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An alternative to the IOC's gender testing policy

The Coalition of Athletes for Inclusion in Sport has recently provided the International Olympic Committee with an alternative to its Gender Policy. Kristen Worley, Co-Founder of the Coalition, explains why an alternative is needed as well as its proposed alternative.

Like the rest of the world, I watched the International Association of Athletics Federations (IAAF) World Track and Field Championships in Berlin Germany this past August with great interest, anticipating that Usain Bolt of Jamaica would break his own world records in both the 100m and 200m men's sprinting events. We were left to speculate on how large a margin he would defeat his closest rivals by, realising we were watching a secondary race of who would place second and third among the men's world elite.

Well, as anticipated, Usain did break away from the field in his respectable events, destroying and demoralising the field and his closest rivals, setting two new world records and in both cases, breaking his own records. Although Usain is undoubtedly a superb athlete and human specimen, the world never questioned why he runs so quickly. His genetic makeup - that which makes him unique physiologically and allows him to be so explosive and take distinct charge and advantage of his fellow runners, other fine specimens and some of the fastest male sprinters on the face of the earth - was never questioned.

This year's World Championships proved different, robbing Usain of his spotlight position as the IAAF's front man and marketing tool, shifting the focus onto a young woman, a rising star in the women's 800m event, 18-year-old

Caster Semenya of South Africa. Caster was a virtual overnight success - just like Usain - in elite athletics competitions, tremendously successful in her junior career in competitions within her home country of South Africa. This year's World Championships was her first international event outside of the borders of her homeland.

This talented athlete never expected what was to come next. For most athletes, to participate at the World Championships on behalf of your country with the world watching, successfully qualifying for your event final is the pinnacle of their career. For young Caster, this dream was unjustifiably taken away from her the very second she crossed the finish-line to win the women's 800m final, although not setting either a Championship or world record as Usain Bolt did in both the 100m and 200m events. There have been several women before her that have run faster, but on this day Caster was the best in her field.

The Coalition of Athletes for Inclusion in Sport was formed in 2009 to address the IOC Gender Policy. In addition to gender equity, the Coalition seeks a sporting system that is open to all people at all levels of participation, recognising in particular those previously excluded from the narrow definition of what is assumed normal human development.

Our position statement was released on 7 January to many of the experts attending the IOC Gender Summit, which took place in Miami on 16 January. The Coalition of Athletes for Inclusion in Sport provided an alternative gender policy solution entitled 'The Guiding Principles for Inclusion in Sport'. This alternative to the IOC Gender Policy outlines the facts, issues and provides

recommendations. Based on inclusive values and founded in evidence-based research, the statement is groundbreaking and appropriate for the modern era. It suggests blanket testing all women and men participating in high-performance athletics bi-annually, using a simple blood test for natural androgen levels. On the World Anti-Doping Agency's (WADA) Anti-Doping Administration & Management System - a web-based application designed to simplify the relationship between stakeholders and athletes worldwide in the anti-doping system - this is already in place for individual athlete profiles.

The simplicity of the testing is important - a general practitioner can prescribe the blood test at any licensed blood lab. The results are faxed or emailed to that country's regulated anti-doping body and inputted into the corresponding athlete profile, in complete confidence and respecting the privacy of the athlete. Cases such as Caster's are presented to the uninformed as unique, although they are not. Using the process described above, she would have been alerted earlier on in her career of her ability to produce higher levels of testosterone, and could have simply taken a common and safe androgen suppressant to lower her androgen levels to within the existing mean levels already in place. Her athlete profile is then respected, confidential and in the complete confidence of WADA and her gender and or identity would never have been questioned, or compromised - as we saw this past August so publicly.

By design, the central focus of our policy was to educate, ensuring a level playing field and to facilitate a fully inclusive sporting system that is equal for both genders. It also works within an existing

system and would therefore not further impact, add any extra cost nor need to take expertise from the universal anti-doping system that currently exists, which is seen as state of the art.

The IOC Gender Policy declaration was created on decade old assumptions on the basis 'of man becoming woman and taking advantage of women's sport'. It thus focuses specifically on the female or male sex organs as the predetermination of one's gender. This stereotype is consistent within our society from the very moment birth takes place. The very moment a child is born, its gender is assumed and pre-determined within our society's narrow model; i.e. that either you have a penis or vagina, which determines ones being as either male or female, and that every penis and vagina are the same, which is of course impossible. But this is the basis on which the IOC has continued gender verification testing of women athletes, which has had horrible results and has impacted and violated dozens of women's lives since the integration of women into Olympic sport in the 1930s.

Furthermore, this suggests that exceptional female athletes must have masculine qualities, which is false. We have seen this recently during August with Caster. Appearing strong bodied and less feminine or attractive as a woman places you under suspicion of cheating, although we accept male high performance exceptions like Usain Bolt, asking no questions of him and qualifying his genetic uniqueness. In retrospect, when a woman performs exceptionally, we violate and terrorise her. We question her very identity as a woman, making accusations that she is a man masquerading as a woman, using male pronouns such as 'he' and using masculine

When a woman performs exceptionally, we violate and terrorise her

definitions with regards to her body. We also use words as ambiguous and disorder, then throw her into stirrups and take pictures of her genitals. Because of policies such as the IOC Gender Policy, we empower people to feel they have the right to punish difference, making the athlete feel she deserves what she is getting.

Caster's gender was never in question. Caster is female, born with Congenital Adrenal Hyperplasia (CAH) - an intersex type condition which constitutes a natural human development. If we are speaking of a woman's genitals as the basis for pre-determining her identity as a woman - i.e. as in the basis that forms the IOC's Gender Policy - Caster's genitals appear as 'normal' as any natural woman, as would her ovaries. Caster's ovaries are not undescended testicles, as reported. She has a period and all common accepted womanly functions. The issue is, as CAH indicates, she has hyper performing adrenal glands that cause her ovaries to over produce natural testosterone above the average mean levels in women. Many women - as well as men - don't understand where their testosterone comes from or its function, not to mention what their average mean levels are.

Women's ovaries are men's testicles. It is during the influx of the Y chromosome 12 weeks into gestation, that the messaging changes to increase androgens to the ovaries. We all start off physically female, however the gonads can become affected by high levels of androgen production, changing female sex (XX) to male sex (XY) organs. Caster has XX chromosomes.

Caster's situation, though awful, does not represent the first time this has happened, although we hope it will be the last. The IOC Gender Policy has resulted in this

happening dozens of times to women in more than seven different international sports over the last few decades. This violation of basic human rights has occurred three times in the last three years, nine times in the last six years and dozens more over the last few decades.

The Coalition of Athletes for Inclusion in Sport recognised that we must stop these incidents from occurring, by articulating what is really happening and presenting an alternative to the current IOC Gender Policy that reflects the values of sport, the values of society, a research-based policy alternative protecting the Olympic Movement and - most importantly - stopping gender verification testing altogether. Current IOC practices clearly illustrate the inaccuracies of our system. The identification of any one person's gender is impossible.

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