

Project Barker

Dr. Jamie Barker, Loughborough University, School of Sport Exercise and Health Science

[The role of athlete support personnel in promoting clean sport behaviours and cultures within international cerebral palsy football.](#)

A significant threat to fair competition in para sport is doping, with increases in the number of adverse findings from athlete samples at Paralympic Games (Pereira et al., 2017). The role of an athlete's entourage, and para sport culture are critical to clean sport behaviours. One global para-sport where an understanding of, and education around clean sport is a key priority, is that of Cerebral Palsy (CP) Football (International Federation of Cerebral Palsy Football; IFCPF). Our project explores the role of athlete support personnel in promoting clean sport behaviours and cultures within international CP football teams.

No research has explored athlete support personnel perspectives and team cultures towards, and actions in promoting clean sport within para-sport. Our novel, overarching research objective is to explore clean sport culture(s) within CP football. We aim to (1) explore athlete perspectives of how athlete support personnel influence clean sport behaviours and doping vulnerability in CP footballers. (2) Ascertain the clean sport perspectives and behaviours of CP football athlete support personnel. Our unique research will generate important information to guide policy and anti-doping education initiatives for key stakeholders including IFCPF, the International Paralympic Committee (IPC), and WADA.

Our novel project will use an exploratory, qualitative research design, which will place the participants as the experts and enable the exploration of athlete perceptions and the role and perceptions of athlete support personnel in facilitating clean sport behaviours and cultures. The subculture of international CP football teams will be investigated, as a setting in which doping presents a significant threat (Broman et al., 2017), but within which clean sport behaviours have yet to be investigated. Qualitative methods are most appropriate as they can be used to explore expressive information such as the beliefs, values, feelings, and motivations that underlie behaviour, which are not as easily conveyed in quantitative data (Smith, 2008). These beliefs can then be interpreted within the sporting context (Bhaskar, 1989). Athlete and athlete support sport personnel perspectives and insights will be sought to ensure the views of different stakeholders are represented within the data (e.g., doctors, coaches, and physiotherapists). Thematic analysis will be used to identify recurring themes in relation to clean sport behaviours and cultures in CP football teams. Recruitment of athletes and athlete support personnel from international CP teams will take place through our collaboration and support for the project with the IFCPF.

Assurances have already been obtained from the IFCPF to support the delivery of our research project. We will sample athletes and athlete support personnel from the 51 member nations of the IFCPF. We will recruit athlete support personnel from a range of professions (e.g., coaches, medical doctors, physiotherapists) and countries. Our project is based around two studies. Study 1 will address, the project with up to 20 individual interviews with CP footballers being conducted to explore their perspectives of how athlete support personnel influence clean sport behaviours and doping vulnerability. Study 2 will address, 8 focus groups (comprising 5-6 participants) taking place with athlete support personnel to ascertain their perspectives and behaviours with regards to clean sport in CP

football. The interviews and focus groups will take place online and will run concurrently across a 9-month project duration. The interviews and focus groups will explore the following areas:

- Athlete and athlete support personnel perspectives of clean sport within CP football.
- Exploration of sport specific challenges around clean sport.
- Thoughts about what constitutes a clean sport culture and how to achieve it within CP football.