



INTERVIEW WITH ATHLETE'S COMMITTEE CHAIRMAN, ABHINAV BINDRA

In November 2015, members of the ISSF Anti-Doping Committee and ISSF Medical Committee will be meeting with the ISSF Athletes Committee for a round table discussion on anti-doping. More specifically, the Athletes Committee has been invited to actively assist these two committees in establishing new educational initiatives aimed at raising greater awareness athletes' roles and responsibilities in the fight against doping in sport. As representatives of the entire pool of shooting athletes, your ISSF Athletes Committee is in a unique position to determine where education is most needed and to provide suggestions on how to best disseminate that information, to whom, and by which communication medium.

Therefore it would seem appropriate that, in anticipation of these meetings, this edition of the IPOD offer excerpts of an interview given by the Athlete's Committee chairman, Abhinav Bindra from India; a decorated and dedicated shooter and an exceptional individual.

As you will read in the following questions and answers, Mr. Bindra has kindly offered his personal views on doping in sport, specifically shooting-sport. You will learn that he finds great promise in the ISSF Athletes Committee's potential to assist the ISSF in implementing values-based educational initiatives that will reach, among others, the future generation of shooters.

How long have you been actively competing in shooting-sport and how did you get involved with the sport?

I have been competing for about twenty years. I was always interested in shooting as a child. I started sport shooting with a family friend and soon realized I was quite good at it. It quickly became addictive.

Shooting is a great and never ending internal pursuit. Not only are you competing against others but you are constantly trying to better your own scores and to better yourself.

It is a never ending quest. Of course this is why shooting is such a great sport: because you can keep shooting for a very long time and always find ways to push yourself no matter what level you are at or how old you are.

Can you share any personal experiences about when you first started learning about doping in sport?

I first realized that doping in sport was a reality at the 1996 Atlanta Olympic Games. There was not much information on anti-doping coming from India at that time. My fascination with the Olympic movement and all Olympic sports was really starting and it is then, by following the media and learning more about everything surrounding the Olympic Games, that I realized even at that young age how important a challenge anti-doping was going to be for sport in general.

I was fortunate in a way because even if there was not so much anti-doping education in India at the time, when I was 13 or 14 years old at my first international competition, I was selected for doping control! So I learned rather quickly about the processes.

Of course, my awareness for anti-doping only grew with the advent of WADA and the World Anti-Doping Code and the proliferation of anti-doping organizations, of anti-doping rules, of in and out-of- competition doping controls, of high profile doping cases in the news etc.

Do you believe that doping poses a problem in the shooting sport?

There is always a possibility of somebody cheating. But, shooters are in a very fortunate position as our sport is relatively pretty clean. Although we sometimes hear that a shooting athlete has been suspended because of an anti-doping rule violation, we do not know of many athletes testing positive or of many coaches involved in doping scandals. I would say 99.9 percent of our shooting population is clean and against the use of performance enhancing drugs.

Do you think that most shooting athletes are aware of the dangers of doping?

I think many international-level shooting athletes are aware of the dangers associated with doping. Maybe not all of them appreciate how important the fight against doping in sport really is.

For athletes specifically, other than the risks for their health of course, I think that the most important danger is inadvertent doping. So, all shooting athletes need to be careful and vigilant. They must be careful about what they do, what they eat and what medications they take. They always need to be mindful of the people around them and of peoples' intentions. They always need to seek proper advice from various sources if and when they are in doubt. Of course, they always need to apply for Therapeutic Use Exemptions before using any medication containing prohibited substances.

What would you say are some of the most important responsibilities an athlete has when it comes to anti-doping?

To me, other than the obvious obligations to not use performance enhancing substances, one of the most important responsibilities shooting athletes have is to tell their medical practitioner up front that they are an international level athlete (or national level athlete) when they have a medical condition that needs to be treated. They need to tell their doctor that there are medications on the Prohibited List that they are not allowed to take or to use without proper authorization to do so.

This responsibility is especially important in countries where sport medicine is not a common or prevalent medical discipline. Many athletes do not have access to experts in the sport medicine field when they are injured or ill. So, it is up to the athletes to be very clear with their general practitioner that there exists a list of prohibited medications they are not allowed to and must not take. They should tell their doctor about the WADA Prohibited List specifically and inform their doctor that if they take a prohibited substance, they could

be banned from competition. Needless to say, it is imperative for athletes to double and triple check all the ingredients of their medications and supplements and to be aware of the Prohibited List of banned substances.

