Drug abuse

Pressure to perform, not only for your country but also for an employer or sponsors, is not easy to handle. When large sums of money are involved, pressure to perform, either legal or otherwise, usually follows. Performance-enhancing drugs have been a feature of amateur athletics, particularly among athletes from nations that were desperate to prove their "superiority" (such as East Germany in the 1970s). The increased financial power of highly paid professional athletics has also led to systemic drug abuse.

Jones' jailing 'a message to drug cheats'

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THE Australian Olympic Committee has applauded the jailing of disgraced American sprinter Marion Jones, saying it sends a clear message to drug cheats in the lead-up to this year's Beijing Olympics.

AOC spokesman Mike Tancred said Jones had brought dishonour to herself, her family and her sport and did not deserve sympathy.

"She will not be remembered as the star of the 2000 Sydney Olympics. She will just be remembered as a drug cheat," Tancred said.

"We feel sorry for the drug-free athletes who raced against Marion Jones. They raced in the true Olympic spirit and she has deceived them. She's the new Ben Johnson."

Jones, 32, was jailed for six months on two charges of lying to US Federal investigators. She was also given two years' probation and ordered to complete 400 hours of community service.

Jones, a mother of two, will begin her prison term on March 11. When leaving the Federal Court in New York, she said: "I respect the judge's order and I truly hope that people will learn from my mistakes."

Victorian athlete Lauren Hewitt, who hopes to compete in the 200 metres at the Beijing Olympics, said she did not feel sorry for Jones because she did the wrong thing. "Her jailing certainly sends a loud message to drug cheats and hopefully they're listening," Hewitt said.

Former triple Olympic silver medallist Raelene Boyle said Jones was lucky to get only six months' jail.

"You've got to look at the number of people in the sport that Marion has let down," she said. "I think it's a good reason for those entering the sport not to take something."

Boyle said it was sad Jones did what she did purely because she wanted to run faster and jump further. "And I hope it shows the rest of the world and particularly others that are playing sport that drugs and sport don't mix and honesty is a virtue."

Jones was jailed after pleading guilty in October to lying about using performance-enhancing drugs, and for lying to federal agents about her knowledge of a cheque-fraud scheme run by Montgomery, father of their son, Tim Jnr.

She had been taking a drug known as 'the clear' or THG — a synthetic, undetectable steroid-like derivative, tetrahydrogestrinone — from early 1999. She says she was given it by former coach Trevor Graham, who told her it was flaxseed oil. THG was developed by Balco, the Illinois-based drug firm run by Victor Conte, who came to the Sydney Games as Jones' "nutritionist."