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Sportsman's authority in the perspective of man's weakness

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abstract

Background: History of glory and fall of the cyclist Lance Armstrong refers to the issues from the borderline of sociology, psychology, pharmacology and qualified sport. It stirs many emotions and extreme opinions in which human attitudes are focused on phenomena impossible to be interpreted unequivocally. The purpose of this research was to learn opinions on the life path of Lance Armstrong, regarding his struggle both with cancer and his rivals in the peloton, but at the same time marked with forbidden doping.

Material and methods: The research was carried out using the survey method, which asked one question about the ethics of behaviour of the former professional road racing cyclist.

Results: People participating in the research had their own oncological experience and pursued the passion of sport-recreational activity. That means that in both areas their life refers to the path of one of the most recognizable sportsmen of the turn of centuries. In most cases, they find understanding for his behaviour.

Conclusions: The main conclusion coming from the assessment of Armstrong concerns recognition that among people who have a similar history of life, most of them are able to indicate his numerous contributions to humanity, minimizing and sometimes even undervaluing shameful reputation, which disgraced professional sport.

Key words: cycling, cancer, doping, authority.

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INTRODUCTION

Physical activity as well as sport activity is a universal field of social life. Sport as a contemporary phenomenon of civilisation influences social life, and from the moral point of view, it introduces important values and behaviour patterns. Thus, it is not only a way of forming vitality but of forming character of a man as well. It allows him to build and cultivate good relations with others. In spite of everlasting traditions of attributing sport activity significant social and educational values, many phenomena openly contradict it. Beside aggression of a competitor, objectification of his/her body or corruption, they also include the phenomenon of doping [1]. Creation of the authority, as in the title, is an important factor of proper communication of people belonging to the widely understood sport environment [2]. In this case, we do not have to think about the revealed authority.

Nobody is perfect, but if he/she is aware of his/her weaknesses and consistently works on them, then he/she has a chance to build own authority. However, in such situations, sincerity, openness, and a desire for development are required [3]. In the process of crystallising, each personality demands a model and excitement for his/her own perfection [4].

Nowadays, we hear quite frequently about death of authority and in a milder definition – about their ostensibility. Many phenomena from the past, as well as from nowadays do not add radiance to authority [5]. In this way, institutional authority of the Catholic Church has been undermined. On the other hand, authority of teachers fades against high esteem of youth idols, but authority of parents is unstable or such instability is attributed to it [6]. In the situation when the world becomes more and more complicated and media flood the society with the growing amount of information, support should be given by somebody who distinguishes himself, the one who indicates the way, somebody who frequently creates identity. It is also written about addiction from authorities, their indispensability in any, even the least important aspect of life [7], which causes unavoidable trivialisation. Losing ability to see the difference between authorities and persons who are presented as authorities constitutes an increasingly bigger problem of ethical nature.

Real authority is an individual who distinguishes himself/herself in the group or at the background of other communities. They may be remarkable specialists in a given field or persons who can become role models by the way they live. In contrast is a reality when media create a given individual as an authority. This, however, is not equal to creation of universal authority that is common for everybody [8].

The fact that personal authority is a problem, particularly such of largo sense, is a man. Nobody is perfect and everybody makes mistakes. It should not be forgotten that in spite of its prestige and social position, authority means first of all a man, and authority is not his identity but only an element. We could try to state that the authority means some kind of social role, a mask in the social theatre, but not a real, coherent identity of a given man. It is only a role, a function performed by a given individual. Personal authority, human, is nothing given once and forever, neither anything with which a man is born and which he has been using since birth. Image of authority is being built for years, frequently by smaller or bigger gestures or achievements, but first of all it is a long lasting process. It is hard to imagine anybody who could be defined as an authority only after one or two actions or achievements. At the same time, authority worked out by the individual is not eternal. It could be ruined by oneself or it may be ruined by others' activity, and rebuilding it is much harder after revealing a defect on the so-far ideal image of the authority [9].

