

# The Dark Side of Sports:

Famous Scandals and Big Questions

ESL Speaking and Reading, Past Tenses Practice

B1-B2

# Warm-up

1. What sports do you enjoy watching or playing?
2. Have you ever played in a sports competition? What was it like?
3. What does “cheating in sport” mean to you?
4. Do you know any famous cases where athletes or teams cheated?
5. Why do you think some athletes decide to cheat?
6. Do you think cheating is more common in professional sports or amateur sports? Why?



# Vocabulary 1 – match the words and the definitions

- A. referee
- B. disqualified
- C. doping
- D. fair play
- E. banned
- F. whistle

- 1. A small tool that makes a loud sound when blown
- 2. A person who makes sure players follow the rules
- 3. The idea of being honest and following the rules in sport
- 4. The use of illegal drugs to improve performance
- 5. Removed from a competition because of breaking the rules
- 6. Not allowed to take part in a competition



# Vocabulary 2 – odd one out

- 1.goalkeeper - bench - yellow card - penalty - to dunk
- 2.court - jersey - sneakers - basket - goalkeeper
- 3.court - backhand - racket - referee - umpire
- 4.bicycle – wheels – chain – pedals – swimsuit
- 5.puck - stick - court - helmet - skates



# Reading 1 – Lance Armstrong

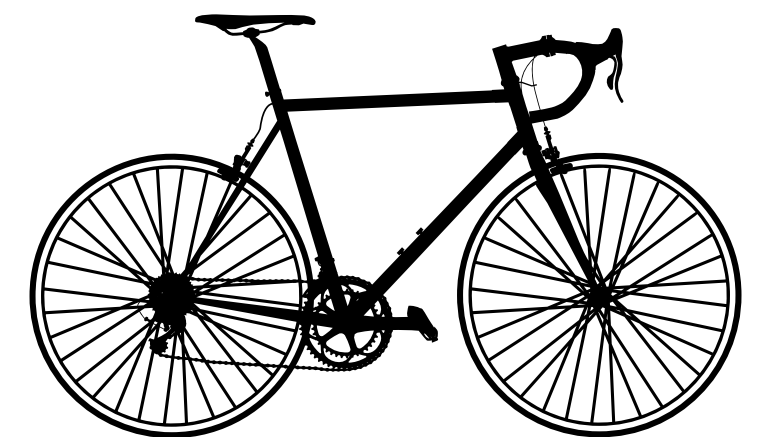
For years, Lance Armstrong was considered one of the greatest cyclists in history. He had won the Tour de France seven times between 1999 and 2005. Millions of fans admired his comeback after surviving cancer.

But while he was winning, rumours about doping had already started. Armstrong had always denied the accusations. He said he had never used performance-enhancing drugs. However, in 2012, the truth came out. Investigators had collected strong evidence. Armstrong had been part of a large doping programme. It wasn't just him – his entire team had used banned substances.

In 2013, during an interview with Oprah Winfrey, he finally admitted everything. He had cheated in all seven of his Tour de France victories. He had lied for years, and he said it was the biggest mistake of his life.

## Comprehension questions

1. How many times did Armstrong win the Tour de France?
2. What did people admire about him before the scandal?
3. What kind of rumours had started during his career?
4. When did the truth come out, and what did investigators discover?
5. What happened in 2013?



# Reading 1 – Lance Armstrong

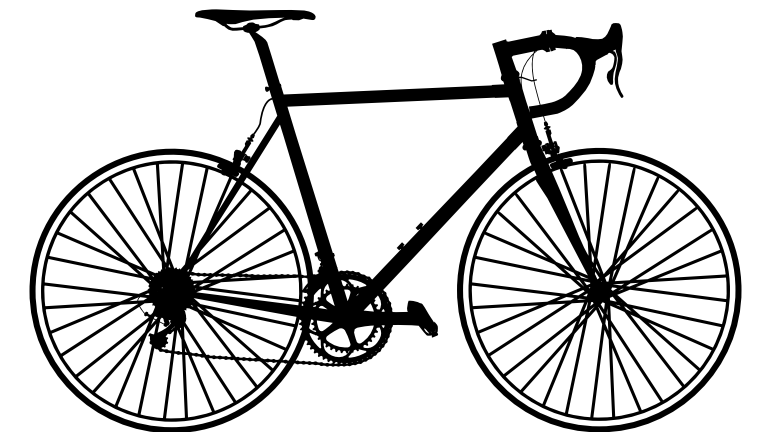
## Discussion questions

1. Do you think Lance Armstrong's achievements should still be remembered?
2. Is it possible to forgive someone who has lied for years but finally tells the truth?
3. Do you think the pressure to win in professional sports is too high?

