



Speech by

Tim Nicholls

MEMBER FOR CLAYFIELD

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SPORTS DRUG TESTING AMENDMENT BILL

Mr NICHOLLS (Clayfield—Lib) (4.44 pm): Queensland is a proud sporting state that is part of a proud sporting nation. In my own electorate there are many fine sporting organisations that provide opportunities for adults and kids to pursue a range of activities. I make mention of Brothers Junior Rugby Club and its President David Hine and Vice-President Tony Barrett. It is also home for two Nicholls junior Rugby players who love training, playing and mingling with their mates together with an average manager and referee.

Brothers Rugby Club, as my friend the member for Southport will attest, is itself home to some of the most famous names in international Rugby, people like 'Budda' Handy, Sean Hardman—current Reds and sometime Wallaby hooker—David Crofts, Elton Flatley, Paul McLean, of course John Eales and that paragon of fair play, clean rucks and mauls, club president Tony Shaw. Coming from Churchie and going to Brothers to watch a game really comes pretty tough when in the old days I would have been over at Ashgrove or something like that. It is almost as tough as getting out to Sunnybank on the south side.

I also mention the Allstars Baseball Club and its President Ian Maurice as well as Sue Wallace and the Dragons Rowing Club. People may not know about the Dragons Rowing Club, but it provides great opportunities for people who otherwise may not be involved in rowing—particularly women and those with a disability. It runs a great disabled rowing program at Breakfast Creek in my electorate. I also have the privilege of having the Mayne Juniors AFL, the Toombul Cricket Club and the Sporting Wheelies in or next to my electorate. I have a great number of bowls clubs in the electorate, including Hamilton Bowls Club, the Clayfield Bowls Club and the Hendra Nundah Bowls Club.

These are all fine organisations dedicated to the best sporting traditions of playing hard but playing fair. Our athletes represent the high level of talent that is cultivated and finetuned from a young age to be the best, without relying on drugs. This bill takes an important step in protecting that image and the wellbeing of our athletes. By aligning Queensland's standards with those being implemented nationally, we help to provide a fairer future for Queensland sports and maintain our reputation as a clean sporting nation.

This year alone we have seen some sports greats dragged from their podiums because of drug scandals. Many members have mentioned Marion Jones, the 2000 Olympics sprint star who this month admitted to steroid use. It was a steroid that was undetectable seven years ago. It gave her an advantage which saw her win three gold medals. Former Australian sprinter Lauren Hewitt was one of those beaten by Jones at the Olympics. She made a vivid description of 18-year-old Jones who was able to run the same times as the men. It gives an idea of how distinct an advantage drugs can provide and how tough we need to be to ensure a fair playing field.

Closer to home, one of Australia's most respected role models, Andrew Johns, admitted to having taken drugs throughout his sporting career. This is proof that even high-profile competitors are able to slip through the system again and again. We have been reading over the last couple of days about West Coast Eagles player Ben Cousins who ended up in Arizona at a drug and alcohol clinic and has just been involved again in misfortune surrounding illegal drugs. There was the suspension of Wendell Sailor last

year after he was found to have used cocaine. There was the tragedy of former AFL player Chris Mainwaring who has just been laid to rest and the allegations of an alleged drug overdose.

Then there are the athletes disqualified from the Olympics. I asked the Parliamentary Library to do some research. The figures reveal a growth in the number of people attempting to cheat. The figures reveal the magnitude of the issue. In 1996 at Atlanta just two people were disqualified for doping. In Sydney in 2000, 10 were disqualified, not including Marion Jones. Those included winners of three gold, one silver and two bronze medals. By 2004 in Athens the number of drug cheats detected had grown by almost 300 per cent to 27, including five gold, one silver and two bronze medallists.

It is not just the athletes whom we should be looking at. In June this year Sevdalin Marinov, an Australian weightlifting coach, received a life ban for a second doping offence after he was found in possession of prohibited substances including testosterone and anabolic steroids. A three-time world champion and an Olympic and Commonwealth gold medallist, in 2003 Marinov was also employed as the head coach of Victorian Weightlifting and the Australian junior national coach. This illustrates that we must be aware that doping can occur at all levels and even a coach can lead our sporting greats and our youth down the wrong path. We can never be too vigilant. There are some who say, 'Why bother? Let them all take drugs and create a level playing field that way.' I reject that argument. As the Prime Minister indicated yesterday, all types of problems lie down that path for our children and our reputation as a clean sporting nation, and in many ways the world has moved on and rejected that argument. It would be impossible to implement even if it were accepted here.

