

LETTERS

A timely wake-up call on drugs in sport



Finally an Australian athlete has had the courage to say the unpalatable: that when it comes to cheating, Australian athletes are potentially no better than the rest of the world.

Many athletes applaud what Werner Reiterer, left, has done in raising the issue, but would be disappointed that he feels he is unable to go further at this stage.

Drugs in sport is a complex issue. The list of prohibited items for Australian athletes runs to the hundreds.

Obviously a sporting organisation that conducts many drug tests with diligence and fervor is more likely to catch cheaters than

an organisation that does not conduct them. Therefore Australia should not be ashamed when an athlete is caught cheating, and the international community would be wrong if it singled out Australia.

Nevertheless, what makes me suspicious of Australia's top athletes, and I suspect what makes Reiterer also suspicious, is the absence of calls for the testing of substances that are not detected in the standard urine sample.

There has been knowledge of drugs such as EPO and human growth hormone for more than 10 years, but still no test has been made available. In short, the efforts

Committee are a disgrace.

While more than enough money is found for chauffeurs and travel for IOC delegates, their scientific arm cannot confirm if an athlete has been ingesting dangerous performance-enhancing drugs.

The only conclusion to be drawn is that they would be scared of the number of people that would be caught.

In the meantime, a number of simple steps should be taken:

- The penalty for a first drug offence is two years; an athlete would miss at most one Olympic Games. It should be increased to a life ban.

for further testing when drug tests become more advanced.

- Blood samples should be taken and stored for further testing.
- Polygraphs could be used.

By themselves, none of these proposals are the answer, but they would serve to instil some fear into athletes who deceive the public and other athletes.

The urge to win affects all athletes, not just those from foreign countries. Reiterer's admission to cheating was a brave one, and if it were to result in cleaner sport, then he should be thanked, not vilified.