

Tekst 8

THE BIG ISSUE: RUGBY UNION GETS THE NEEDLE

Drugs and the generation gap

By Eddie Butler

I THINK IT IS the fault of my generation, those people who played their games back in the Seventies and Eighties. We all knew that, behind a closed iron curtain, doctors were at work, still trying to manufacture the master race. If the East Germans felt like turning out spotty women with beards who could run like cheetahs because they were flush with the hormones extracted from that particular feline, then there was nothing we could do except give thanks that we 28.

This was the Cold War and the sight of a Bulgarian shot putter strapping her lunch pack into the Frankenstein fold of her upper thigh before taking to the circle was a reminder that it was good to belong to the free West. Sebastian Coe and Steve Ovett – with rare affection we knew them simply as Seb and, er, Ovett – didn't get on particularly well, but they were 29 and could beat the Commies.

And we all liked Liverpool FC because they were the best and were rumoured to drink like fish. Rugby was amateur and even more boozy. And if someone did a little speed to get them through the afternoon, then it was a laugh because it only went to show that he was a hell of a boy who'd had a skinful the night before.

A YEAR BEFORE the fall of the Iron Curtain, at the Seoul Olympics, it was clear that drugs had 30. But even then it didn't seem quite so bad. Oh, I know there was a right stink when Ben Johnson failed his test, but, let's admit it, no one liked Carl Lewis and to see his smile wiped out by a chap from the Commonwealth was damn good sport while it lasted. If there was one thing worse than a hairy East German fraulein, it was a smug Yank.

But now, of all people, the Irish are taking drugs. Michelle Smith was bad enough, but now it seems that lads who didn't marry dodgy Dutch discus throwers are up to their overdeveloped pecs in the mess. It's like finding out that one of the Von Trapp children grew up to become an arms dealer, that Coe became a Conservative MP. Somehow, drugs have come into our own back yard, where the children play.

They've always been here, though. In the course of doing some casual research on the extent of noxious-substance abuse back in 31, I was reliably informed that there were a lot of pills doing the rounds even when there was no money in rugby. This, I retorted with admirable patriotic zeal, would have been a peculiarly Welsh weakness. Body-building gyms seem to abound in Wales. Must be the weather.

No, I was informed, drugtaking was, without being commonplace, evident across the board. In changing rooms 32 players have been doing stuff for years.

IT'S QUITE UPSETTING really. All those watering eyes and determined stares in the changing room may not have been the result of the power of my oratory after all. Those rides across waves of natural passion turn out to be nothing more than trips down billowing cloud nine.

I'm sorry if I sound 33 about the whole thing, but I suspect that at some imprecise time around the fall of the Berlin Wall, I began to fear that corruption in sport was not just confined to the institutes and laboratories of the Eastern Bloc. Such a fear predates the arrival of absurd sums of money in the arena of sport, but there's no question that the lure of huge rewards has 34 the basic human instinct to cut corners in the competitive pursuit of

victory. Hell, we cheat. As much as we can and as often as we can. The spirit of competition relates, according to that same session of casual research, to our primeval hunting instincts. Who cares if the lion is engaged in noble chase up hill and down dale until the spear is cleanly driven through its noble heart? Much safer to creep up on it in numbers 35 a good session on the narcotic home-brew and rip it to pieces before it has a chance to stir.

THE SAFE ASSUMPTION to make is that everyone in every form of athletic endeavour is on drugs. Sport is the playground of dope-heads. Only from such a starting-point do we stand a chance of being surprised by romance, when somebody bucks the trend and wins 36.

Absurd sums of money are washing around sport. How can it be that at a time when footballers rank among the richest people in Britain, the drug-testing agencies complain of lack of funds? The most dangerous narcotic on earth – 37 – should be used to keep all the growth hormones, steroids, caterpillar excreta and ladyshaves in some sort of check. Everybody is cheating, but let's try to keep our competitors free from permanent mutation for as long as possible.

The Irish are on drugs. It is enough to put you off sport for good. Such was the consensus around the table of our informal research group. Among the generation who had played their games in the Seventies and Eighties, and who felt that they were somehow to blame for not doing enough at the time, heads drooped. But not for long. Luckily somebody had brought a little pick-me-up. Spirits were raised and hair began to sprout in strange places.

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Kies bij iedere open plek in de tekst het juiste antwoord uit de gegeven mogelijkheden.

1p **28** >

- A had been born elsewhere
- B had won the fight against drugs
- C were safe from East Germans

1p **29** >

- A clean
- B politically acceptable
- C popular
- D tolerant enough

1p **30** >

- A become a serious health risk
- B gained territory
- C got into criminal hands
- D proved their effectiveness

1p **31** >

- A the age of apparent innocence
- B the era of fierce nationalism
- C the years of global competition

1p **32** >

- A all over Wales
- B throughout the Eastern bloc
- C up and down the land

1p **33** >

- A confused
- B flippant
- C indifferent
- D optimistic

1p **34** >

- A altogether undermined
- B merely suppressed
- C only increased

1p **35** >

- A after
- B before
- C in favour of
- D in the hope of

1p **36** >

- A by fair means
- B by sheer luck
- C without being found out
- D without being sponsored

1p **37** >

- A ambition
- B fame
- C money
- D sports