

A journey to the dark

PARIS, July 14 (AFP): He was one of the most exciting athletes in the world. A ball of rippling muscle who battled with Carl Lewis for the title of the fastest man on earth.

Nowadays, Ben Johnson is simply remembered as the world's most notorious sporting drug cheater.

He ran the fastest 100m ever seen at the 1988 Seoul Olympics — and was assured of wealth and fame.

Johnson then tested positive for the anabolic steroid stanozolol and was disgraced. He initially said he knew nothing about the drug — as has become standard in such cases — but later admitted to serial steroid abuse over several years.

Johnson was allowed to return to competition in 1991 but was banned for life two years later after testing positive for the growth hormone testosterone.

The unfortunate, dumb Johnson may be the most high-profile of all the sporting drug cheats, but he is just one of hundreds of top-level competitors who have failed tests.

Red wine and strychnine was used a stimulant around the turn of the century, when drug tests were unheard of.

Amphetamines were widely used by cyclists several decades ago, resulting in the death of Tommy Simpson on Mount Ventoux in 1967. The Dane, Knud Jensen, died after a violent reaction to another stimulant seven years earlier.

And there has been an ongoing saga of big names who have failed drug tests ever since Dutch decathlete Eduard de Noorder made history in 1969.

De Noorder tested positive for steroids at the 1969 European Championships and went into the record books as the first man to be disqualified from a major sporting event for failing a drug test.

Three years later, tests for steroids were introduced at the 1972 Olympic Games: the battle was on.

Track and field, swimming and weightlifting have produced probably the highest-profile drug cheats: athletes who have either failed tests for performance-enhancing substances or refused to take tests when ordered to do so.

Here are just some of the names in track and field, although several of those who failed tests have continued to

proclaim their innocence.

Tatyana Kazankina, Butch Reynolds, Martti Vainio, Katrin Krabbe, Jason Livingstone, Larry Myricks, John Ngugi, Randy Barnes and Dmitry Savchenko were among the biggest names in their respective events, competing and winning at major international events.

Yet all failed, or refused to take drug tests.

Kazankina, the Russian world 1,500 metres record holder, was the first world record holder banned when she declined to take a drug test.

Vainio was caught in 1984 when the blood he reintroduced to his system contained steroids.

Butch Reynolds, the 400 metres world record holder, tested positive for the steroid nandrolone at a meeting in Monaco in 1990. He maintained samples had been mixed up and went to court. He was awarded 27 million dollars in damages but the IAAF successfully contested the award. The affair rumbles on.

Dual world championship gold medalist Krabbe tested positive for the stimulant clenbuterol, along with two German teammates. She still protests her innocence and was subsequently cleared.

Later in 1992, Livingstone, the European indoor champion over 60m tested positive for steroids prior to the Barcelona Olympics.

Ngugi, Kenya's multiple world cross country champion, was suspended after refusing to take a test in 1993, while American long jumper Myricks was barred for four years last year after a positive test, as was Shevchenko, the 1995 Grand Prix discus champion. American shot putter Barnes was ousted for two years after being found to have used methyl testosterone.

Britain's Dianne Modahl, a Commonwealth Games champion who tested positive for testosterone in 1994, fought a long battle to establish her innocence and will now compete at Atlanta.

Birgit Dresel, a German who finished fourth in the 1986 European championships, didn't fail a test — but drugs cost her life.

She died in hospital a year later after an allergic reaction to various performance-enhancing drugs, including steroids.

Athletes will do almost anything to avoid detection.

In 1992, Russian 1,500 metres runner Natalia Artimova was banned for life after she tried to trick drug testing officials by concealing a pouch of untainted urine in her underwear. It was a ruse cyclists had used for decades.

Canadian sprinter Angela Issajenkina admitted in the wake of the Johnson affair that she had taken steroids for several years.

But such abuse is not restricted to track and field, which is merely the highest profile sport, and cycling.

Weightlifters and swimmers have cheated in the same way. Anabolic steroids were rife in East German swimming, as well as track and cycling, between 1970 and 1990, leading coaches have subsequently admitted with the Olympic Games.

Chesnut even has taken on the ACOG cartoon mascot IZZY, with a dog called PIZZY.

However, sincere Chesnut may be in his opposition, he has managed to keep the in-victive light-hearted.

For instance, in that ACOG officials have never, to his knowledge, used the words "please," "thank you," or "I'm sorry" in their dealings with local residents.

Of the 500 T-shirts he says he has sold, Chesnut said a substantial number have gone to buyers at the Georgia Institute of Technology: home of the Olympic Village.

"I can't name which department because they're frightened for their lives," he jokes. "Georgia Tech is a hotbed of anti-Acogism."

Nearly 300 Russian athletes failed drug tests in the three years leading up to the Seoul Olympics, while Chinese swimmers have recently come increasingly under the spotlight.

Seven, including two world champions, were banned for between two and four years after testing positive at the Asian Games in Hiroshima, Japan, in 1994.

The Chinese were banned from the subsequent Pan-Pacific Games but will compete at Atlanta — much to the ire of the Australians and several other nations.

At Atlanta, it was hoped that new high-tech testing machines known as spectrometers would step up the war against the cheats. The installation of the machines was delayed, however, and there are now doubts just how effective the testing programme will be.

At the Swiss Open, Rosset said he had decided to defend his title in Atlanta, reports Reuter.

The world ranked number 16 had said Last Wednesday he was having second thoughts about playing in Atlanta after losing in the opening round of the Swiss Open to German qualifier Oliver Gross.

But shortly after losing in the semifinal of the men's doubles with partner Cedric Pioline of France, Rosset told reporters, "I'm announcing to you that I've decided to participate in the Olympics."

"It wasn't an easy decision. I have thought a lot about it these last few days. But the Olympic Games are important and this could be my last chance to participate."

"I want to re-live that experience I had in Barcelona." But like many other top ranked players, including Austria's Thomas Muster, Russia's Yevgeny Kafelnikov and Germany's Boris Becker, numbers two, four and five in the world rankings respectively, Rosset said that his gold medal was not as important as defending his position in the rankings.

Rosset said he had put together a programme that would allow him to defend both his medal and his place in the rankings.

"My programme will consist of the Olympics, tournaments in Cincinnati and Toronto and the US Open which will allow me to defend my Olympic title and win enough points on the ATP," said Rosset.

On Saturday, sixth seed Costa upset top seed and defending champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 in just 63 minutes.

Olympic trauma for prisoners

ATLANTA, Georgia, July 14: Prisoners are on the loose at an Olympic site, put to work to get the Atlanta beach venue ready in time to host the beach volleyball tournament, reports AFP.

The winner takes away 74,000 dollars and 180 computer ranking points. Mantilla earned 44,000 dollars and 130 points.

On Saturday, sixth seed Costa upset top seed and defending champion Yevgeny Kafelnikov 3-6, 6-4, 6-3 in the semifinals.

Kafelnikov, the French Open champion and world number four, came into the semifinal without dropping a set and looked poised to make a second appearance in the final after easily winning the first set.

But Costa fought back with timely breaks against the 22-year-old Russian in the second and third sets to win the first meeting between the two and reach his third tournament final this season.

"These guys are all about to end their sentences and it wasn't like someone was dominating," said Kafelnikov, who will play next week in Stuttgart and then return home to Sochi or Moscow by passing the Olympics to prepare for the American hard-

court season. "I had some luck in the first set and then things turned quickly."

Mantilla, who has improved his world ranking from 94 to its present 31 in just six months, neatly dispatched the Czech Republic's Bohdan Uhlirach 6-4, 6-3 in just 63 minutes.

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