

## ANTI-DOPING: THE FRAUD BEHIND THE STAGE

By: [Sandro Donati](#)

**The head of research at the Italian Olympic Committee (CONI), Sandro Donati, recounts his personal story about twenty years of fighting against doping in Italian and international sport. An unbelievable story which nevertheless is true.**

### 1. Introduction to the doping cave: 1981, I meet prof. Conconi

Just a few days after becoming National Coach for 800m and 1500m male runners, I met Prof. Conconi at a scientific congress where I was a speaker. He was informal, as if we had known each other for a long time, and asked to speak to me. He congratulated me on my new appointment and told me the Italian Athletics Federation had asked him to advise me of their project.



*Sandro Donati has worked from within the Italian system on putting an end to doping in sports.  
Photo: Niels Nyholm*

He had elaborated a new system, improving upon the one used in Finland, for the transfusion of selected red blood cells, which were stored at -90, enriched with particular substances and then transfused two or three days before an important event. He said: "it means an improvement of 3 to 5 seconds for 1500m races, 15 to 20 seconds for 5000m races and 30 to 40 seconds for 10,000m races."

I was astounded as I suddenly understood that doping really did exist and that the rumours concerning the Italian medals at the Moscow Olympics were true! But I did not let on; I immediately decided I would not let him understand what my position was so that I would be able to gather as much information as I could.

He went on to say: "in the next few weeks we shall carry out a number of field tests and then draw the blood - a total of 1000 c.c. on two separate occasions - of the athletes you consider more promising in view of the oncoming Athens European Championships".

I made no comment and just said I would be available for the field tests.

I was very upset when I got home as I realised that in the new environment I had just entered, high level performances were to be obtained through any means. But was there anyone I could take into my confidence?

### 2. 1981 - 1984 blood transfusions

I decided the best thing would be to tell everything to the athletes themselves. I called a meeting and illustrated the proposal, adding that for my part, I would never accept this type of procedure, even though it had not been expressly forbidden by the IOC, because it had all the characteristics of doping. I told them they were absolutely free to choose, but that if they were to accept I would resign and go back to my desk at CONI.

All seven of them said it would never occur to them to accept.

A few days later, Prof. Conconi sent his assistants to perform the field tests and I carefully took note of all the data they recorded for each athlete. I then processed these data and found that the test elaborated by Conconi and extensively publicized on international scientific publications was by no means as significant as he claimed.

I therefore decided on a counterattack; I refuted the test thus putting off the moment in which I would

have to give the more important reply, the one about the blood transfusions; a practice that probably killed the young middle distance runner, Fulvio Costa.

Prof. Conconi waited for a few weeks and then wrote to Primo Nebiolo who was President of Italian Athletics Federation as well of the International Athletics Federation to report my lack of co-operation.

I was summoned by the Head Coach, Enzo Rossi, who very urbanely tried to persuade me; I firmly refused saying that if he wanted to perform blood transfusions on the athletes in my charge, he would first have to find another coach to substitute for me. I knew I had the full support of the athletes and of their respective club coach. He did not insist but said he hoped I would change my mind.

Just before the Los Angeles Olympics, Italian Athletics Federation officials became more determined; the Head Coach summoned my best athletes and asked them whether they wanted to improve their performance in view of the Olympic Games through blood transfusion. I was present in this occasion but had been asked not to express an opinion. All the seven athletes refused!

The Head Coach left the room in a rage.

After a few days, behind my back, Prof. Conconi invited two of these athletes to visit the University of Ferrara and, once again, tried to persuade them to try blood transfusion without letting me know about it. Both of them refused and came to talk to me that same evening as soon as they returned to the Tirrenia Training Centre.

I protested heatedly but was told I would be relieved from office immediately after the Olympic Games. All the other National Coaches, so had the athletes (5000m, 10,000m, marathon and walk races, Men and Women) had accepted blood transfusion.

It was then that I understood how, when it comes to doping, the key figure is the coach; it is not really a question of honest or dishonest athletes but of honest or dishonest coaches.

During that same period, apart from the blood transfusions organized by Prof. Conconi, Italian Athletics Federation was also implementing another project with Prof. Conconi and with the complicity of one of the major Italian research institutes; the administration of testosterone and of anabolic steroids to athletes specializing in different Athletics events.

These procedures were of course kept secret; I heard of them only because I was still working with the National Team. None of my colleagues opposed them, in fact they were very pleased that the Federation provided them with "methods" that would allow them to achieve better results and so improve their reputation.

I did not know how to organize a movement of opposition as I had to be careful not to lose my job with CONI.

A dear friend of mine, Renato Marino, suggested I speak to his uncle who was a Member of Parliament. I was very agitated on my way to this appointment but I managed to explain clearly just how dangerous the situation had become with CONI supporting the doping methods carried out by Italian Athletics Federation.

He introduced me to a younger Member of Parliament, Adriana Ceci, who was haematologist and immediately took this issue to heart. Together we prepared a question in Parliament to the Minister of Health. The Ministers reply came after a few weeks - blood transfusions aimed at improving sports performances were outlawed and defined blood doping.

