

Boosting in elite athletes with high spinal cord injury: awareness, knowledge and attitudes of athletes, coaches and trainers

Study Objectives: Boosting is a technique that is utilized by competitive spinal cord injured athletes to enhance athletic performance. The IPC Anti-Doping Code identifies several factors including "the administration or attempted administration of a prohibited substance or prohibited method by an athlete." Clearly, boosting falls under this category of the IPC Anti-Doping Code. The World Anti Doping Agency (WADA) Social Sciences Research Grant Program has identified "Increasing knowledge of causes and of risk and protective factors in doping behaviour" as a research priority for 2007. This proposal will focus on these aspects of boosting in competitive Paralympic wheelchair athletes and their coaches/trainers.

The specific objectives of this study will be to: (1) conduct an international survey of the National Paralympic Committees (NPCs) and International Organizations of Sports for the Disabled (IOSDs) that are members of the IPC to gain information on the: (a) incidence of boosting in competitive wheelchair athletes, (b) the methods commonly used by athletes to induce boosting during training and competition, and (c) knowledge that athletes and their coaches have on the risks and efficacy of boosting; and (2) disseminate scientific knowledge pertaining to boosting that will be useful to Paralympic athletes, coaches, trainers and IPC member organizations.

Research Design and Methods

Phase I: Development and Validation of the Boosting Questionnaire; March – July, 2007 The purpose of this athlete survey is to gain some insight of the athletes' values, knowledge, attitudes and behaviour toward boosting. A boosting questionnaire, originally developed by Burnham et al. (1994), will be modified and validated by two experts in questionnaire design.

Phase II: Implementation and Analysis of the Boosting Survey; August 2007 to November 2008 The athlete survey will be administered by the IPC Headquarters in Bonn, Germany. The IPC will forward the survey to the NPCs and IOSDs that are members of the IPC (approximately 135 to date). This survey will include a covering letter from the Chief Executive Officer of the IPC to the Manager of the NPC/IOSD indicating the purpose of the study, method of disseminating the questionnaire, voluntary participation of the athletes, etc. Once the completed surveys have been received at the IPC Headquarters, the data will be analyzed by the IPC-SSC and a report will be compiled for WADA and the IPC.

Phase III: Dissemination of Boosting Information; December 2008 to February 2009 The IPC-SSC will develop comprehensive information pertaining to boosting that can be used by the IPC, NPCs, IOSDs and the athletes, coaches and trainers to gain a better understanding of this practice. The following documents will be prepared and disseminated: (1) results of the boosting survey completed in Phase II, and (2) position statement pertaining to the practice of boosting in Paralympic Sport. This information will be disseminated as follows:

1. Workshops at sporting events sanctioned by the IPC.
2. Postings on the IPC and NPC websites.
3. Publication in the The Paralympian, the official IPC newsletter.
4. Hosting a Seminar/Workshop at the IPC Vista Congress in 2009.
5. Publications in Sports Medicine and Adapted Physical Activity Journals.