The person, for many years aspiring to the title of authority was an American road cyclist Lance Armstrong. At the age of 15 he was a very promising triathlete, soon however he decided to concentrate on cycling. Ten years later, he was diagnosed with cancer – testicle

cancer. The treatment excluded him from sport for the whole season. He had two surgeries and four cycles of chemotherapy that allowed him to return to sport. In 1999, he won Tour de France. In 2005, Armstrong won this race for the seventh consecutive time, and then he announced the end of his cycling career. Three years later, he officially informed that he was going to return to cycling to promote fight against cancer. He is a founder of the Lance Armstrong Foundation, the organization with 20 million members called to support people with cancer. It started selling rubber bands with the inscription "Livestrong", the income from which is spent on action against cancer. He also wrote two autobiographical books. In June 2012 the United States Anti-Doping Agency – USADA officially accused Armstrong of using doping in the years 1996–2011, which meant lifelong disqualification. Officially, it was confirmed in October of the same year, depriving him of all the titles achieved by him since 1 August 1998. In the middle of January 2013, in the interview with Oprah Winfrey, Lance Armstrong admitted using doping. He did it in front of 28 million viewers in 190 countries to whom this information was directed in 30 languages. Then he answered positively to the questions concerning using EPO, cortisone, testosterone, growth hormone and blood transfusion, admitting that during all the seven editions of Tour de France he was using doping.

Discussions on the fall of Armstrong can be found in mainstream media, publications concerning cycling, on public internet forums and in papers of investigative journalists, which all helped to reveal the details of this issue. Ethical debate led to critical judgments not only against Armstrong himself, but also against his colleagues from the team, physicians and media [10]. In the course of time, however, there appeared demand for Armstrong in his new form. It occurred that he could be as well placed in the role of a victim or at least the role of a man involved in a diabolic system. Americans facing the dilemma, like most of professionals from his generation, decided to sign a pact. He arrived to Europe at the beginning of the 1990s with the best possible intentions. However, it occurred that doping is a daily routine in the professional peloton. So he had to choose: either to take or to return to the States. Once he went astray, there was no return.

Some people, referring to the issue of cancer, were asking if one could be surprised that a man who was fighting for life was ready to agree to any kind of therapy, then returned determined and hungry for victories at any price? There were, though, many more attenuating circumstances. Thus what to say about his sponsors, who treated him as a golden goose? Is it possible that that they did not know anything? Did they not encourage him? Did they not tell him not to look back, to realize his American dream which would bring gains to everybody? And when the truth was revealed, they turned back on him without hesitation, applying the sacred business principle to control damages. The same is another fact, Armstrong being deleted from the history of Tour de France, whereas other notorious doping abusers still are on the list of winners in various individual classifications [11].

There are also questions that we would like to ask about goodness generated by Armstrong, genuinely engaged in the activity at Livestrong. Did he not protect achievements of the foundation when he was lying with a straight face? Should we not put blame, besides Armstrong, on federal interrogators who build up their careers taking him off the pedestal and without any scruples destroying reputation of the foundation? Finally, was his stigmatization as an architect of the greatest cheat in the history of sport not only a populist argument to justify enormity of investigation and to make the interrogators famous?

Lack of absolute clearness in the assessment of Lance Armstrong is also well seen in the selected opinions of people with cancer experience. Dan MacAlpine says that Armstrong gave face to his disease. In his opinion, if somebody could win the most difficult cycling race after a bout of cancer disease, it is more obvious that after losing a testicle you can

remain a wholesome man. Initially, he recognized him, first of all, as a master in the fight with cancer and only then as a cycling champion. However, later justified accusations of doping changed everything for MacAlpine. He could not believe that anybody could risk freeing any stray cancer cells by means of substances increasing efficiency. Now, he finds Armstrong as the worst hypocrite who was preying on the human need of faith. However, even now after his dishonour, there are claims that Lance's sins cannot destroy his message of action against cancer.