The reaction of the entire sports system was particularly violent and led to heated debates on the major newspapers and on television. Italian sports officials denied that blood transfusions had been performed on Italian athletes in view of the Los Angeles Olympics, but they had to acknowledge the letter sent by the Ministry of Health and agree to ensure that blood transfusions would not be performed in the future.

Also the IOC promptly declared that blood transfusions were forbidden, and this method was officially denominated blood doping. One little move of a seemingly powerless individual had delivered a sensational blow to the propagators of doping - it was unbelievable!

### **3. 1986, the discovery of doping diaries**

A physician and former decathlete by name of Daniele Faraggiana had been instructed by the Athletics Federation and by the Weightlifting Federation to "treat" the athletes of their respective National Teams - mostly with anabolic steroids and with testosterone. People talked about it but there was no proof. Proof could come only from photostats of the documents he always carried with him. Far from easy, but at long last it was done!

The documents listed everything: the names of all the athletes involved (between them the shot put Olympic Champion in Los Angeles, Alessandro Andrei), the drugs that had been administered, the respective dosage, the negative effects on their health, the targets that had been set, even the "philosophy" behind the whole process.

It also emerged that the Anti-Doping Laboratory in Rome, duly accredited by IOC, was used for a totally different purpose: to establish after how long traces of these drugs would disappear from the urine samples of the individual athletes.

The documents also proved that Dr. Faraggiana was regularly paid by the two Federations to administer these drugs and that he provided forbidden substances also to Prof. Conconi

### **4. 1987, an interview to L'Espresso**

The excellent results obtained at the European Championships, Mei and the 400-metre runners, induced the Federation to increase the number of disciplines in my charge; I became National Coach for the 100m, 200m, 400m, both relay races and the 800m.

In March, two of my sprinters, Pier Francesco Pavoni and Antonio Ullo, placed second and third in the 60m dash at the European Indoor Championships. We then began to prepare for the World Championships that were to be held in Rome during the month of August.

Taking advantage of the fact that these achievements had given me credit, I released a number of controversial interviews on the issue of doping. Also Pavoni strongly attacked Athletics Federation.

### **5. 1987, the faked jump**

The day before the beginning of the World Championships, the secretary of the Field Judges told me that the Long Jump event was going to be arranged so as to favour the Italian athlete Giovanni Evangelisti. She said to me "a jump of 8m 38cm will be arranged for him so that he will be third after Carl Lewis and Emmian".

I was at the Stadio Olimpico and watched the competition very carefully. Evangelisti's first trial was a no jump, the following ones were quite modest but the distance given was every time over 8 metres. Finally, the fifth jump; a very poor performance, the spectators were disappointed and so was Evangelisti himself.

As he was getting dressed, one of the Judges went to him and obviously told him to turn around and look at the electronic scoreboard; after a few seconds it showed 8 metres and 37 centimetres; the exact result that had been established beforehand.

I went home in rage; I could not understand how they had managed it and it drove me mad that they would probably get away with it once again. I did not sleep all night and in the morning I went to the police station and reported everything.

When the newspapers took up my accusation, CONI started a separate enquiry. Neither of these investigations seemed to be getting anywhere; on the contrary all the witnesses denied everything. My situation was becoming extremely difficult as CONI was ready to sack me.

Everything around me appeared to be crumbling. First Athletics Federation withdrew my appointment as National Coach, then the Civil Court of Rome decided my accusations had no foundation and dismissed the case; the Committee established for the CONI investigation was about to do the same.

With the few friends still ready to help me, I stubbornly continued to look for proof of the fraud until I found a young Field Judge, who trembled even as he spoke, but told me he had overheard the other judges when they agreed to arrange the fifth jump. He said: "I think they recorded the distance, by electronic instruments, before Evangelisti jumped".

I now had a clue and I started looking for the television recordings of the event. A journalist friend of mine agreed to let me watch hours of film recorded with various cameras. After a long day in front of the video I finally found what I was looking for. The film showed clearly how the Field Judge went to the pit, placed the marker, focused the Seiko apparatus, returned to the pit, retrieved the marker and then waited for Evangelisti to jump.

Ironically, that jump was particularly poor, about 7 metres and 85 centimetres, quite 50 centimetres below the distance which was officially measured.

#### **6. 1989, a book: Campioni senza valore**

I decided to set down the details of this nine-year struggle in a book, *Campioni senza valore* (Worthless Champions), to illustrate how the struggle had constantly risen in level and how I had encountered unimaginable levels of corruption.

The book was presented to the press in one of the major bookshops in Rome. Quite a number of journalists and other authors attended, and during the first week the sales were very successful.

Then, all of a sudden, the publisher stopped providing the bookshops and I was submerged by telephone calls and letters from all over Italy: nobody could not find my book. The publisher told me they had problems with the distribution but that everything would be solved shortly. Nothing happened; my book disappeared for ever.

#### **7. 1992, the appointment to scientific anti-doping committee**

After four years of exile, which turned out to be useful to purge my mind of all the poison and tiredness I had accumulated, the President of CONI summoned me and told me he thought I deserved to be rewarded for all I had done for sports. He therefore offered me to become Head of CONI's Research Department (Settore Ricerca e Sperimentazione).