Also, many athletes don't inquire about alternatives to the medication they are being offered. Seeking out alternative treatments can make a huge difference when athletes are applying for Therapeutic Use Exemptions.

Do you think that things have changed in the last 5-10 years when it comes to anti-doping?

Yes so much. The Rules are more complicated and the anti-doping movement is bigger than I think many people thought it would become. But it doesn't mean that ignorance of the Rules, however complicated, is a proper defense.

We are in the age of communication and internet information is readily available from numerous sources. Athletes need to take responsibility for themselves and take extreme care. Seeking out information may often be the best way for athletes to get better informed about things. And doing so does not require too much work anymore because of the facility with which such information can be found on the internet.

All athletes bear the same obligations and share the same responsibilities. They must learn about the various processes. That is part of the athlete's job profile.

If I was to ask any random shooter: "If you could take any banned substance to improve your performance, what substance would you use"?

Shooting is not a high risk sport when it comes to doping, so we are all very fortunate. But, certainly, it is well known amongst shooters that beta blockers are the category of substance that would provide the most performance enhancement. They hear about them. They know that beta blockers can reduce tremor and lower heart rate. But that does not mean that they use them. As I said, I would estimate that 99.9% of shooters are clean; and because they know that beta blockers are performance enhancing, there is almost a zero level of tolerance with regards to any one taking beta blockers amongst shooting athletes.

So I think it would be best for any shooter with a serious medical condition that could warrant the use of a beta blocker while competing to seek out alternatives. Otherwise he or she really should not be allowed to compete at an advantage. That would not be fair for everyone else.

If an athlete was to suspect another athlete of cheating, do you think he or she would report it? Why? Why not?

Certainly, any athlete who reasonably suspects another athlete or a coach of using prohibited substances or of encouraging athletes to use prohibited substances should and must report this to ISSF. But I don't know that this would happen.

Not because athletes would be scared to report a suspected anti-doping rule violation, but more because I think it would rarely occur.

You have been around as an active shooter for many years, and more or less since the beginning of WADA and the Code. How much has changed from an athlete's perspective, and do you think that the imposition on athletes have become too onerous?

Maybe the responsibilities imposed upon athletes have grown in time with the expansion of importance of anti-doping, but so too has the ease with which to fulfill these obligations. There are "apps" for submitting whereabouts, and things can be done by SMS, and ADAMS is much easier to use.

So yes, sometimes our responsibilities may seem onerous, but it's better than the alternative; and the effort certainly outweighs the risk!

Athletes are aware, and have a certain pride in knowing that their responsibilities with regards to anti-doping are part of their profile as modern day competitive athletes. I think as an athlete, there is a sense of solidarity in knowing that every athlete must fulfill these responsibilities and also a certain pride in knowing that by doing so you are helping to make your sport better and cleaner.



Do you think athletes are generally educated about doping matters?

I think that ISSF athletes are generally well educated on anti-doping. Shooting in itself is a very analytical sport that requires athletes to constantly seek out more information. Therefore, in my opinion, shooting athletes are, for the most part, wired to seek out information.

Certainly though, athletes coming from countries who have very well established NADO with long standing and experienced anti-doping programs are better equipped in terms of educational materials than smaller or less developed countries that don't have the expertise, experience, know-how or budget of bigger countries. Inevitably, there are many athletes in various regions of the world who do not benefit from the same level of anti-doping education as athletes from other countries.

So for example, I would say without a doubt that younger athletes from developing countries don't know enough about anti-doping and would probably not be aware of the importance of staying away from beta blockers or of applying for Therapeutic Use Exemptions.

The ISSF has done a great job over the years, spreading the information to international level shooters about staying away from beta blockers as well as their many other responsibilities regarding anti-doping. But the younger athletes are the ones that ought to be educated the most, so the scope of ISSF's anti-doping efforts should perhaps be expanded.

What else can be done to reach out to those athletes who don't seem to be sufficiently educated?

Even though we are not experts in the field, the ISSF Athletes Committee gets various queries on anti-doping topics from athletes from countries who do not possess great anti-doping programs or who are unaware that their country even has a NADO. But in truth, this information is readily available to every athlete, in his or her own language all over the world.

