### Defending the indefensible: why sports people take drugs

The rewards for success in professional sport are manifold: there are the financial rewards, including increased sponsorship and funding, for example, as well as the recognition and praise that follow success and accords hero status. These and other rewards would seem to be too compelling for some sportspeople and may encourage them to use artificial means to achieve them.

Generally speaking, athletes do not start out using drugs: some get to a certain point in their careers and then start using drugs for what they perceive to be ‘good reasons’. For example, Tyler Hamilton, a Tour de France cyclist in the same US Postal Service team as Lance Armstrong, reveals in his book *The Secret Race* (Hamilton and Coyle, 2012) how athletes had to earn the right to take drugs. Riders had to achieve a certain standard before being supplied with expensive drugs. He describes the first time he was given a ‘red egg’ (testosterone pill) as a ‘badge of honor’ that proved that the team had seen his potential and were ready to move him on to the next level.

However, not all drug use is associated with cheating. Weinberg and Gould (2015) outline that apart from the obvious performance-enhancing reasons, athletes can also choose to take drugs to cope with pain and help recovery, to achieve weight loss to fit into a weight category or to boost confidence and alleviate stress. It is interesting that not all drug use is associated with cheating as athletes are permitted to take banned substances for certain conditions, such as asthma, under the banner of therapeutic use exemptions (TUEs). In 2016 the medical records of several British and American athletes were leaked, including five-time Olympic gold medal-winning cyclist Bradley Wiggins, who was shown to have taken, quite legitimately in accordance with the rules at the time, a banned steroid before major races in order to relieve his hay fever symptoms. When asked about his use of the drug, he claimed he took it to ‘put himself back on a level playing field’ (BBC News, 2016). In other words, he took it to ensure that he was at the same level as other cyclists and that they didn’t have an unfair advantage. Activity 15.5 introduces you to resources that explore the issues surrounding drug use in sport.