On the other hand, Suleika Jaouad explains her liking of Armstrong due to his heroic fight with cancer and not due to his cycling achievements. She learnt from his autobiography that he overcame cancer in stage IV, sparing others suffering which he himself was enduring, in this way inspiring others to take effort for survival [12].

The goal of this research was to learn the opinions on the life path of Lance Armstrong, leading through cancer disease, struggle with it and sport triumphs with the gloomy reality of doping in the background. Persons participating in the research had their own oncological experience and developed sport-recreational action into passion. In this way, in both areas their lives refer to the path of the sevenfold winner of Tour de France.

MATERIAL AND METHODS

The narrative interview is the research technique within the method of a diagnostic poll, consisting of relating the experiences connected with participation of the examined person in any event or in the sequence of events. The phases of the narrative interview include the initial phase, the phase stimulating to narration and the phase of presentation of the story by the narrator that creates a spontaneous, undisturbed by the researcher, story about the narrator's experiences. Before the final part of the interview, but after the complete end of the narration, there is also the phase of asking questions. It is intended to gain extra opinions from the narrator [13].

In this study, narrative interviews concerned experiences accompanying cancer and opinions on the ways of managing such reality through activities aiming at psychophysical improvement of the organism during sport-recreational activity. In the phase of asking the respondents questions, only one question was asked: "To what extent could the American cyclist Lance Armstrong, who after a successful battle with testicle cancer returned to extreme sport efforts that were finished by seven triumphs in Tour de France, shake the faith of oncological patients in their own powers, declaring that he owes his success to forbidden doping?

23 oncological patients participated in the research. This group consisted of 11 men and 12 women. Each of the respondents was characterised with considerable engagement in physical activity, primarily in the post-disease period.

The responses to the questions had to represent this social group's attitude to Armstrong as a man and a sportsman. All the responses were electronically registered and reconstructed in the original version. The research was conducted in the period from April to December 2019.

RESPONSES

Anna: I think that even if Armstrong was taking doping, he didn't hurt humanity with it. However, all the time he pressed forward, fighting for his goals, so in my opinion he deserves applause. Such people that get out from any disease or addiction and can get to the top are heroes for me. I treat it this way that he showed millions of people that it is possible. For me, it is more important than the fact that he later admitted taking doping.

Elżbieta: He certainly inspired others. And the fact itself that he finally admitted it is also a measure of sincerity, so for me showing his human weakness could mean a lot of good and be more important than the fact that with his confession he tarnished his wonderful sport career.

Mirosław: I think that sick people having heard about confession of this touched by cancer American cyclist could lose faith in their own powers. I also listened to it with sadness. Maybe because I was observing this situation from the point of view of sport and from the point of view of oncological disease. Because, however, when I consider that a man sick with cancer achieved such heights, so no, he is still inspiration for me in spite of doping.

Leszek: I was admiring him for his return at a certain time and giving inspiration that it is possible. I think that for me it is too difficult but if I had to give my opinion, then I would say that his work and his inborn predispositions should decide about his success. Sometimes though the need to be the master or world famous makes you reach for various substances even at the cost of your health or even life. Some people are ready to sacrifice everything for such fame. Maybe it was so in the case of Armstrong.

Antoni: For me personally, what he did was absolutely unacceptable. I look at him from my point of view, because I've never taken drugs and I would never do it, notwithstanding the circumstances. But as I say, there are many truths, definitely not the only one. For some, he will be almost a God for what he did showing fortitude after his disease, competing with his healthy rivals. Others will forget about his success having heard confession after finishing the career, about being supported by anabolics.

Andrzej: I would not find myself in the group of people being inspired by his biography and success. It is because my cycling was not inspired absolutely by anybody but it was my free choice. It is hard for me to make an opinion whether he lost his authority by announcing that he was taking doping. Maybe it was true for anybody who had been following him before but not for me.

