

Ben Johnson, Charles Dubin, and 'The Spirit of Sport'

Canada's Role in International Anti-Doping Policies

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The World Anti-Doping Agency's World Anti-Doping Code states explicitly that the fundamental rationale for the Code itself and the fight against the use of performance-enhancing substances and practices in sport is the preservation of "the spirit of sport." This paper explores the historical development of "the spirit of sport" clause in the Code, tracing its source to events in Canada emanating out of the Ben Johnson drug scandal in 1988. We begin with a careful examination of Commissioner Charles Dubin's interpretation of events in Canada and, in his Commission of Inquiry, Dubin's legalistic reading of his mandate to represent the Canadian sport system and return it to what he recognized as its intended amateur roots. To buttress his recommendations for reform and to help return Canada's sport system to what he saw as its "true values," Dubin found inspiration in Olympic Games founder Baron Pierre de Coubertin. The attempt to reform the Canadian sport system gained further momentum with a campaign launched by the Canadian Centre for Ethics in Sport, a body created by the Canadian Federal Government in an attempt to ensure the implementation of Dubin's recommendations. The terminology from the Centre's "Spirit of Sport" campaign was subsequently used by the creators of the World Anti-Doping Code as an ethical basis for anti-doping worldwide. While the inspiration for anti-doping appears to emanate from an attempt to maintain sport's essential, transhistorical values—its "spirit"—this paper recounts the real social and historical forces, and the human agents acting within the possibilities and constraints of those forces, that created "the spirit of sport."



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