

ARTICLE



Is there still hope for clean sport? Exploring how the Russian doping scandal has impacted North American sport culture and identity using an ethnographic content analysis

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ABSTRACT

At the Olympic and Paralympic levels, competitive sport reflects individual, organisational, and political power, serving as a significant source of both social and economic national pride. When revelations arose against Russia concerning systematic doping, the integrity of international sport was called into question and countries experienced threats towards their national identity. Since 2014, news coverage of the Russian doping scandal dominated North American sport media headlines. Media is considered a powerful outlet capable of influencing behaviours, attitudes, and actions through the transmission of ideas, values, and norms. As such, the purpose of this research was to identify dominant discourses surrounding the Russian systematic doping program as presented in the North American media from Sochi 2014 to Pyeongchang 2018. We conducted an ethnographic content analysis of 55 newspaper articles to identify how the media perpetuated attitudes and ideas surrounding cultural identity in sport. Two discourses were identified: (a) the frustration and disappointment held by North Americans against international sport governing bodies, and (b) the desire to fight for clean sport. Whereas the former discourse left readers feeling hopeless about the state of international sport, the latter provided suggestions to prevent doping in the future. Through our interpretations of the media articles, we have come to understand how the media reinforces North American identity as being morally superior in the fight against doping. We encourage readers to reflect on our interpretations of the North American media's discourse and to think critically about the current state of doping in sport.

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International sport is a complex, multifaceted phenomenon, capable of bringing people together towards a common goal or creating divisions between opponents. In fact, at the Olympic and Paralympic levels, sport has become a significant display of individual, organisational, and political power, and can be a source of social and economic national pride (Boye et al. 2017). Considering the glory, fame, and financial benefit associated with standing on top of the podium at an international event, it is not surprising that athletes feel considerable pressure to perform in extraordinary ways. This pressure can manifest into the temptation to enhance one's performance through the use of prohibited or banned substances, also termed doping (Kirby, Moran, and Guerin 2011). The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) was created with the goal of preventing doping in sport and maintaining a fair playing field for athletes (WADA 2015). Even though countries that