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Elective performance enhancement surgery for athletes: Should it be resisted?

Mark Hamilton

Abstract

The following article describes some surgeries used to enhance athletic performance along with discussion of possible ones that could be used in the upcoming years for this purpose. Elective eye surgery is used by numerous athletes in sports where sight is an essential aspect of success. This raises the ethical question of whether it is morally acceptable to perform enhancement surgery for the purpose of developing capabilities that are superior to normal, such as 20/10 vision. Criteria to determine the morality of these actions is necessary, especially when the surgery is optional and is motivated not by therapeutic needs but to enhance performance and to create an ability above and beyond the norm. It is one thing to have corrective surgery for convenience's sake or to slow down deterioration, but it is quite another to do it to create superior vision, such as 20/10. With the acceptance of this rather benign eye surgery and due to the advances in minimally invasive surgical techniques, the crackdown on steroid usage, and the growing financial incentives for athletes, it is only a matter of time before this evolves into athletes having elective surgeries to become bigger, stronger, or faster. Elective surgery will expand in its usage to enhance performance. This raises a plethora of moral issues, therefore there must be serious pursuit of criteria to evaluate the morality of this type of elective surgery and encouragement of athletic institutions to be proactive in policy making. Finally, there is discussion on whether a solution can begin to be found in transhumanism, in a pragmatic approach or in returning to an essentialist view of human nature.

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