of the judging classes and flesh admiring voyeurs. But sporting bodies, in a manner similar to the clergy, demand something called the level playing field. Fairness and fair play imply that sports people will follow various principles and rules in competition. They will, for instance, do nothing to unravel and disturb this understanding of détente between the supremely talented. We are all gifted on Olympus; may the best athlete behave in accordance with accepted practices. No need for superior sporting machinery, superior equipment, enhanced biceps, steroid-boosted bodies. To do so would upset the balance.

The historical record suggests otherwise. Spectators who barrack for an athlete or a team will not mind the odd tinkering with rules, a streak of sharp practice. The same for those playing the sports. The Fair Play principle, revered and cherished by officials and gatekeepers noisy about equitable performance on pitch and field, has become a ritualised and abused fetish, the comical effigy one salutes at big sporting carnivals even as it is being burned.

Organisations such as the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) exist to defend these principles through drug testing, but they operate unevenly and tyrannically. They are also of questionable effect; in the undergrowth of performance is always the nagging suggestion that many athletes do participate undetected. WADA's own estimate is that anywhere up to 40% of athletes may have taken performance-enhancing substances at the Tokyo Summer Olympics in 2021.

Countries, seeing their sporting figures as extensions of the State and its values, have also been loose with their manipulation of fair play, subverting rules using their athletes as surrogates for national glory. To win gold at the Olympics, for instance, is to win credit with the home audience and favour for politicians and grey officials. All must therefore be done to get the result: doping, meddling, cheating. It's all a matter of degree.

With such standards of hypocrisy at play, it is little wonder that the concept of an Enhanced Games has taken so long to make it to the planning stage. The figures involved should make participants wary, but PayPal cofounder Peter Thiel and its creator Aron D'Souza have expressed a desire to finance drug dabbling and experimentation, featuring heavily doped bipeds performing to the fullest of their juiced abilities. Five events in Australia are planned to feature the body beautiful, and the body potentially ruined: swimming, gymnastics, weightlifting, track and field, and combat.

As the [site](#) hails, "Backed by the world's top venture capitalists, the Enhanced Games is the Olympics of the future. When 44% of athletes already use performance enhancements, it is time to safely celebrate science." The project is adamant in stating, tersely, that, "Sports can be safer without drug testing." That leaves the athletes free to partake in experimentation, where science can be used "for the pursuit of human excellence."

D'Souza, an Australian, London-based lawyerly entrepreneur, knows what appeals. He derides the organisers of the Olympics, the corrupted fat cats who bag huge salaries while most athletes participate for a barely manageable pittance. "The IOC (International Olympic Committee) has effectively been a one-party state running the world of sport for 100 years," [he reasons](#). "And now the opposition party is here. We are ready for a fight." He suggests a profit-sharing model for drug taking participants, with cash incentives for those breaking records.

The games sound like a pharmaceutical free for all, lubricated by venture capital, and it is by no means clear how informed consent will work in this regard. Keen to break records, and keen to avoid being institutionally excoriated and publicly shamed for doing so, is hardly a recipe for sober judgment. This is despite D'Souza's [assertion](#) that athletes are adults with "a right to do with their body what they wish - my body, my choice; your body, your choice." The one-party state becomes substituted by a cadre of investors, doctors and advisors, all keen on getting their results from the bodies on show.

The games proposal, [argue](#) two University of Canberra academics in the often sterile columns of *The Conversation*, "does not set out how the increased risk to athletes exploited for commercial gain will be managed. The games also propose to include events in which the burgeoning elite competitors are young and vulnerable, such as gymnastics and swimming, which may have serious implications for these children and their carers."

Publicity for the events has already seen over 500 registered athletes, along with a sprinkling of Olympians. Canadian bobsledder Christina Smith, who participated in the 2002 Winter games, [is a member](#) of the event's Athlete Commission.

James Magnussen, an Australian swimmer, Olympian, and two-time world champion in the 100m freestyle has made a very public declaration that he will "juice up". And why not? His brain turned mushy after being told that he was the golden boy at the London Olympics in 2012. Australian sporting commentators were convinced that the swimming events he participated in were his, absurdly declaring him victorious in advance of the events. As things turned out, he was silvered and bronzed.

Formerly known as The Missile, Magnussen is keen to spend six months [on a regime](#) to "juice to the gills" in order to compete for A\$1.5 million if he breaks the 50m world record. Things are already starting to sound hazy for the aspirant: "I'm going to need one of those super suits to float me, because if I get unbelievably jacked, then I'll sink."

Some of the critics may sound like spoilsports (well, anti-doping ones), but the relevant dangers are substantial. Are athletes in their right mind in saying yes to such a distorting diet, becoming, effectively taut assets of body and matter for venture capitalism? Given the babbling from Magnussen, distinctly not.

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