Urszula: If doping helped him in realization of these sport goals, so I can understand it. Thus despite certain doubts about him, he has remained an icon for me, although he should not certainly be praised as a competitor. I myself, however, see a human being in him.

Renata: I am always against doping and I think that a sportsman should reap laurels by himself. However, in this case it is really hard to take a stand on it. If he had not taken doping, so supposedly he would not have achieved the success, so in his case, in the sense of finding life goal, it went rather in the right direction.

Elżbieta II: First of all, what I value in him is that he overcame this disease, and what he did then with this statement on doping, is another case. People should be valued for what they did with their body and psyche.

Katarzyna: As far as Armstrong is concerned, I do not like to make opinions about people. Something that is evil for somebody, for another one maybe good and vice versa. Maybe getting into doping, and in general return to sport after disease, was just escape. Maybe he did not want to analyse his disease, but to cut off from that what had been and to start again.

Maciej: Generally, I am against any cheat in sport. Never, however, did I feel any special anger against this cyclist, even though his successes decreased slightly after the statement on taking doping substances. I know that for many he was an inspiration to take up activity and I treat it as his contribution to society, particularly to those who are sick.

Joanna: I think that in his case, after this disease it would be enough only to set off. If he proved to everybody that after such experiences you could start and cover all the distance, but not necessarily to do everything to win. Still, not mixing it with sport – the way he was struggling with the disease and how he showed his determination makes him definitely a great inspiration, and many people were drawing strength for themselves, despite the fact that both by myself and by history he will be remembered from this worse side.

Magdalena: He certainly inspired many people who trusted that they could do something while being sick, so it was good. As far as doping is concerned, well he is only a man, nobody is a saint and everybody makes mistakes, so I suppose that he might be received rather positively, especially that he was not stubbornly denying, but he admitted taking doping even though he was risking loss of reputation.

Anna II: Generally, I am an adversary of doping substances, and the disease or its treatment does not excuse anything. But I am able to understand the mechanism driving him. At first, he was young and healthy and he was the winner. The disease deprived him of everything, and he, as I suppose an ambitious person, wanted to return to the top. For him it was not important in what way.

Anna III: I consider his case in this way that, on one hand, he was breaking rules; on the other hand, however, he did a lot of good. If e.g. he inspired millions of people to analyse or take up any physical activity, then he did more good than bad.

Sławomir: I am convinced that after his cancer experience Armstrong achieved most of his successes due to doping. So, I think that for humanity he did more good than evil. Anyhow, such a person is a good man only until he admits his fraud. There is no forgiveness.

Karol: I think that Armstrong did a good job for humanity. Steroids as such are obviously prohibited, but they will not make a man the world champion. It is hard work, but simply the effects come easier and faster. For me, though, first of all, he inspired many.

Janina: As far as Armstrong is concerned, I think that it would be better for the world if he had never admitted taking those doping substances. I suppose it helped him but because it was not a fair game, he should have kept it to himself.

Wojciech: Armstrong has to come to terms with himself in the issue of taking such and not other substances to achieve his goal and others, particularly the sick ones, cannot refer his case to themselves. Besides, things are frequently seemingly unavailable to realise them successfully.

Piotr: The vast majority of sportsmen at the highest professional level take doping substances. At those times, the whole peloton might have used them, but only he was winning. I support him one hundred percent, in a sense that nobody distinguished negatively from the crowd.

Piotr II: But considering the huge sums of money which were lying on the table of professionals, I know that by doping Armstrong was just making his chance equal with the others who were also taking. It is hard to say how I myself would behave if I had so much to gain financially. And at my activity without money, I would never allow myself to take anything only to reach the final, let's say 15 minutes earlier.

Zdzisława: This cyclist, first of all, did good service to society and in particular to its sick representatives who saw that one cannot surrender and has to strive. What he had done

before was valuable. And as far as his confessions are concerned, one may say that they tarnished his image, but others will perceive him less than a hero but more than an average mortal who has his faults. What acts in his favour is that he did not lie stubbornly but at a certain moment, he decided to be sincere.