We should also think of the example it sets for our kids. I am sure many of us have children who have worshipped and have idolised some of the sporting greats. I took my own two boys to see the Broncos play only two months ago and witnessed their enthusiasm and their thrill at going to see a game live, and we were fortunate enough to get some tickets to go down to the dressing rooms afterwards to see their stars after a game. They had been beaten and pummelled and looked hot and hard and sweaty but the kids just had a great time. I asked my oldest boy whether he had had a good day and he said, 'Dad, it was the best day of my life.'

Mr Dempsey: Hear, hear!

Mr NICHOLLS: That is what sporting heroes do for our kids. The member for Bundaberg just hit on how important it is for them and how much they take it on board. What sort of example would we be giving if we said, as has been suggested by some commentators recently, 'Let them take drugs. Let's have a level playing field'? That is not the atmosphere we want for our children, that is not the atmosphere we want them growing up in and that is not the example we want to set.

Additionally, athletes are not always aware of just how dangerous the side effects can be from the extended use of these drugs. There is the risk of heart attack, stroke and lung clots—all a result of EPO, or erythropoietin. Then there is the change in appearance—protruding eyebrow and jaw bones—caused by the excessive use of human growth hormones. Even narcotics—drugs that are accessible outside the sporting arena—obviously pose the risk of physical dependence and addiction. Education must play an important role in eliminating these substances from Queensland sporting arenas. By allowing the Commonwealth Australian Sports Anti-Doping Authority, which incorporates the drug agency role with further powers and functions to provide Queensland athletes with educational services, we give our athletes the knowledge and the power to beat the scourge of drugs. This bill will provide Queensland with the opportunity to further harmonise its antidoping stance with that in place at an international standard and something that is already being achieved at a national level.

It is interesting to note the history of the World Anti-Doping Agency with which this legislation is ultimately bringing us into line. It was as a result really of a large number of prohibited medical substances being found by police in a raid during the Tour de France. It led to a major reappraisal of the role of public authorities in antidoping affairs. In the 1980s and before that there was a marked increase in cooperation, but before the 1998 debate took place following that scandal in the Tour de France there were a lot of discrete forums. There was no unified body and they often had different standards so it was difficult to reach common ground and for common policies and for common penalties to apply across-the-board. That Tour de France highlighted the need for an independent international agency that would set unified standards for antidoping work and coordinate the efforts of sports organisations and public authorities throughout the world.

The IOC took the initiative and convened the World Conference on Doping in Sport in Lausanne in Switzerland in February 1999. Following the proposal of the conference, the World Anti-Doping Agency was established on 10 November 1999. It is structured on the basis of equal representation of the Olympic movement and public authorities. In 2001 the foundation board voted to move its headquarters from Lausanne to Montreal and the Montreal headquarters were inaugurated in April 2002. In fact it is the case, as the research brief provided by the Parliamentary Library shows, that if a sports organisation or government does not accept the World Anti-Doping Code then it has very severe repercussions including that only sports that do have that code can compete at the Olympic Games. So by unifying and

harmonising those rules and setting up a common standard, the international sporting community and public authorities are moving to eliminate the scourge of drugs in sport.

In that respect, Australia is playing a strong role, and always has played a strong role. Most recently we only have to look to former New South Wales Premier and federal minister John Fahey who, according to today's press, appears set to become the head of the World Anti-Doping Agency following a tremendous effort by Senator George Brandis and the Prime Minister in supporting him in his attempt to get into that position. His success at this international level shows just how high a standard Australia has already set in combating drugs in sport. In addition, Senator Brandis has proven that he is equally tough when it comes to banned substances. This month the federal government committed \$21 million per year over the next four years towards the testing of elite athletes.

But there is also the issue of people being under pressure, and a number of members have mentioned that today. My colleague the honourable member for Bundaberg has just talked to me about the pressure that he faced during his sporting career, and I suspect that the pressure that high-grade athletes are in fact under is different from his. But nonetheless we know the pressures that these sporting stars face. Again, the member for Toowoomba South raised these issues when he talked about what it was like to run out in front of a crowd of 50,000 and to feel the high of being on a field and playing your best and the adrenalin buzz and rush that comes with that and then coming off the field and having to come down from that high that you got through physical activity and the thrill of being there. We are also hearing more and more about the use of illicit drugs amongst our sporting heroes. There has to be an opportunity for those people to be educated and to be given support so they do not fall down that path but if they do fall down that path they can get off it and are supported so that they are able to make a comeback.

I also support the amendments made to the bill regarding minors. I support fully the requirements for the protection of minors as set out in the bill. Again, the shadow minister has outlined the issues surrounding the testing of minors and there is no doubt that we must ensure their safety and their protection. The changes to this bill provide Queensland with the chance to align its policies with the principles and legislation that is sought at both a national and international standard. Queensland's athletes represent not only our state but are the role models who represent the dreams and aspirations of our kids. Supporting this bill is about supporting an antidrug culture within the sporting world that will ensure not only a fairer future for our current sportsmen and women but our upcoming stars.