



Drugs in Dojos

Drugs aimed at enhancing performance or heightening pleasure are commonplace in our society and in sports. So how should we deal with them in the martial arts?

There are a number of cultures where fighters 'get stoned' during practise and in preparing for combat. In the East, there is anecdotal evidence that the Indians prepare a candy mixed with *bhang* to induce a trance-like effect; others combine a drug-like substance in their drink or food to make them feel stronger.

In our society, use of illegal 'recreational drugs' such as cocaine, ecstasy and amphetamines is prevalent. Some people also take prescribed drugs to control erratic behaviour or mental illness. Regardless of the reasons, drug use poses risks to the martial artist and those around him.

Taking drugs and alcohol can not only impair one's judgement, they can result in blurred vision and affect the most basic functions, like speech and co-ordination.

It was reported in *The Sunday Age* (13 January 2005) that about 1500 motorists had already been tested under the drug-driving testing program, with more than 15 returning positive laboratory results. In 2003, almost a third of drivers killed on Victoria's roads had drugs other than alcohol in their system, and in a number of recent years, more people have been killed with drugs other than alcohol in their system than those killed with a blood-alcohol reading above .05.

When drugs are taken in combination with alcohol, it's especially dangerous, as the effects of both substances are often increased in unpredictable ways. Some drugs like rohypnol (a tranquilliser similar to valium) produce a sedative effect, relaxing the muscles and slowing down motor responses. For obvious reasons, the effects of such drugs can be especially dangerous when their effects are present during martial arts training.

Even legal medicinal drugs, which people can use legally but in accordance with a doctor's prescription, can be a danger. These include minor and major tranquillisers like Serepax, Valium, Librium; sleeping pills like Mogadon, Rohypnol, Noctec; sedative-hypnotic barbiturates like Amytal, Nembutal; and sedative-hypnotic non-barbiturates like Dorden and Dormel.

While there's no place for drug abuse in martial arts, the reality is that drugs and

alcohol will continue to be used by some martial artists. Some drugs, such as steroids and growth hormones (illegal without prescription), may be used to enhance performance. The question is whether or not martial artists ought to subscribe to a code of conduct of no tolerance to drugs, as provided under the World Anti Doping Authority rules. Some people would argue that martial arts overall are not sporting activities — much less one sport — and therefore any anti-doping policy does not apply to the martial artist. In Australia, there is no statutory requirement for martial arts schools to submit their students to anti-doping policies. The Martial Arts Industry Association Inc (MAIA), in co-operation with the Australian Olympic Committee, did adopt and implement an anti-doping policy to conform with the World Anti-Doping Code, however, being that the MAIA represents only a small portion of the Australian martial arts industry, adopting guidelines to adhere to these codes is really a voluntary process for individual instructors and organisations.

The World Anti-Doping Code is designed to protect athletes' fundamental right to participate in doping-free sport and thus

promote health, fairness and equality for athletes world-wide; and to ensure harmonised, co-ordinated and effective anti-doping programs at the international and national level with regard to detection, deterrence and prevention of doping.

It's my view that there ought to be support for fair play, good health, fun, enjoyment and harmony of mind and body in the martial arts industry. In order to achieve such ideals and promote the benefits of martial arts to the community, martial artists ought to embrace a uniform code of conduct of no tolerance to drugs.

On a related note, although there's no available evidence that martial arts training helps people overcome drug or alcohol addiction, many doctors believe that practising martial arts can replace drug therapy for patients suffering from psychological conditions. The more aggressive styles such as kendo and kickboxing appear to help people with problems such as depression, while the softer disciplines of aikido and tai chi can help people who are anxious or under a lot of stress. **BLITZ**

Drugs come in all shapes, sizes and for many purposes — but all have their side-effects.