Bożena: Despite the fact that he hurt himself, in my opinion he was a very good role model. If I had heard about him then, I would say: If he manages I will manage, too. And after some time, if he admitted, I would remain with the awareness that under influence of his accomplishments I had managed and his present confessions about doping would not change this fact. So, I can say the advantages of this situation cover the disadvantages.

DISCUSSION

The opinions about Lance Armstrong's life choices presented by the respondents were ambiguous. However, their vast majority found more understanding for the cyclist's attitude. 13 persons out of 23 respondents expressed clearly positive opinions about him. Such terms dominated in favourable commentaries as: more good than bad, goal, inspiration, sincerity, icon, hero. A clear shift of accents towards the assessment of victorious fight with cancer and determination necessary for return to great sport after disease could be noticed in the responses. In this aspect, admitting to doping remains supplement to the man's biography who as any other makes mistakes in life and he is entitled to it. His opinions were expressed by people concentrating first of all on other than sport life dimensions.

Seven persons opinionating Armstrong, beside good sides of his attitude, also indicated their negative response. Katarzyna perceives herself as somebody who is not assessing others and she considers doping used by Armstrong as escape from the disease. Maciej declaring lack of support for forbidden doping praises the idea of physical activity which Lance implemented into society. Joanna clearly separates in her opinion on the issues of doping from struggle with the disease. Piotr II does not identify himself with the cyclist, mentioning at the same time that he was not the only one in illegal support. In his opinion, it is hard to find the innocent ones in this sport discipline. Wojciech gives a very interesting response, negating the necessity of social judgment of Armstrong and the necessity of his confrontation with himself. Leszek's opinion can be treated as intermediate between the positive and the neutral opinion, which is more impersonal than referring directly to Armstrong. Antoni's opinion can be thus placed between negation of the choice of doping and acknowledgement that everybody has a right to individual assessment of this sportsman. Andrzej speaks about the lack of possibility to lose authority due to lack of the previous inspiration by him. From this opinion, it is the hardest to conclude the assessment of the cyclist and we can notice that Andrzej simply avoids it.

Among the analysed persons, we can also find two opinions in which there were no positive motives. Janina, ignoring Armstrong's achievements, concentrates on the fact of unnecessary, in her opinion, revealing of the dark side of his career. Sławomir seems to get even further, thinking that Armstrong achieved his position in the sport world due to doping.

Summing up the gathered responses, we should notice warm tones dominating in them. They are also confirmation that the opinions concerning each situation in which the subject may experience an inner conflict will never be unequivocal. Neither will the degree of engagement in sport and recreational activity have any importance nor the fact whether one was affected by cancer.

CONCLUSION

Social reality is a resultant of various behaviours or attitudes which bring new consequences. It entails responsibility that is a moral or legal duty to account for own or somebody else's deeds. Readiness to account for one's own deeds should be the higher; our behaviour has a wider range. Regarding this, responsibility of an authority should be much higher than of a common man. However, it is not always so. It is hard to blame the authority for misinterpretations and abuse of his work, achievements, opinions or points of view. But even in this situation of personal authority, an individual who has wider knowledge, showing certain features, should be aware of potential consequences of his behaviour. If taking responsibility for own acts is of legal character it involves constraint external rules. In the case of moral obligation, this constraint should result from an inner set of rules. In this situation, the word "duty" loses its meaning and it should take on the form of "readiness". Legal responsibility refers to legal consequences such as, e.g. public apologies, ban on performing the profession or custodial sentence. Moral responsibility does not involve similar sanctions. On the one hand, we may impose it upon authority; on the other hand, however, there is no chance to instil it and to find it objectively when it has to result only from the inner code of a given individual. It is easy, including authorities, to accuse somebody of lack of moral responsibility for his activities. It is even easier to undermine the position which had been built for years. It is, however, the price for being somebody who has to show the way to others.

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