Shortly afterwards, as doping was becoming a major issue, CONI created a Scientific Anti-doping Committee, which was quite ambiguous since some of the members, such as Prof. Conconi, and the Heads of Rome's Anti-doping Laboratory, were heavily involved in doping activities. The President of CONI invited me to sit on this Committee.

It was obvious that my name would be used to give credit to the Committee. I thought it over and, in the end, decided to accept as the time had come to oppose doping from an official position and from within the system.

#### **8. 1992-1994, science, conscience, logic and information**

To begin with, I introduced anti-doping tests to be performed without prior notice on Italian athletes of all sports disciplines.

I then suggested to install a telephone line on which anyone could call, toll-free, to ask for information on medical or pharmacological aspects, or to provide any type of information on events related to doping. The telephone number was widely publicised on the media.

I also suggested to reduce the length of the suspension for athletes who had proved positive at anti-doping tests but were willing to co-operate by giving complete information on who had introduced them to doping and provided the forbidden drugs.

At the same time, I obtained the IOC official statistics on the number of positive tests detected in each one of the 21 accredited Anti-doping Laboratories throughout the world. The data clearly showed that the Rome Laboratory was way behind all the others with a ridiculously low number of positive tests. I pondered over the possible meaning of these statistics and then asked to meet both the President and the General Secretary of CONI to advise them of this situation.

When the meetings of the Scientific Committee began, it became immediately apparent that it was not an assembly of saints and virgins. As Secretary of the Committee, I was careful to instruct my collaborators to take very detailed minutes of each meeting so as to record the exact details of all discussions. I mentioned earlier that Prof. Conconi sat on this Committee. Conconi was always particularly nice to me,

nearly sickening.

A number of incidents occurred to change the atmosphere and re-establish the distance between the various members of the Committee.

Right from the beginning I questioned the work done by the Rome Laboratory on the basis of the IOC statistics; the responsables were not able to find a reasonable explanation for the ridiculously low number of positive tests.

A few months later, I asked Prof. Conconi to perform anti-doping tests on urine and blood samples of a professional cyclist, Francesco Moser, who was "assisted" by Conconi, and was preparing to go to Mexico City to try for a new one-hour track record. Prof. Conconi refused and the other members of the Committee voted against these tests...

Then, Prof. Conconi submitted to the Committee a request of 150,000 US \$ to finance a research project aimed at the detection of erythropoietin. His request was supported by the President of CONI, Dr. Pescante. I showed Conconis project to chemistry experts who concluded it could not possibly be successful since the technical bases were wrong. The request was therefore refused much to the President's annoyance.

After the refusal of Prof. Conconis request the President of CONI lost interest in the Committee and did not even answer my proposal to organize an International Contest for a method to detect erythropoietin. I realized that the time had come to let this Committee die out as it was ambiguous and I was being used as a screen.

### **9. 1994, the EPO dossier**

Before the Committee was closed down, however, I decided to investigate closely, and very secretly, on the incidence of doping among professional cyclists.

I identified twelve key-figures of the cycling milieu, athletes, physicians, officials, and spoke to them assuring that the information would remain strictly anonymous, as my interest lay in collecting information that I would then report to the President and to the General Secretary of CONI in order to establish adequate measures.

After four months of investigation, I arrived at extraordinary conclusions:

1. anti-doping tests on cyclists were very rarely positive because they used new substances, peptidic hormones, which cannot be traced with urine tests;
2. in particular, the erythropoietin hormone also known as Epo, was being used ever more frequently;
3. the idea of using Epo for athletes involved in endurance sports, and therefore also for cyclists, had clearly come from Prof. Conconi, who had been nominated member of the IOC Medical Committee some years before;
4. Prof. Conconi and his assistants had signed very important contracts with professional cyclist clubs to administer Epo to the cyclists;
5. at that time the production of Epo was quite limited and the substance was provided only to the hospitals who treated nephrology and the cyclists therefore obtained it through illegal channels;
6. the cost of Epo on the black market was very high (about 150 US\$ per dose); there were also other very expensive hormones, such as Gh, or Igf1; in other words the doping market was becoming as lucrative as the narcotics market;

I wrote out a 14-page report and sent it, complete with a protocol letter, to the President and to the General Secretary of CONI. The President did not even answer it. The General Secretary sent for me and said he was very worried.

Time passed but nothing more was said about my report.

### **10. 1994-1996, reflux**

The only outcome of my report on Epo was that the President of CONI stopped talking to me, while the General Secretary talked of other matters; he also mentioned that I should make better use of my

capacities, instead of concentrating only on doping.

In the meantime the media had forgotten all about doping and were busy magnifying the performance of this or that champion athlete. Page-long interviews with Prof. Conconi filled all the newspapers.

The President of the IOC Medical Committee, Prince de Merode, accorded Prof. Conconi the financial support that had been refused by CONI's Scientific Committee! Prof. Conconi therefore posed as the great champion of the struggle against doping while he actually administered the forbidden substances in his laboratory!

### **11. 1996, the EPO dossier reappears**

October 1996 marked the beginning of a period the President of CONI and other high sports officials are not likely to forget.