## Grammar

Complete the sentences with the correct past tense form of the verbs in brackets.

1. Lance Armstrong \_\_\_\_\_ (win) the Tour de France seven times.
2. By the time he confessed, people \_\_\_\_\_ already \_\_\_\_\_ (suspect) him.
3. While journalists \_\_\_\_\_ (ask) questions, Armstrong kept denying everything.
4. He \_\_\_\_\_ (use) banned substances for years before he got caught.



# Reading 2 – Diego Maradona

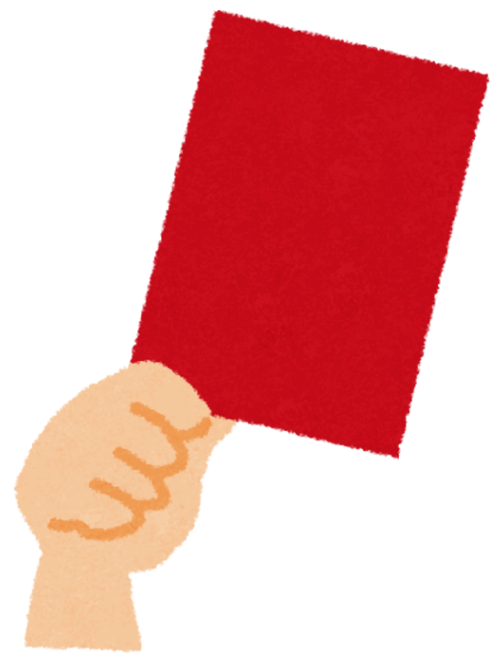
On June 22, 1986, Argentina played against England in the quarterfinals of the FIFA World Cup. The match was full of tension because of the countries' political history. Diego Maradona, Argentina's star player, became the center of attention.

In the 51st minute, Maradona scored a controversial goal. He had jumped into the air and hit the ball with his hand, but the referee didn't see it. The goal was allowed, even though Maradona had broken the rules. After the game, when people asked him about it, he said it was scored "a little with the head of Maradona and a little with the hand of God."

At the time, many fans were shocked. England had lost the match, and some people felt it had been stolen from them. Years later, Maradona admitted he had done it on purpose.

## Comprehension Questions

1. When did the match between Argentina and England take place?
2. Why was the match so tense?
3. How did Maradona score the first goal?
4. What did the referee do?
5. What did Maradona say after the match?



# Reading 2 – Diego Maradona

## Discussion Questions

1. Should Maradona have admitted the truth immediately?
2. If the referee doesn't see a foul, is it still cheating?
3. Would VAR (video assistant referee) have changed the result of this match?

## Grammar

Complete the sentences with the correct past tense form of the verbs in brackets.

1. In 1986, Maradona \_\_\_\_\_ (score) one of the most controversial goals in football.
2. He said he \_\_\_\_\_ (use) “a little with the head, and a little with the hand of God.”
3. Many people \_\_\_\_\_ (watch) the game live on TV when the incident happened.
4. Years later, Maradona \_\_\_\_\_ (admit) it was a handball.



# Reading 3 – The 2000 Spanish Paralympic Basketball Scandal

At the 2000 Paralympic Games in Sydney, the Spanish basketball team for athletes with intellectual disabilities won the gold medal. Everyone celebrated their amazing performance — but things weren't as they seemed.

After the games, one of the players admitted something surprising. Ten out of the twelve team members had not had any disability. They had pretended to be disabled so they could play in the tournament and increase their chances of winning. Investigators later found that the team had cheated with the help of coaches and officials.

While the team was winning matches, journalists had already noticed something strange. Some players were answering interview questions easily and had shown no signs of any disability. By the time the truth came out, the gold medals had already been awarded and celebrated. The team was disqualified, and the scandal shocked the sports world. It had damaged trust in the Paralympic system.

## Comprehension Questions

1. What did the Spanish team win at the 2000 Paralympics?
2. What was unusual about most of the players?
3. How was the cheating discovered?
4. What had some journalists noticed during the games?
5. What happened after the truth came out?



# Reading 3 – The 2000 Spanish Paralympic Basketball Scandal

## Discussion Questions

1. Why do you think the team decided to cheat in this way?
2. Should the coaches and officials also be punished?
3. How can sports organisations prevent this kind of fraud in the future?

## Grammar

Complete the sentences with the correct past tense form of the verbs in brackets.

