

News Article

Alcohol and Sport - Who's the real winner?

By Alice Kearns

Consider this scenario-you are a promising young football player, barely sixteen years old and already playing Ireland's under eighteen team. You train four nights a week at the club with your friends and you play matches every Saturday morning for the local team. Football has been your passion ever since you first saw a Chelsea match on the television when you were six years old and you decided then that was what you wanted to be when you grew up. Your dream hasn't changed, you still practice every spare moment you can, and you can't wait for those matches when you get to wear the green Irish jersey on the pitch. You play centre forward – you're the team's leading goal scorer. You go to school with the other boys, but you can't seem to pay attention to learning at all. You keep dreaming about being outside and playing football with your friends.

In fourth year you begin to get in with a bad crowd at school, the ones who don't care about work or about school. They smoke, they drink and they like to party. You think you fit in with them, and they seem to like you. You have never tried a cigarette or drunk any alcohol, your mum said it was bad for a footballer's health, and she was right. You don't care about that; you only want to impress your new "mates". They asked you to go with them to a disco that Friday night and you agree. They said you come drinking to one of their houses beforehand, you also agree, even though you have a football match early the next morning.

One little drink couldn't hurt, could it?

That's where you are wrong. Surprisingly, according to the GAA, one drink even three days before a game could seriously affect your match performance in more ways than one. The first and most obvious of these effects is the slower reaction times that players who have consumed alcohol produce. Alcohol is a sedative, so this means that while it relaxes and eases the tension, you also have slower reactions to game being played and your hand eye co-ordination decreases. So while it may be cool to go out drinking a Friday night, it won't be fun to be "benched" at a match the next day because you can't seem to keep up with everyone around you.

We all know of the many injuries associated with sports, whether you play professionally, competitively or just for fun. Sports players therefore need to be able to withstand and prevent all types of injuries. So why would you put yourself at a greater risk? Yes, if you drink alcohol up to twenty four hours before a match it increases your risk of injuries, cramps and other complications. Alcohol also increases the bleeding and swelling around sprains, bruises and cuts, which are the most common sports injuries. Don't put yourself at a greater risk of becoming hurt just because you wanted to drink a can the night before, your body won't thank you.

Endurance, also called stamina, is the ability of a person remain active and exercise for a long period of time, as well as its ability to resist, withstand and recover from trauma, wounds, or fatigue, as quoted from Wikipedia. Athletes need endurance to run throughout long matches, or to shoot a basketball into a hoop or even to swing a golf club. In relation, alcohol affects your body's ability to produce sugar, or glucose, which you need to generating energy. This affects you for up to forty eight hours, or two full days, after you drink, as said by DrinkAware.ie. With less energy in your system you will simply not have the stamina to last a full football match, or a full game of tennis. In effect you are losing the game before you even start, all because of drinking alcohol.

Finally, alcohol causes dehydration, which in turn depletes your body's store of vital vitamins and minerals. Alcohol reduces the production of the anti-diuretic hormone, which stops your body from losing water. This loss of water also means you do not gain the vitamins and minerals that water contains, such as magnesium, calcium, potassium and zinc. All these aforementioned vitamins and minerals help ensure that your nerves and muscles function effectively, so alcohol then inhibits your ability to move and think properly. If you can't even walk straight, how do you expect to play sports?

So next time you decide to take a drink the night before a match or training, think about what's written here. Alcohol affect you ways that you couldn't imagine and it's clear that sport is the real winner in this game.