One of the major Italian sports daily newspapers, La Gazzetta dello Sport, began a series of articles, rather sterile and unenthusiastic, on doping; I just looked on and smiled as this happened after a whole two years of complete silence. After the sixth or seventh instalment, the Journalists of the Gazzetta asked me to help them. I jokingly pointed out that they had not needed my help for the past two years, nor for the other instalments.

I gave them the name of a physician in Florence, who for many years had been in charge of the national women road cyclists team, and who had contributed significantly to my report on the incidence of Epo doping among professional cyclists.

The two journalists went to Florence where Dr. Flavio Alessandri gave them a number of details; he also underlined that he had already given these same details to me, nearly two and a half years before, when I was preparing a report for the President of CONI. The two journalists knew something and came to me asking about the report. I said "ask the President of CONI, I delivered it to him more than two years ago".

The President first tried to deny the existence of such a report, and then admitted to having received it, but could not explain why he had kept it secret without doing anything about it.

All hell broke loose. I was in Russia for a scientific congress but my collaborators informed me of the scandal that had followed the publication of these facts first on the Gazzetta and then on other newspapers. CONI was being asked to answer for:

- a) having ignored the heavy accusations contained in the dossier;
- b) not having reported these accusations to the Court of Law;
- c) not having interrupted, or even discussed CONI's collaboration with Prof. Conconi's Centres.

Many Italian and international newspapers contacted me; I was ready for the press campaign that followed and after so many years of struggle, I knew how to manage it.

The dossier was taken up by the press and by television in Italy and abroad; in particular L'Equipe, the major French sports daily dedicated the front page to this issue.

### **12. 1996, the international setting and extra-sports context**

During the various conversations I had with journalists from all over the world, I was careful to keep in mind the following concepts:

- a) doping is not a strictly Italian problem but an international one;
- b) my reason for talking to them was not only to denounce what was happening in Italy, but mainly to raise the issue at an international level;
- c) the root of the problem is international; the pharmaceutical companies which produce these substances are multinational companies; the illegal import and export of these substances is managed by an international racket (one example is via Internet);

d) doping is no longer restricted to high level athletes; for a long time now industrialised production of these drugs and the widespread distribution through a network of peddlers, has turned doping into a social issue;

e) the IOC has lost its struggle against doping, through lack of a clear analysis of the situation and of the capacity to intervene on a practical level. The anti-doping testing techniques have practically not progressed from 1980 onwards, as against the enormous development of doping methods.

f) consequently, extra-sports institutions should be made aware of the problem and take the necessary measures to face it.

### **13. 1996, CONI, the Italian parliament and the magistrate**

As I said, the discovery of the dossier and of the fact that it had been kept secret for over two years created a great sensation.

The attacks of the media were so pressing that even CONI had to take action. I was summoned by the Committee of Enquiry and my hearing lasted over five hours.

The Italian Parliament took an interest in these events and formed a Commission of Enquiry who summoned both the President of Coni, Dr. Pescante, and Dr. Santilli President of the Sports Physicians Federation. They were questioned as to the relationship between CONI and Prof. Conconi of the University of Ferrara. Dr. Pescante lied to them saying that the relationship with Prof. Conconi had been ended a few years before, when Prof. Conconi's activities had begun to create suspicion.

There was also criminal investigation; in the month of November 1996, three investigators from the Criminal Investigation Department came to my office in CONI, asking to speak to me. This interview lasted a whole thirteen hours.

Also Following the echo of this affair even the International Cyclist Union (UCI) had to take adequate measures, and started preparing tests on blood samples. An haematocrit limit was set for the value: 50% for men, 48% for women.

### **14. 1997, the Di Terlizzi case**

After a few weeks of intense excitement, the media lost interest in doping once again; nearly no articles in the press, no debates on television. My telephone stopped ringing.

Also the CONI officials around me were silent. Then they organized the terrible coup de grace.

Anna Maria Di Terlizzi, a young 100m hurdler I had been training for a few years, was tested positive for caffeine on February 7th 1997, after an indoor competition. The caffeine level found in the urine sample was very high, nearly double the value established by IOC.

When the girl told me what had happened, I asked if she had taken any medicament. She answered she was on the pill, but had not taken anything except a cappuccino at breakfast and a cup of coffee after lunch, but the competition had taken place hours later, in the evening. The caffeine value found in the urine sample corresponded to about thirty cups of coffee taken at the same time.

After a week, the second sample of urine was tested in the presence of an expert of our choice.

Right at the beginning, the Head of the Rome Anti-doping Laboratory asked our expert if he chose the normal testing procedure, which would last several hours, or the shortened procedure. The expert was very surprised and answered, that it was, of course, necessary to repeat exactly the procedure used for the first test, the one that had proved positive.

Before the end of the qualitative analysis, the Head of the Laboratory asked our expert if he wanted to go out for a cup of coffee. He refused and noticed that the Head of the Laboratory and his collaborators were becoming increasingly nervous. When the qualitative analysis was over, the result was astounding: no caffeine peak at all!