1. The team \_\_\_\_\_ (win) the gold medal in the Paralympics.
2. After a journalist investigated, it was clear the players \_\_\_\_\_ (not/have) disabilities.
3. While some players \_\_\_\_\_ (celebrate), others knew the truth.
4. The team \_\_\_\_\_ (return) their medals after the scandal came to light.



# Reading 4 – Tonya Harding

In January 1994, American figure skater Nancy Kerrigan was attacked after a practice session. A man had hit her in the leg with a metal stick, trying to stop her from competing. The news shocked the skating world.

It was soon discovered that the attack had been planned by people close to Tonya Harding, Kerrigan's main rival. Tonya's ex-husband and her bodyguard had hired the attacker. At first, Harding denied knowing anything about it. But later, she admitted that she had heard details after the attack and had not reported them.

At the time of the incident, Kerrigan had been preparing for the national championships. While she was recovering, Harding had already won the title. Both women competed at the Olympics, but the scandal followed them everywhere. In the end, Harding was banned for life from professional figure skating.

## Comprehension Questions

1. What happened to Nancy Kerrigan in 1994?
2. Who planned the attack?
3. What was Harding's role in the situation?
4. What had Kerrigan been doing before the attack?
5. What happened to Harding's career?



# Reading 4 – Tonya Harding

## Discussion Questions

1. Do you think Harding should have been banned for life?
2. If someone knows about a crime but doesn't report it, are they guilty too?
3. Can athletes truly move on after a scandal like this?

## Grammar

Complete the sentences with the correct past tense form of the verbs in brackets.

1. Nancy Kerrigan \_\_\_\_\_ (be) attacked just before the Olympic trials.
2. Investigators discovered that people close to Harding \_\_\_\_\_ (plan) the attack.
3. At the time, Harding \_\_\_\_\_ (train) for the competition.
4. She later admitted she \_\_\_\_\_ (know) about the attack after it happened.



# Reading 5 – Marion Jones

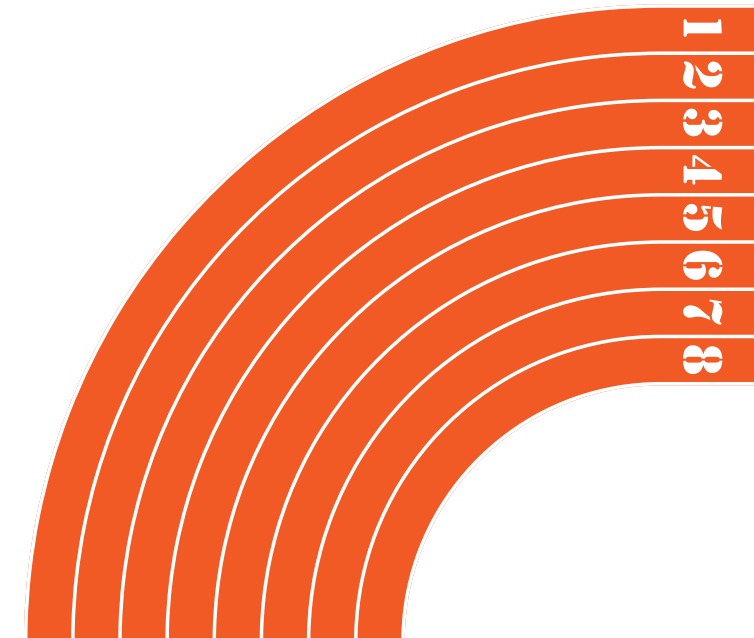
Marion Jones was once called the fastest woman in the world. At the 2000 Sydney Olympics, she had won five medals — three gold and two bronze. Her performances amazed millions of fans.

But years later, everything changed. In 2007, Jones admitted that she had used performance-enhancing drugs before the Olympics. She had denied the accusations for a long time, but eventually the truth came out. She had lied to federal investigators and had even signed documents that weren't true.

By the time she confessed, her medals had already been questioned. After her admission, she lost all five medals and served six months in prison for lying. She had once been a role model, but now many felt disappointed.

## Comprehension Questions

1. How many medals did Jones win in the 2000 Olympics?
2. What did she admit in 2007?
3. Why did she go to prison?
4. What had happened to her medals?
5. How did people feel about her after the confession?



