

Men's Health

TONS OF
USEFUL STUFF

Say it Ain't So, Floyd!

Would you cheat, if you could get away with it?

By: **Mark Harrison**

About a week ago, the *Men's Health* editorial office was buzzing around the news of Floyd Landis's improbable comeback at the Tour de France. Landis had withered in the heat the day before, lost the yellow jersey, and been written off by the experts. Now he was motoring over mountains, rising from the ashes, and re-writing cycling history books right before our eyes. "Have we ever seen anything like this?" asked one editor. "Could this be considered one of the most impressive individual athletic performances ever?" asked another.

Yesterday, the tone of conversation was a bit different as we gathered for lunch. A recent flurry of news reports had revealed that an "adverse analytical finding" had been found in Landis's "A" sample, and there was a possibility that our new champion was a fraud. This time someone asked, "How are we supposed to trust these guys?"

If you could cheat at something at your job, that would advance your career, would you risk it? [Join the discussion](#)

[Do you need a moral makeover](#), or is your character up to snuff?

That question might seem especially valid considering the emotional roller coaster that American sports fans have ridden in the past few years. From baseball and Barry Bonds' drug woes to Olympic champion Tyler Hamilton's [two year ban](#) to [the mountain of circumstantial evidence](#) piling in support of Lance Armstrong's supposed drug use (Armstrong has never tested positive), and now the possible [fall-and-rise-and-fall of Floyd Landis](#), you do have to wonder how we continue to get duped by these athletes.

But when you really consider the circumstances, isn't the better question, "Why do we have faith in the first place?" This past Friday, the co-author of *Freakonomics*, Stephen Dubner proved to be a bit of a fortuneteller [on his blog](#) when he hinted at the inherent lack of logic in believing that Americans could compete cleanly in a sport like cycling that has [proven to be so helplessly dirty](#).

Our disappointment and disbelief in these circumstances makes very little sense when we confront the reality of doping in sport. What is that reality? *When elite athletes don't think they'll get caught, they cheat. Period.* That was the conclusion Dr. Bob Gordon reached just over a decade ago when he surveyed 198 U.S. Olympic athletes and asked them whether or not they would take a performance-enhancing drug that would help them win gold if they knew for certain they wouldn't get caught. One hundred and ninety-five said they would. Disturbing right? But get this: more than half of those athletes said they would still take the drug even if they knew that it would eventually kill them. This is not just a doping trend that we're talking about; this is human nature.

"With everything at stake in elite and professional sport -- all of the big-ticket items dangled in front of elite athletes -- I think it's human nature that these guys want to get an edge," says Steven Ungerleider, Ph.D., author of *Faust's Gold: Inside the East German Doping Machine* and sports psychology consultant to the World Anti-Doping Agency. "The tragedy is that we look for heroes and role-models in sport; we love these stories, we need these stories, we want our children to be inspired by these stories. But now -- with what's happening and what's about to happen in baseball -- we're about to see a complete paradigm shift in the overall perception and trust level of elite and professional athletes."

Landis's positive test is not the final word on his innocence or guilt. There's a chance -- a good one I hope -- that this time next week, his B sample will test clean or that faulty testing methods will negate his positive A sample. For now though, the luster is off his victory. He finds himself an athlete far from proven guilty in a sport proven to be far from innocent, and that's a tricky situation to be in.

The real victim here are the next incarnations of Floyd Landis and Barry Bonds that are riding so fast, or slugging so

hard, redefining the possibilities of the human potential. Because at some point, none of us will be able to believe that the human spirit is capable of such possibility. And when that happens, chances are they'll be a little bit less excitement around the water cooler.

[http://www.menshealth.com/cda/article.do
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