**19th November - Sport: Exclusion of Drugs**

My Lords, I thank the noble Lord, Lord Addington, for this timely debate. I also welcome the Minister to the world of acronyms.

When I see the cases in the press about a sport that I love and a sport I participated in, part of me is hugely disappointed. However, as an ex-athlete and a fan, I am also pleased because these issues need to be raised. There have been rumours and speculation, but we cannot act on them; we need cold, hard facts about what is happening in the world of sport, because it has a much greater effect. It affects parents’ choices about which sports they allow their children to do. It affects participation, as the noble Lord, Lord Addington, said. It affects how people view activity. This also has a massive impact on the UK.

Personally, I have a strong view on athletes who are caught cheating. If I had a preference I would ban them from sport for life. I recognise that that is extremely difficult to do, but it is a huge privilege to compete for your country in your sport. A certain responsibility has to go with that. As an athlete, I was on the Whereabouts programme and I was tested. As a young female athlete, providing a sample is hugely daunting. The first time I was called into a test, I did not particularly know what I was about to do. You have to be stripped from your bra to your knees and you have someone watch you give a sample. That is part of your job as an athlete and part of your responsibility. I willingly did it because I really believe that sport at this level has to be clean.

I argued consistently over the years that any lottery-funded athlete should be part of the programme. Although in the early years of lottery funding Paralympic athletes were not on the programme, I am delighted that they now are. One of the misconceptions about disabled athletes is that there is a different list of testing. It is exactly the same. Very few disabled athletes take medication for their condition, but we are subject to exactly the same tests as everyone else.

I declare an interest in anti-doping. I sat on the first UCI investigation into Lance Armstrong, which seemed like a good idea at the time but it was incredibly ill fated. As a fan of cycling, I watched each of Armstrong’s wins. I was amazed. I wore his yellow band, until, at the end of 2004, I was told to take it off by someone I trust in sport. The UCI announced in October 2012 that it would establish a fully independent external commission to investigate the allegations from USADA, the US Anti-Doping Agency. John Coates, the president of the Court of Arbitration for Sport and a senior member of the IOC was asked to set up this commission. I was joined by Sir Philip Otton and Australian lawyer Malcolm Holmes. The plan was that we would have a team of forensic accountants and medical experts who would advise the commission. We were due to hold a two-week hearing. In the end it was a single day, because the UCI, even though it funded it and spent a significant amount of money, refused to hand over a single piece of paper. It quickly became obvious that it had no intention of being involved in the process. Brian Cookson, who stood as president on the platform of sorting out the sport, has since carried out a further investigation.

However, it is not just the athletes taking drugs, but the corruption and everything that goes with it. It is the bribery and the coercion. I have a certain degree of sympathy for the Russian athletes. It would not have been a choice for them; it would have been, “Do this or else”. I also did an investigation for British Athletics when Dwain Chambers came back into the sport after serving a ban period. It was a very messy period. Here was a young man who had lots of talent and who had made some really poor choices. Again, I had a huge amount of sympathy for him, but a number of people in the UK knew that he was going into a destructive and suspected environment, but they did not stop him. There was nothing we could do about that.

Not only do I take a tough stance about athletes; it is also about coaches and associated personnel, because rarely do athletes do this on their own. Taking performance-enhancing drugs is relatively easy; they are quite easy to obtain. However, it is understanding the microdosing and how to avoid detection that you need a huge amount of expertise on. It is quite expensive as well.

I was disappointed when the British Olympic Association was forced to change its rule. The BOA stood up very strongly in the world and said, “We do not want to take anyone who served a banned period to the Olympics”, but because of international rules it had to change that. I was disappointed when it went from a four-year ban to a two-year ban—luckily it is going back the other way—because we have to send out this really strong deterrent that taking performance-enhancing drugs in sport is just not the right thing to do.

We found out about the case of BALCO because there was a falling out between Victor Conte—the architect of the drugs—and one of the coaches, Trevor Graham. He coached Marion Jones and Tim Montgomery and was the one who sent the syringe to WADA, which enabled them to develop the tests. We cannot forget that Marion Jones never failed a drugs test. There are other athletes in the world who have and it has been covered up by their federation. This has to stop. We cannot overestimate the challenge that the noble Lord, Lord Coe, is going through, but I believe that you have to be on the inside. There have been rumours around the Russian athletes for a number of years, but you need to have the facts of who has taken drugs.

Just recently, a 17 year-old Chinese athlete, Qing Wenyi, died at a training camp. They believe that that was from state-sponsored drug taking. She will be one of many athletes who we will never hear about, who have no choice about this, but sport is their way to a better life. If it is a choice between taking drugs and potentially ending up in prison, the athletes will make the choice in front of them.

In Paralympic sport this is not such an issue, although this week a Russian athlete, Alexander Zverev, has been banned for a nine-month period for taking cannabinoids. It is very expensive to successfully dope competitors involved in Paralympic sport, and Paralympic sport does not have the money to do that. However, as more money moves into Paralympic sport, that may become more of an issue. The issue in Paralympic sport is around cheating classification. The difficulty is that athletes are divided into different classes based on their level of impairment. Athletes will fall one side of the line or the other, and it is not as clear cut as just breaking the rules.

On 12 October this year, as reported in *Inside the Games*, a web-based newsletter, the IPC issued a statement about what it calls intentional manipulation and said that it, “is in grave danger of undermining the credibility”, of Paralympic swimming. This statement refers just to swimming but I am sure there are issues in other sports. An email seen by *Inside the Games*, sent from the IPC chief executive Xavier Gonzalez to national Paralympic committee and national federation presidents, outlines the threat posed by intentional manipulation. The email entitled, “Athlete/Support Personnel Conduct during IPC Swimming Classification” states that this is a “serious issue”. The email continues,

“we believe we have witnessed, and have heard of, a number of cases of alleged intentional misrepresentation during the classification evaluation process of athletes”.

This has a massive effect on the sport but did not warrant front page news or much reporting in the sports press. The email continues:

“Wherever IM takes place it strikes at the heart of fair play, threatens the concept of excellence in Para-sport, and goes against the requirements of the IPC Classification Code and the classification rules of IPC Swimming”.

However, there is no penalty. If an athlete gets moved, nothing happens to the country or to the athlete. For me that has serious implications for the future of paralympic sport because some countries will seek to move athletes into a classification which will better aid their performance. I believe that it is a responsibility of sport in the UK to ensure that athletes are correctly classified. We only have to look back to the 2000 Paralympics, when the Spanish basketball team pretended to have learning disabilities. It turned out that most of them were journalists. They cheated the classification with the result that a group of learning disabled athletes got thrown out of the sport. That has a huge impact on the wider sport and is very disappointing.

In this country we have UKAD, which is under the threat of a funding cut. We should ensure that it receives greater support. The noble Lord, Lord Lord Moynihan, was right to talk about WADA’s independence. At the moment it is too closely tied up and it is impossible to find a way through. We have to have an independent body. So my question to the Minister is: can the Government guarantee that appropriate funding will be made available to UKAD to ensure that it is able to do the necessary testing? Will Her Majesty’s Government consider criminalising the use of performance enhancing drugs?

I also believe strongly that athletes should be rehabilitated. We should not just penalise them. But now is the time when we have to take a much tougher stance or this will carry on and in another year, five years or 10 years we will have more front page headlines on this issue and it will never end.