# Reading 5 – Marion Jones

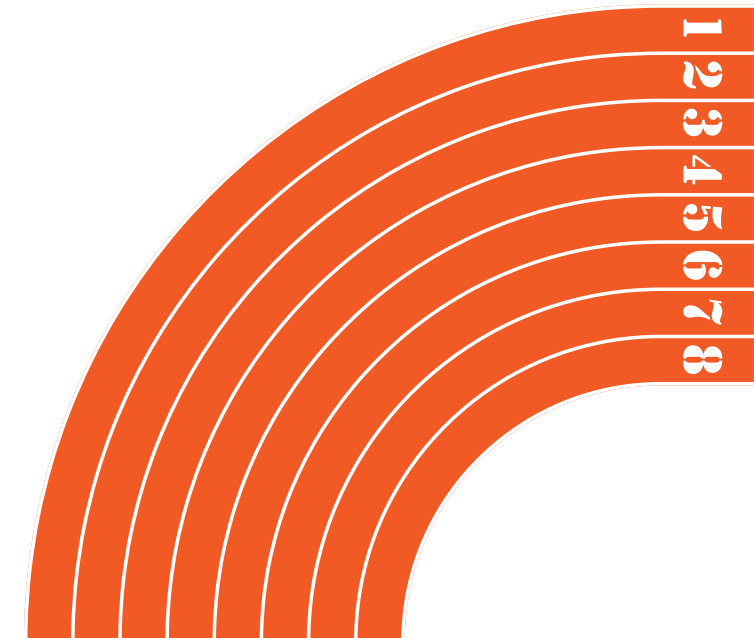
## Discussion Questions

1. Is it fair to take away medals years after the event?
2. Why might athletes feel pressure to cheat?
3. Can someone regain their reputation after a scandal like this?

## Grammar

Complete the sentences with the correct past tense form of the verbs in brackets.

1. In 2000, Marion Jones \_\_\_\_\_ (win) five Olympic medals.
2. By 2007, she \_\_\_\_\_ (admit) to using banned substances.
3. She \_\_\_\_\_ (lie) to investigators during the case.
4. Fans \_\_\_\_\_ (admire) her before the truth came out.



# Reading 6 – Clem Haskins

In the 1990s, Clem Haskins was the head coach of the University of Minnesota men's basketball team. His teams had done well, and many believed he had built a strong, successful program.

But in 1999, a major scandal broke out. A former academic tutor revealed that she had written more than 400 assignments for basketball players. Some of them had not even attended class. The university had allowed these players to stay eligible by cheating.

Haskins claimed he didn't know the full extent of the cheating, but it was discovered that he had paid the tutor to stay quiet. After the truth came out, the university erased the team's records from several seasons, and Haskins resigned.

## Comprehension Questions

1. What was Clem Haskins's job?
2. What kind of academic fraud took place?
3. Who was involved in the cheating?
4. What had the tutor done?
5. What did the university do after the scandal?



# Reading 6 – Clem Haskins

## Discussion Questions

1. Should coaches be punished for academic cheating by their players?
2. Why is education important for student athletes?
3. Do you think Haskins deserved to lose his job?

## Grammar

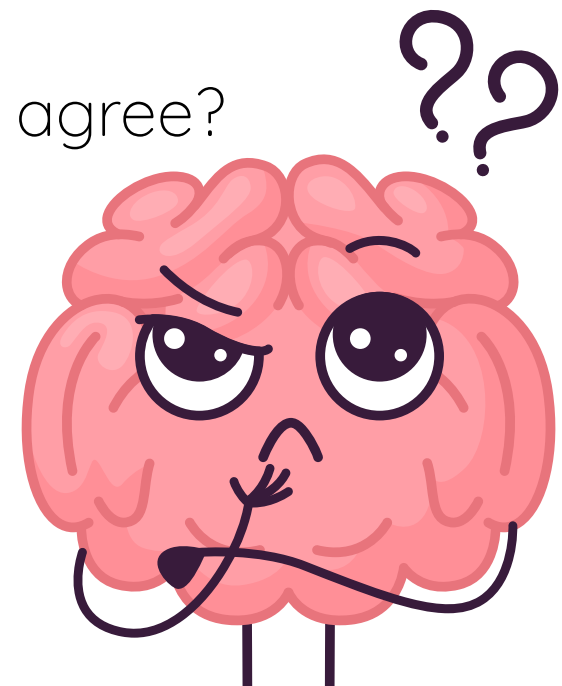
Complete the sentences with the correct past tense form of the verbs in brackets.

1. Haskins \_\_\_\_\_ (coach) the university basketball team in the 1990s.
2. A tutor later revealed she \_\_\_\_\_ (write) hundreds of assignments for players.
3. While players \_\_\_\_\_ (ignore) class, the school let them play.
4. Haskins \_\_\_\_\_ (resign) after the scandal was exposed.