The expert called me on his cellular phone; I had been waiting for that call all morning and the news left me breathless; but I still couldn't believe it. I asked how long it would take to have the results of the quantitative analysis; about an hour, he said. That hour seemed never to end. At last he called me with the results; Anna Maria's urine sample contained the traces of one cappuccino and one cup of coffee.

At last, it dawned on me; they had prepared an ambush, the worst possible one: they had tried to destroy my reputation, my credibility. I realised then that I had been dealing with really malicious people.

The following day, and for a few days after that, the Italian media gave quite relevant coverage to this incident and accused the higher sports officials of having organized a fraud to get rid of me. Unfortunately, the international media did not understand the significance of what had been planned; they did not connect the trap prepared for me to my untiring struggle against doping.

### **15. 1997-1998, everybody has forgotten**

There was also a question in Parliament asking the Minister of Sports to assure that those who had organized this fraud would be called to answer for it.

The President of CONI tried to clear himself of suspicion and the only result was the substitution of the Head of Rome's Anti-doping Laboratory.

As usual, the media lost interest after a few days and the President of CONI, furious because he had failed to get rid of me, took his revenge by cutting off my Department's funds, so that all our work came to a standstill, and by isolating me completely.

### **16. 1998, the scandal of the Rome Anti-doping laboratory**

In the month of August 1998, Zdenek Zeman, coach of a first division soccer team, A.S. Roma, declared in an interview that doping was widespread among soccer players. A great scandal ensued as the foreign press took up the news. The usual scenario: a sudden and totally superficial interest, no real understanding of the facts nor of their significance, followed by an equally sudden loss of interest, boredom, perhaps, or calculation.

The Public Attorney of Turin, Raffaele Guariniello, started an investigation; he summoned Zeman first, and then me, on the following day. He asked me to tell him all I knew about doping among soccer players. I answered that the question should be worded differently; it should be: "how are anti-doping tests performed on soccer players?"

In the following days the press reported that during my hearing I had accused the Rome Laboratory of using irregular testing procedures. The President of CONI and the President of the Sports Physicians Federation, reacted violently; my declarations were false, they said, and I would lose my job at CONI unless I could prove the facts.

And proof was found! The premises of the Rome Laboratory were searched, by order of the Public Attorney, and, as I had said, it was established that the anti-doping tests performed on soccer players did not include tests for the detection of anabolic steroids or of the other hormones!

The scandal became international and grew to unprecedented proportions; a number of the events that followed will prove decisive in the struggle against doping, namely:

1) the Italian Government appointed a Committee of Enquiry, headed by the Vice President of the Consiglio Superiore della Magistratura, the highest judicial authority in Italy;

2) at long last, the Public Attorney of Turin forced the IOC to take notice of what was happening; the Rome Anti-doping Laboratory accredited by IOC was closed down.

### **17. 1998, the president of CONI resigns from office**

The President of CONI, Mario Pescante, who had denied charges right to the end and accused me of lying, was found guilty by the Committee of Enquiry appointed by the Government and had to resign from office!

### **18. 1998, criminal investigations begin**



As I mentioned earlier, investigations on doping were opened in a number of Italian cities. It would be impossible here to list them all, I shall therefore mention only the more important ones:

- 1) the Public Attorney of Torino investigated the Rome Anti-doping Laboratory, the first division soccer team Juventus and Marco Pantani.
- 2) the Public Attorney of Bologna investigated one of the cities chemists which was charged with import, production and illicit sale of forbidden drugs; the names of important customers were revealed;
- 3) the Public Attorney of Ferrara investigated Prof. Conconi, in particular his twenty-year relationship with CONI and with various Italian Sports Federations;
- 4) the Public Attorney of Venezia investigated the incidence of doping among the younger athletes and came to shocking conclusions;
- 5) the Public Attorney of Trento investigated the Pantani case in Giro d'Italia;
- 6) the Public Attorney of Brescia investigated the higher officials of the Italian National Cyclist Team and charged them with the acquisition of forbidden drugs in Switzerland.

### **19. 1998-1999, work on a new anti-doping law begins**

The bill on doping was drawn up by the Senate, the higher branch of the Italian Parliament. It combined the better points of six different drafts on the issue; this proved to be a time-consuming process and the bills procedure in Parliament was accelerated only as a result of the very serious doping offences discovered in August 1998.

I participated in the various steps of the preparation of this bill which in September 1999 was passed to the Chamber of Deputies where it will be examined by the Health Committee. I was appointed consultant to the Committee by the President of the Committee itself as work on the final draft of the bill will begin within the next few weeks.

### **20. 1998-1999, from the scandals to the Lausanne fiasco**

When IOC decided to oppose the diffusion of doping, it set up a Medical Committee, and appointed, none other than Prince Alexandre De Merode as its President; not a physiologist or a chemist, no, just a member of the aristocracy.

This occurred 28 years ago, and the President had plenty of time to prove his inadequacy: in the implementation of anti-doping methods, in the organization of the Anti-doping Laboratories, in the selection of his collaborators.

