



# Playing Dirty

A UCLA LAB IS STUCK WITH AN OLYMPIAN TASK: KEEPING DRUGS OUT OF THE SUMMER GAMES

**F**OR MOST DIE-HARD SPORTS FANS, THE ISSUE OF DRUGS IN THE Olympics begins and ends with Ben Johnson, the Canadian sprinter stripped of his gold medal in 1988 after testing positive for anabolic steroids. But Johnson's drug bust surprised few in the athletic community, where it is widely believed that the vast majority of Olympic athletes have been using banned substances for years. "I hear all the time from athletes that you can't compete internationally unless you use performance-enhancing drugs," says Dr. Robert Voy, former chief medical officer of the United States Olympic Committee. Dr. Charles Yesalis, an expert in anabolic steroids, calls the current drug situation an epidemic.

This month, Dr. Don Catlin, director of the UCLA Olympic Analytical Laboratory in West L.A., will head to Sydney to take on the unenviable task of supervising drug-testing facilities for the Summer Games. Incredibly, the medical team won't be testing for human growth hormone or EPO, two of the

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sports

most commonly abused performance-enhancing drugs. The reason: For years, the International Olympic Committee has refused to invest a cent to develop tests for them.

"If they had put up the money, there would have been a reliable test for EPO a long time ago," says Catlin, who has sought research funds from the IOC for the past 15 years. The committee recently promised the UCLA lab \$250,000, an amount Yesalis dismisses as "chump change—with biochemistry research on a problem of that level, you're talking about spending \$50 million to \$100 million over the next five years."

So why not just fund the research? "I don't think the IOC really wants to find

The International Olympic Committee has refused to fund research to develop tests for two drugs widely abused by Olympic athletes.

an answer to this," says Yesalis. "Positive drug tests hurt business, and sport at the elite level is primarily a business."

Lest one believe that this is only a problem with steroid-popping East German weight lifters, American athletes are believed by many to be some of the worst juicers on the planet.

"In the world scene, we're considered one of the dirty players," says Yesalis.

Despite his long struggles with the IOC, Catlin believes that the committee's research grant and the recent establishment of a World Anti-Doping Agency are both important first steps in curbing the abuse of performance-enhancing drugs at the Olympic level.

"Don Catlin has really dedicated his life to creating a lab that is beyond reproach," says Voy, who believes Catlin is facing an uphill battle. But Catlin doesn't feel completely alone in the fight. "There are some very good people at the IOC who care about sport and want to do the right thing," he says.

Nevertheless, says Yesalis, "the Atlanta Olympics were called 'the growth hormone games' by the athletes." What will the Sydney games be called? Yesalis doesn't even hesitate. "Pick your drug."

—ROBERT ITO

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