# Moral dilemmas – what would you do?

- A. You know your teammate is cheating, but your team keeps winning. Do you report it or stay quiet?
- B. Your best friend is about to lose a championship. You have a way to help them cheat without anyone knowing. Do you do it?
- C. You're an athlete, and you're offered a substance that isn't banned (yet), but gives you an unfair advantage. Do you take it?
- D. A coach promises you a place on the team if you lie about an injury. What do you do?
- E. You find out your idol cheated years ago. Do you still admire them?
- F. Your country is desperate for a gold medal. The government suggests you "bend the rules." Do you agree?



# Moral dilemmas – what would you do?

G. You're a journalist and discover evidence of cheating. Reporting it could destroy someone's career. Do you publish the story?

H. You're a referee, and you didn't see the foul clearly, but the crowd expects a red card. Do you pretend you saw it?

I. You were part of a team that cheated, but you didn't take part directly. Should you be punished?

J. A young athlete is pressured to cheat to stay in the sport. Would you blame them or the system?



# Do you agree?

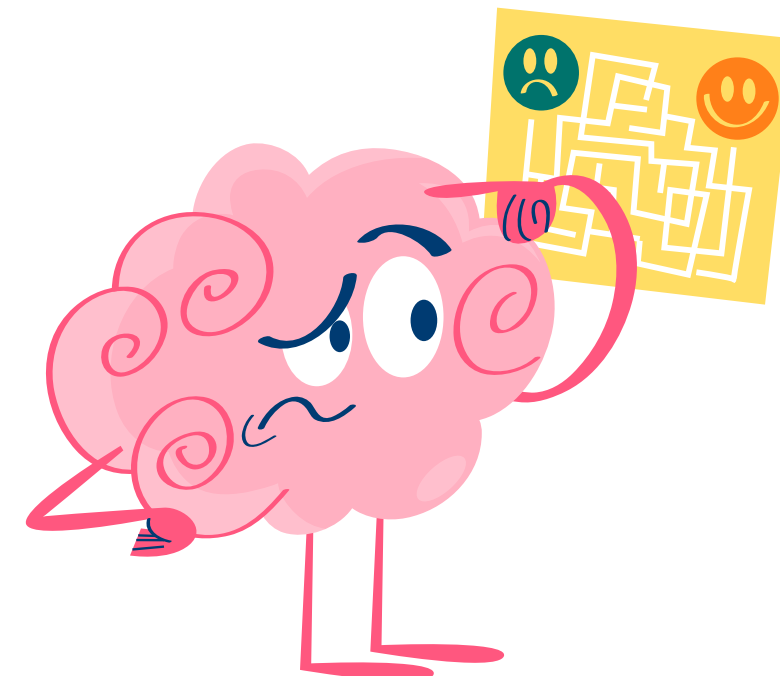
- Athletes who cheat should be banned for life.
- If the referee didn't see it, it's not cheating.
- Winning is more important than playing fair.
- People deserve a second chance, even after cheating.
- Cheating in sports is always wrong, no matter the reason.
- Athletes face so much pressure that cheating is sometimes understandable.
- If everyone is cheating, it's not really unfair.
- Video technology (like VAR) has made sports more honest.
- Fans care more about winning than about fairness.
- Cheating in school is just as serious as cheating in sports.

## Agreeing

- I (completely) agree with that.
- That's true. / That's a good point.
- I think you're right.
- I feel the same way.
- Absolutely!

## Disagreeing

- I see your point, but I disagree.
- I'm not sure I agree with that.
- Actually, I think the opposite.
- That's not how I see it.
- I have a different opinion.



# Answer key – odd one out

- 1.goalkeeper - bench - yellow card - penalty - **to dunk**
- 2.court - jersey - sneakers - basket - **goalkeeper**
- 3.court - backhand - racket - **referee** - umpire
- 4.bicycle – wheels – chain – pedals – **swimsuit**
- 5.puck - stick - **court** - helmet - skates

# Answer key – grammar

## 1. Lance Armstrong

Answer Key:

- 1.won
- 2.had already suspected
- 3.were asking
- 4.had used

## 4. Tonya Harding

Answer Key:

- 1.was
- 2.had planned
- 3.was training
- 4.had known

## 2. Diego Maradona

Answer Key:

- 1.scored
- 2.had used
- 3.were watching
- 4.admitted

## 5. Marion Jones

Answer Key:

- 1.won
- 2.had admitted
- 3.had lied
- 4.had admired

## 3. 2000 Spanish Paralympic Basketball Team

Answer Key:

- 1.won
- 2.had not had
- 3.were celebrating
- 4.returned

## 6. Clem Haskins

Answer Key:

- 1.coached
- 2.had written
- 3.were ignoring
- 4.resigned