Halfway through his seemingly unending mandate, De Merode fell under the spell of an Italian biochemist, Prof. Conconi, who was strongly supported by the powerful Italian IOC members. To please them, he appointed Prof. Conconi member of the Medical Committee and readily confirmed, in public, his absolute faith in Prof. Conconi even though this man was accused of doping by the public attorney of Ferrara.

To show his gratitude, Prof. Conconi arranged for the University of Ferrara to confer an honorary degree, in medicine, of course, to Prince Alexandre De Merode.

While the CONI Scientific Anti-doping Committee refused Prof. Conconi's request for funds to study a method for the detection of Epo in urine samples in 1994, the highly competent President of the IOC Medical Committee readily accorded these funds.

A series of public declarations began: De Merode and Conconi jointly declared that the test would be ready "at the beginning of 1996 ... in June ... it is ready, it is a question only of final details ... will be ready for use at the end of 1996 ... in June 1997..." Finally, De Merode had to admit, in great confusion during a press conference that the project had been a total failure.

In January 1999, with the Lausanne Conference dedicated to the struggle against doping, the IOC made a desperate attempt to recover its credibility which had been significantly undermined both by the scandals on the venues of the Olympic Games, and by the fact that doping was increasingly widespread among

athletes. The Conference was attended by many Ministers of Sports, but it backfired as various Ministers openly attacked the IOC for not having implemented an adequate strategy to oppose the diffusion of doping.

### **21. 1998-2000, doping from the producer to the consumer**

During these same years, doping evolved considerably; at first, more than twenty years ago, it was limited to high level athletes and many Sports Federations in various countries tolerated doping, in some cases even protected and encouraged this plague.

There was a great demand among athletes for Gh; it was first extracted from cadavers, and later, after 1990, synthesized. The multinational pharmaceutical companies were made aware of the enormous potential of this market. The same happened with Epo after 1993. High level athletes acted as testimonials for the effectiveness of these substances which were then sold to an increasing number of amateur athletes and then even youngsters as the network of complaisant physicians and peddlers developed.

The entity of the turnover (no less than forty thousand million US dollars a year only for the illicit drugs and ten times as much for the so-called dietary supplements) could not but attract criminal organizations. For my part, I frequently pointed that this danger.

The two following examples confirm that the fears were not unfounded:

- 1) in September of 1999, a large operation of the Italian police led to the seizure of relevant quantities of doping substances and to various arrests; evidence clearly pointed to an international racket in the hands of the Mafia;
- 2) in May of 1999 a commissioned burglary occurred in Nicosia (Cyprus); four million and five hundred thousand doses of Epo were taken; according to the investigators these were to be sold on the black market to athletes specializing in endurance disciplines;
- 3) in January 1999 in Milan, the Police received an anonymous telephone call and seized various bags containing 35 kilograms of testosterone (...!); enough to dope 700,000 athletes for one day, or if we prefer, 70,000 athletes for 10 days. The telephone call was probably a reckoning between racketeers.

### **22. 1999, Nandrolone and EPO champions**

This last year is dotted with resounding doping cases; a real massacre of key figures who were far from innocent.

Most of these worthless champions tested positive to nandrolone, an anabolic steroid: the British sprinter, Linford Christie, the Jamaican sprinter Marlene Ottey, the Barcelona Olympic 5000m champion, Dieter Baumann, French and Russian professional soccer players, weightlifting record holders and various women athletes from Sri Lanka, Columbia, the Dominican Republic and Morocco!

What a coincidence! The same drug, nandrolone, was found in the urine samples of athletes from different continents, who specialized in different sports disciplines and has invaded female sports, even in the countries where "integriste" religions are predominant. It would appear that a grapevine spread the information world-wide, overcoming ethical, religious and sexual barriers. A grapevine dictated by commercial interests which have transformed the world of sports into a stupid market, populated by vapid athletes who parade muscles and worthless medals.

The other resounding case concerned a professional cyclist, Marco Pantani, who dominated the major stage races in these last few years. This year, the UCI found his haematocrit value well above the establish limit 50%. This happened just before the second last stage of the Giro d'Italia, which he was dominating once more.

The UCI started an investigation and it came out that he was being "assisted" by Prof. Conconi and his team. In 1995, Pantani came very close to death on account of a sudden decrease of the haematocrit value from 60% (...!) to below 16%.

Many former champions of endurance disciplines have now the side-effects of Epo, but they remain silent, and even deny everything when they are questioned on this subject. It does not occur to them to warn

the thousands of young athletes who are following in their steps, all they care about is their own reputation.

Death figures hover behind the stage of sports events as doping becomes increasingly widespread among young and not so young athletes. Hypocrisy is the word for athletes, trainers and sports officials. The media look on a pretend to believe in it all. In the meantime, the producers of these forbidden substances, the complacent physicians and the peddlers take advantage of such foolishness and falsehood as their profit increases.