As anti-doping becomes more and more important, all athletes should know that National Anti-Doping Organisations (NADOs) and Regional Anti-Doping Organizations (RADOs) have anti-doping educational materials to distribute on-line or in paper format to their nation's or region's athletes.

Shooting is not as big a sport as athletics or swimming, but it does not mean our athletes do not need to be educated on the dangers of doping. So, all athletes and national federations should seek out greater educational materials from their NADOs or RADOs. In fact, all national shooting federations should be encouraged and pressed to actively seek out all available educational materials for their athletes from their respective NADO or RADO.

I think it would be great if national shooting federations could get more involved in order to provide the necessary information to as many athletes as possible. Maybe this is something the Athletes Committee can work towards with ISSF. For example: national federations could work with their NADOs to try to promote anti-doping education at national and regional events.

(Note for the reader: One of ISSF's planned initiatives in the near future is, in fact, to get national federations and NADOS more involved in educating young shooters).

Would you agree with me when I say the fight against doping in shooting sport needs to be a collective effort?

Yes coaches, parents, team doctors, everyone needs to be aware and get educated on the various anti-doping issues that affect us all (testing, TUEs, the Prohibited List, the Registered Testing Pool etc). It is a collective responsibility.

National Federations should work more closely with their NADOs. The ISSF should

encourage and provide the tools to its National Federations to seek out the assistance from their NADOS. Coaches and parents and team doctors should read the Rules, be aware of their respective obligations and be good role models for their athletes.

But ultimately the responsibility lies with the athlete. At the end of the day, it is the athlete who must be aware of all his or her obligations and responsibilities, and who must avoid the use of prohibited substance and follow the ISSF Anti-Doping Rules.

What are your thoughts on ISSF's anti-doping education program?

I believe that the ISSF has done and continues to do a great job at trying to educate the greatest amount of shooters through the informative and interesting IPOD articles published in the ISSF News magazine, through the Outreach Education booth at Munich World Cups, through its website which contains very useful information and links to all other necessary information.

But, over and above all the athletes which the ISSF has successfully reached, young athletes are now the ones who in my opinion require more attention. They are the future of our sport and they possess little knowledge on doping issues when they come into the sport. As I said before much of the information is not properly disseminated or does not reach the younger or national-level athletes because it is aimed at the RTP and top ranked athletes. To me, this is counter intuitive. The

younger generation of athletes are the ones who need to be taught about these things. They are the ones who would benefit the most from education initiatives. We need to give juniors the tools to fight doping in sport right from the start of their athletic careers.

(Note for the reader: the ISSF has already increased its focus on educating its junior athletes by setting up an Outreach Education booth at the ISSF Junior World Cup in Suhl. More similar initiatives will follow.)

Do you think the fight against doping in sport is successful?

Yes, to a certain extent. But, I think that to have an athlete test positive and then get suspended for the use of a substance for which a TUE could have been granted is not the purpose of anti-doping in sport. The idea must be to catch cheaters, not to suspend athletes who have been misinformed or uneducated on the many risks of doping and ended up with an inadvertent doping infraction as a result. That is why education and awareness are so important!

How does the ISSF Athletes Committee feel about being invited to contribute to the ISSF's education initiatives?

Firstly, I was very happy to be interviewed for the purpose of the IPOD. And, looking ahead, the ISSF Athletes Committee members are honored to have been invited to meet with ISSF and to assist ISSF in establishing new and innovative initiatives to reach out to all

shooting athletes, especially juniors. We need to reach out to the future generation of shooters to increase their awareness and to educate them on the dangers of doping.

The Athletes Committee believes it can make a difference. We believe that if everyone gives it a little extra effort we can educate a greater amount of younger shooters and in turn avert anti-doping rule violations that could have been avoided as well as prevent other mistakes that can occur when an athlete is misinformed or uneducated.

Do you have any closing words?

The ISSF Athletes Committee is very excited about the opportunity to assist the ISSF in its anti-doping educational initiatives and looks forward to doing so.

If together we all focus on raising awareness and on getting the information out to those individuals who need it the most, then, collectively, we just may succeed in the fight against doping in sport.

The IPOD is grateful to Abhinav for his contribution to this Edition of the IPOD. We also invite all athletes who may have some ideas or contributions for the ISSF's education program to direct their comments to the ISSF Athletes Committee at athletes@issf-sports.org.

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