

Ditch plan to disregard all athletic world records before 2005, urge experts

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The proposal by the European Athletics Council to disregard all athletic world records set before 2005 should be abandoned, insist experts in an editorial published online in the *British Journal of Sports Medicine*.

The proposal, which has now been put to the world governing body, the International Amateur Athletics Federation (IAAF), aims to redress the consequences of past undetected doping violations that may have helped set some of the "least attainable world records," they say.

But it is unfair to those athletes who legitimately achieved world records without the aid of performance enhancing drugs, as well as being "overly simplistic and ill conceived," contend UK and Australian sports science experts.

A major justification for the European Athletics Council's proposal is that urine and blood samples taken to check for doping have only been stored since 2005, they write.

Although this means that world records achieved through cheating will be purged, memorable and inspirational performances from clean athletes, such as Jonathan Edwards (triple jump), Mike Powell (long jump), and Paula Radcliffe (marathon) would also be removed from history.

"It seems a double punishment for clean athletes who have competed against and overcome drugs cheats to now lose their world records," argue the authors.

And there are other flaws in this plan, they suggest. Many failed drugs tests have previously not been upheld because of factors, such as cross-contamination, poor storage and possible degradation of samples. The authors point out that all of these are more likely as time passes.

Therefore, to try and prove a doping violation for a sample held since 2005 and expect a prosecution might not only be unrealistic but also potentially open to legal challenge, they warn.

And the participation of intersex athletes may yet call into question other [world records](#) as there is no longer any limit on these athletes' use of testosterone, despite the undoubted performance advantage it confers, they add.

It is clear that doping hasn't stopped. A 2015 World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) report detailed a Russian state-sponsored [doping](#) programme and stated that the London Olympic Games "'were in a sense, sabotaged by the admission of athletes who should have not been competing," they write.

But it is impossible to prove retrospectively the innocence of individual athletes who set records before 2005, the authors insist.

"The initiative by European Athletics is certainly provocative, but it stains the reputation of all athletes pre-2005 by introducing an arbitrary threshold date that may need to be reset in future as new detection methods emerge," they write, branding the initiative as an attempt "to address the serious issue of drugs in sport with an overly simplistic and ill-conceived strategy."

More information: Editorial: Proposal to disregard athletics world records prior to 2005: a radical and misjudged initiative, *British Journal of Sports Medicine* (2017). [DOI: 10.1136/bjsports-2017-098307](https://doi.org/10.1136/bjsports-2017-098307)

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