### **23. Analysis of international situation**

I believe that the battle to combat doping in the international arena has reached the following situation:

1) the IOC has little power over International Federations, which almost always take decisions regardless of the IOC's rules, with regard to the lists of substances and doping methods and to the size and actual application of sanctions. This is true for both anti-doping testing during competitions and especially random testing during training;

2) there is moreover no temporal or substantial correlation between the aims of the IOC and those of International Federations, or between the activity schedules of the IOC and those of International Federations. The objectives and consequent activity of the IOC are indeed focused almost entirely on a four-yearly event, the Olympic Games, while those of International Federations focus more closely on day-to-day events;

3) the IOC has gradually become an Organisation that is part corrupt and part inadequate, occupying the demanding and bulky role of the world's foremost sporting institution, but in this capacity it has been unable to dialogue with the world's leading non-sporting institutions - Governments, the World Health Organization, international pharmaceutical companies or international Scientific Organisations - to seek joint solutions to problems;

4) at the same time, International Federations have been busy "defending themselves" in the anti-doping battle without defending their sports from doping. Their actions have accordingly been slow and very inadequate.

### **24. The media system: Basic considerations**

Of all journalists, those in the most difficult position are probably those employed by specialist sporting papers, because they are called upon to write about the feats of sportsmen and women who are the readers' idols.

A sports champion is, in the collective imagination, a people's champion, loved by one and all. He is an example to be copied, full of personal qualities. He is naturally good, even though he may not be, intelligent and educated, even though he may actually be stupid and very ignorant. And what is even worse, he sells papers and conquers an audience for the radio and TV, but only if they take care of him.

Journalists have the following problem: talking about doping or corruption makes you unpopular. It is just the opposite of what is said about journalists making up stories about doping to sell more copies or gain a wider audience: the more you praise the champion the more you sell. When you talk about doping, people do not at first believe you; then, when the proof comes out, readers finally realise and begin to lose interest in sport.

This state of affairs is of course very dangerous for sports papers. Any journalist that intends to delve into the doping problem will come up against strong resistance, first of all from his editor. He will have to write with the proof in his hands and with great care if he does not want to be sued for libel, especially if the sportsman in question is very popular.

Suing against doping accusations has become all the rage: even those who are guilty resort to the law in a bid to intimidate both the journalist and the paper in question. At this point, the journalist will ask himself whether it is worth all the trouble. Only if the answer is yes will he have the strength to carry on. If he realises that his profession obliges him to be honest and to keep the public correctly informed, then he will have the courage to go on.

A separate chapter should also be written about those sports newspapers that also act as organisers of

major sporting events. Like Italy's daily "La Gazzetta dello Sport", which organises cycling's Giro d'Italia, or the French sporting daily "L'Equipe", which organises the Tour de France. How can they combine the need for correct information with that of promoting the race they are organising? How can they talk about doping without covering their creations with mud?

As for more general newspapers that also deal with sport, the situation is different. These journalists can be a little freer, as sport is not the only attraction for readers.

In conclusion, a sports journalist will only be able to do his job well if he realises that doping is a real, dramatic social problem, and that youngsters are in danger of taking "artificial" champions as role models.

It is a difficult choice to make, which is why only a few have had the necessary courage.

### **25. Rediscovery of ethics or crisis**

But the IOC is no other than a manifestation of what sport has become. Proof of this assertion is the crisis of International Federations or, returning to the subject of this seminar, the proven unstoppable spread of doping in all parts of the world. Doping tests have been positive at the Asian Games, African Games, PanAmerican Games and the European Championships in various sports, even at the PanArabian Games, however inadequate or backward these analysis methods may be. A clear example of the Global Village!

### **26. The sporting education of children and youngsters**

I believe that the crucial question for the future is the following: Which needs must the supply of sports to children and youngsters meet most urgently?

The need to find youngsters of great sporting talent through a planned selection programme?

The need to submit youngsters to intense training to verify their real potential?

The need to identify "winners" from a psychological point of view, thanks to their resistance to stress, their control of anxiety and very strong motivation?

This is the "culture" which, disdaining the rights of individuals, has exploited youngsters in a search for CHAMPIONS. A culture that arose in the authoritarian regimes, but that was copied by democratic nations! The social consequences of this process are extremely serious, leading, among other things, to the emergence of the most cynical and unprincipled persons in the sporting sphere. At the same time, this process puts off honest persons who respect children's rights to:

- have fun by playing sports;
- limit their sporting activity so as to fit it in with studies and a normal social life;
- claim victory every time they improve themselves;

Since broad segments of the sporting world have shown themselves to be incapable of adequately performing this educational task, schools in particular must deal with the problem, teaching youngsters to free themselves from conditioning, to view sport as an asset and victory over oneself as more important than victory over others.

It is always possible indeed to improve oneself, no matter what level one is at, while victory over others seldom occurs, requiring genetic advantages and a certain "diversity", which should be accepted as a value and not simply reduced to "one winner, all the others losers".

### **27. The solutions: Creation of the World Anti-Doping Agency**

The success of the Agency will depend on the quality of contributions from national Governments, which will have to:

a) carry out a preliminary analysis of the IOC's activity in scientific, legal, technical-sporting and ethical-educational terms, to gain an idea of its merits but also of its responsibilities, potential, inability, sincerity of intents and ambiguity;

- b) study the spread of doping in a rational manner, both the existing situation and possible developments in the near future;
- c) appoint their own representatives to the Agency on the basis of competence, honesty and independence from the IOC and from leading international sports institutions;
- d) act to ensure that the strategies drawn up are quickly implemented.

