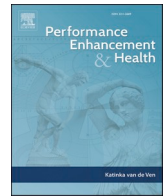


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Esports anti-doping advocates and their strange bedfellow: A matter of integrity and sport ethics

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In her response to my article, “The ‘big red bull’ in the esports room: Anti-doping, esports, and energy drinks” (Lopez Frias, 2021), Joanna Tweedie (2021) argues that “a closer consideration of the world of esports may add some contextual clarity and deem the relationship between the esports and energy drink industry a *perfect match*—rather than, *strange bedfellows*.” I agree with this claim and most of Tweedie’s analyses to sustain it. The interests of esports organizations, gamers, professional players, and energy drink companies significantly align. As Tweedie explains, “[t]he lifestyle tied to esports is one that lends itself to abuse of stimulants”, esports players can easily access such substances, either over the counter or through medical prescription. The prevalent use and ample accessibility of cognitive stimulants hinder esports anti-doping regulatory efforts. Furthermore, because such efforts are disperse and still-nascent, esports anti-doping must concentrate on minimizing harm. For instance, by seeking a balance between allowing access to cognitive stimulants and minimizing cheating. Aiming at more ambitious goals, such as the promotion of health, would make esports anti-doping policy unviable, especially because the nature of esports renders this activity a “questionable vehicle for the promotion of a healthy lifestyle.” Moreover, Tweedie correctly remarks that the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) allows the use of cognitive stimulants, such as caffeine and taurine, typically found in energy drinks. Tweedie is also correct that there are many types of stimulant substances and that each substance produces different kinds of health problems, with energy drinks, in her words, likely being “the lesser of esports’ evil” because, as the title of her response reads, there is “a jungle out there.” Hence, she concludes: “The road towards implementing anti-doping policies in esports is one littered with obstacles ... For esports, energy drinks may be the least of its concerns.” In her view, criticism of the partnership between energy-drink companies and esports organizations falls outside the scope of discussions on the ethics of doping, mainly because demanding that esports anti-doping policy takes a stance on issues concerning the use of cognitive stimulants permitted by WADA would “hold esports to a higher standard than traditional sports”. Instead, Tweedie suggests that such discussions pertain to marketing ethics.

Despite largely agreeing with Tweedie’s analyses on the esports context and the relevance of marketing ethics perspectives, I disagree with her conclusions. In particular, the claim that discussions on the partnership between esports organizations and energy-drink companies fall outside the scope of the ethics of anti-doping and the charge that I hold esports to a higher standard than traditional sports. As I explicate in my article (Lopez Frias, in press), health fears around the use of drugs in sport and the larger society have played a vital role in developing and consolidating anti-doping (Johnson, 2016, Chapters 16–18). Anti-doping advocates have capitalized on the protection and promotion of health to justify the need for anti-doping policies. For example, when identifying the criteria to classify a substance or method as prohibited, WADA appeals to the notion of “health” in two different parts of the World Anti-Doping Code (WADA, 2021). One of them as a standalone principle; the other in the “spirit of sport” principle, namely as a value that sport practitioners find in and through sport. Anti-doping scholars have long criticized the instrumentalization of health for advancing the anti-doping cause (Dimeo & Møller, 2018, Chapters 4–6). For instance, (Kayser, Mauron, & Miah, 2007) argue that “the concern about doping is largely disingenuous, if it is supposed to reflect a genuine moral concern for health ... Today’s medical reality of high-level athletics little resembles the quaint image of an ideal harmony between beauty, strength and health dreamed up by the early Olympic movement” (p. 6). Knee and ankle problems are commonplace among elite-level soccer players and spine injuries and concussions among ice hockey and American football players. In my article, I identify one more example of how (esports) anti-doping advocates’ preoccupation for health is disingenuous or, as I posit in my article, “hypocritical” (Lopez Frias, in press). In doing so, I question the integrity of anti-doping policies in esports.

Integrity, which applies to people and organizations alike, is one of the most fundamental values in sport. The International center for Sport Security, for example, considers integrity to be a core value of sports (ICSS, 2006). In a book chapter I co-authored with Mike McNamee (2019) Lopez Frias & McNamee, 2019, we identified coherence, moral deliberation, publicity, and responsibility as the defining elements of

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integrity. My claim that esports organizations and energy-drink companies are strange bedfellows connects directly with coherence. As Lynne McFall explains (1987, p. 7), individuals or organizations embody coherence in two senses: (a) by maintaining a consistent set of principles and commitments and (b) by keeping their principles and actions consistent. Thus, in the first sense, an individual or organization demonstrates integrity when their principles and commitments align with each other. Esports organizations that partner with energy drink companies while advocating for introducing anti-doping regulation to protect the professional players' health hardly qualify as coherent. On the one hand, esports organizations promote the consumption of energy drinks despite their negative health effects. On the other hand, such organizations justify the ban of cognitive stimulants to protect the professional players' health, although stimulants are also detrimental to health.¹ In the second sense of the term, coherence involves abiding by and keeping one's principles and commitments consistent, even in the face of difficulties, danger, and temptations. Esports organizations also fail to be coherent in this sense because they seem to suspend their commitment to protecting health out of commercial interest.

In sum, "what [esports anti-doping organizations] say [with regards to protecting health] and what they do is two different things" (Byrne, 2017), thereby failing to embody an essential feature of integrity. As Tweedie argues, esports and energy drinks are a perfect match in practice. However, they are strange bedfellows from an integrity standpoint and, therefore, *should* be kept separate. This kind of normative claim about the integrity of esports organizations and anti-doping efforts falls within the scope of sport ethics or the ethics of anti-doping – as much as it does within the scope of marketing ethics (see Lopez Frias, 2020). Moreover, in advocating for coherence in esports anti-doping policy, I am far from holding esports to higher standards than traditional sports. My claim that (esports) organizations must exercise integrity by keeping their principles, commitments, and actions consistent applies to all individuals and organizations, including traditional sport, and it aligns with arguments by anti-doping scholars on the inconsistency of appeals to health to justify anti-doping.²

CRediT author statement

Since this is a sole-authored piece, there is no need for this statement.

Declaration of Competing Interest

The author, Francisco Javier Lopez Frias, certifies that he has NO affiliations with or involvement in any organization or entity with any financial interest (such as honoraria; educational grants; participation in speakers' bureaus; membership, employment, consultancies, stock ownership, or other equity interest; and expert testimony or patent-licensing arrangements), or non-financial interest (such as personal or professional relationships, affiliations, knowledge or beliefs) in the subject matter or materials discussed in this manuscript.

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¹ For a caveat, see footnote 13 in Lopez Frias, in press.

² In my paper, I failed to fully articulate the importance of integrity in my analysis of the partnership between esports organizations and energy-drink companies (Lopez Frias, in press). I would like to thank Tweedie and Katinka van de Ven for affording me the opportunity to further elaborate on this point in this rejoinder to Tweedie's response.