### **28. The solutions: The search to improve anti-doping analysis methods**

One of the tasks to be performed by the new Agency will be that of commencing Studies and Research on new anti-doping analysis methods that can detect in athletes' urine the new pharmacological agents used and, more generally, that can extend analysis methods beyond urine to other biological indicators.

This is a task in which the IOC Medical Commission has failed, and we do not see how it can now help to tackle the problem. This task will thus be shouldered mainly by Governments. A detailed research programme must thus be drawn up and rolled out:

- a) in conjunction with Universities and Research Institutes;
- b) in conjunction with IOC Anti-doping Laboratories, which must organise specific sectors really dedicated to Research in their own area of competence;
- c) in conjunction with pharmaceutical companies, which can provide necessary information on the pharmaco-kinetic action of new products and on their chemical properties.

At this point in time, the most effective actions to be taken appear to be the following:

- 1) the intensification of random anti-doping tests;
- 2) the development of analytical methods capable of identifying molecules that are modified so as to render them unrecognisable in anti-doping tests;
- 3) the use of biological indicators other than urine (e.g. blood, saliva and hair) to uncover drug-taking methods;
- 4) the perfecting of new techniques, e.g. IRMS (isotopic ratio mass spectrometry) to determine whether a given substance (e.g. testosterone or nandrolone) is of endogenous or exogenous origin;
- 5) the development of indirect methods based on a longitudinal examination of biochemical and clinical parameters.

### **29. The solutions: Campaigns to safeguard sportmen's health**

The purpose of anti-doping tests is to demonstrate the presence in urine of a forbidden substance or of a relative metabolite as proof of the taking of doping drugs. Many substances are not however detectable at the present time, so the use of doping substances has increased dramatically in all parts of the world.

These substances, as already mentioned, include: the erythropoietic hormone (Epo), the growth hormone (Gh), the insulin growth factor (Igf).

Starting from the assumption that these substances, administered to healthy persons in the absence of a pathology, are harmful to one's health and cause evident physiological alterations, it is possible and indeed dutiful to safeguard the health of sportsmen and women through the monitoring of haematic-chemical parameters measured in the blood or urine.

The International Cycling Union (UCI), the International Skiing Federation (FIS), the International Biathlon Union (IBU), Italy's National Olympic Committee (CONI) and the French Sports Ministry have already begun blood test campaigns to detect indirect signs of the taking of erythropoietin.

These programmes have proved to be very effective, making it possible to reduce the use of Epo in

endurance specialities. CONI has even established that Italian sportsmen wishing to take part in the Sidney Olympics must undergo blood tests, otherwise they will be excluded from the list of potential participants at the Olympic Games.

In Italy, studies are now being conducted for special blood test campaigns against the use of Gh and other hormones, in collaboration with study groups from other countries.

### **30. The solutions: Agreements with international pharmaceutical companies**

The IOC has been unable (or perhaps unwilling) to dialogue with Pharmaceutical Companies and seek forms of collaboration to find solutions to the doping problem, especially for those drugs that cannot be detected during tests.

The new Agency will have to work in this direction, and it will have the authority to do so.

Pharmaceutical companies must be asked to:

- a) produce drugs in relation to the actual needs of the ill;
- b) report to competent authorities (WHO and the Governments of different countries) any anomalies and suspicions regarding the increase in demand and consumption;
- c) forgo with a great sense of responsibility a portion of their revenues, receiving as a reward the knowledge that they are helping to safeguard the health of a large number of youngsters.

The World Anti-doping Agency should steer the actions of single countries in identifying legislative or regulatory instruments that might allow a definition of the nature of substances similar to those included in the IOC lists of doping substances during the registration phase for new drugs.

### **31. The solutions: Approval of specific criminal laws**

The Agency could pursue another primary objective: that of examining the legislative situation in different countries to assess the possibility of:

- a) making additions to existing laws on narcotics or on drugs in general;
- b) proposing specific texts on drugs and doping procedures for those cases in which this is deemed necessary.

For the comparative analysis of different legislative situations, suitable instruments should be prepared, where they are not already present in single systems, to foster the prevention of specific crimes relating to the international trafficking of doping substances.

### **32. The solutions: International cooperation among magistrates**

The present report has repeatedly referred to the international dimension of the doping phenomenon. The seizure of doping drugs and several investigations in France, Italy and Belgium show without a shadow of a doubt that the trafficking of these substances transcends national borders.

We have also mentioned the continuing spread of sales via the Internet, giving rise to orders and deliveries that escape all controls.

It should be added that the life of sportsmen and women is one of constant travelling, especially for those in the top flight. Sportsmen are often accompanied on their trips by coaches, masseurs or physiotherapists, physicians and federal officials. In this nomadic existence, doping "runners" are hired from the circles of organised crime. An Italian professional cyclist, was for example recently arrested in France for the trafficking of huge amounts of Igfl from Mexico to Europe. And a Moroccan top athlete was recently arrested in Italy after becoming involved in the international trafficking of enormous quantities of doping substances.

We could go on for a long time with other examples.