

# ***WE BELIEVE!* ONLINE REPRESENTATIONS OF THE OLYMPIC WINNER AS A MYTHIC HERO**

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**Abstract:** This article<sup>1</sup> is a study of the doping scandal that broke out in April 2011 and concerned the esteemed Estonian sportsman and Olympic gold medal winner, Andrus Veerpalu. The current analysis is based on the material collected from the Estonian online media throughout two years, from April 2011 to March 2013, during which Andrus Veerpalu's court case was actively followed by the Estonian sports circles and laymen alike. We will analyse how the image of Andrus Veerpalu as a national hero (almost as a demigod) is constructed on the Internet and how it relates to analogous stories about athletes from earlier times (e.g., to folk stories about Georg Lurich).

In the current case, the main reason why the majority of the nation supported Andrus Veerpalu was because they believed in him. This pervading thread emerged right after the news spread, and was present in various contexts: the online comments of the articles that dealt with the scandal, Facebook community posts in the group entitled "We believe in Andrus Veerpalu" ("*Usume Andrus Veerpalu*"), which was created to show solidarity with the sportsman, etc. All this indicated the high status of the athlete and laid a foundation for a sincere and positive discourse. This was in opposition to the negative discourse of irony, which questioned the honesty of the athlete and foregrounded subversive emotions like indifference and superiority towards the topic. The analysis will address the emergence of the Olympic hero as a national myth, and point at various narratives that deal with the scandal through the present-day genres of urban legends, conspiracy stories, and Internet humour.

**Keywords:** conspiracy stories, fan culture, folklore about doping cases, mythic hero, national identity, sports folklore, stereotypes

## **INTRODUCTION**

On February 23, 2011, the famous Estonian cross country skier Andrus Veerpalu, who had twice won the world championship as well as collected two gold medals at the Olympic Games, announced the termination of his career as a sportsman. This unexpected news was seen under a different light when one and a half months later, on April 7, a doping scandal broke out after the Estonian Ski Association had organised a press conference to announce that Veerpalu

had tested positive for growth hormone in a doping test that he had taken about two months earlier. Regardless of his plea for innocence, the International Ski Federation decided on August 23, 2011, to punish him by suspending him from competition for three years. But as the long court case drew to a close, Veerpalu was acquitted on March 25, 2013. The case was dismissed and his competition ban was withdrawn. The main argument of his defence – that the doping tests were not sensitive enough to distinguish between forbidden substances and the level of natural growth hormones increased by excessive exercising – had been successful.

Throughout these two years the media and the general public showed heightened interest in everything connected with Andrus Veerpalu in particular and doping issues in professional sports in general. The Olympic winner denied that he had used any forbidden substances, either during competitions or at other times, although he admitted at a press conference that he had found out about the positive doping test results already before announcing his decision to end his career. The active concern in the topic was first fostered by the professional media and further amplified by the social resonance visible in the persistent interest of different online community groups. This was evident in news texts, innumerable comments that followed each of those, public discussions and events, and the creation of social media communities for Veerpalu's fans and those who believed in his innocence. It is important to point out that social networks have become a very important channel of information in the present-day world, but not only that – social networks do not only spread information but also shape and restructure it, making it more difficult to separate the communicator from the content of the message. New knowledge communicated across the community and even further is actively produced. This, in addition to comments in online news portals (the continuous creation and resonance of information as well as the emotional aspect of the communication), has proven to provide ideal data for the folklorist. Internet material comes in different genres, for example, narratives, rumours of conspiracy theories, jokes and anecdotes, stories containing (ethnic) stereotypes, etc. It is interesting to note that in the public discussion of the current case, believing in the sportsman became one of the central topics. In the highly emotional public dispute, people were split into two camps that stood in sharp opposition. On the one hand, there were those who represented the serious and earnest discourse, either supporting Veerpalu's innocence or, to a lesser extent, advocating against it; on the other hand, the sceptics voiced the ironic discourse, mocking the ones who believed, but also criticising the role of the media in the scandal. The purpose of this article is to describe the attitudes and stereotypes displayed in Veerpalu's doping case and list their potential interpretations in the broader socio-cultural context.

The material for the study was collected in the course of two years. The data includes the most relevant news texts published on the online news portal Delfi ([www.delfi.ee](http://www.delfi.ee)), posts and commentaries from the same online environment, and posts from the Facebook fan site “We believe in Andrus Veerpalu”<sup>2</sup>.

## 1. THEORETICAL BACKGROUND

### 1.1. Andrus Veerpalu’s doping case as a source of newslore

Russell Frank, American researcher with an academic background in journalism, has coined the term “newslore” to denote folklore that stems from the knowledge disseminated by daily news and provides a commentary on it (Frank 2011). Newslore can be displayed in various genres of folklore: jokes (including disaster humour), sayings, rumours and conspiracy theories, digitally manipulated photos, news parodies, printed inserts, unofficial circulars, parodies of songs and poetry, commercial and political advertising, comics and animations, etc. Also the stories, ideas and beliefs that were created and spread during Andrus Veerpalu’s lengthy doping scandal can be defined as newslore because they mostly relied on daily news. Apart from the narratives themselves, the reactions to the narratives (in the form of online comments) contain folkloric elements. The whole dataset, i.e., the newslore narratives and their comments, form an excellent instance of sports folklore.

Sports folklore is a genre that shares an overarching topic – sports (cf. also Voolaid 2003: 197). The focus of sports folklore is the sportsman, the main actor in the field. The carriers of tradition can be divided into three main categories: (1) sportsmen and people closely connected to the area (sports pedagogues: coaches, teachers of physical education, specialists in training methods); other people dealing with sports (officials, sports journalists, doctors, etc.); (2) people interested in sports (fans, amateur sportsmen, audience members at sporting events, so-called armchair sportsmen or people watching sports programmes at home); (3) laymen, people usually unacquainted with the field and the nuances of the work and private lives of sportsmen and their coaches. It is not possible, of course, to define these categories fully and exhaustively. For example, someone extremely knowledgeable in the folklore of a certain area of sports may be ignorant of the slang and traditions of another. There is, however, a common set of sports narratives that are known equally well by fans and laymen, and this layer of folklore is very often related to events or phenomena in sports that have received the biggest public attention. Any popular sports events and large scandals may eventually involve the third group, laymen. The case that we are

analysing in this article captured wide public attention, and hence it is not surprising that the event resonated not only in the sports-related circles (groups 1 and 2), but also in the group least familiar with sports (group 3). The latter got their information from the media or by word of mouth from their friends or acquaintances. The laymen made their decisions regarding the scandal relying on secondary sources. The attitudes of the third group are highly visible in the analysed Internet comments. It is exactly them who loudly express their evaluations and monochrome attitudes towards sports in the form of sports folklore. The emotions shape the stories: the commentators dream of a medal, Olympic or other; they talk about their hopes vested in the heroes, they crave for celebrities, and they show their excitement about hearing and spreading the rumours, scandals and intrigues surrounding these stories.

The leading sportsmen and athletes are well-established targets of public attention, who have stepped or been dragged into the spotlight. Folklore about such matters enables the researcher to gain an insight into the prevalent reactions and attitudes in a particular case. When the leading sportsman, the hero, faces misfortune instead of success, consecutive narratives display evaluations and stereotypical points of view.

## **1.2. Olympic winner as a national hero**

There are plenty of examples in sports history concerning the fortifying effect that the success of a famous athlete can have on the national spirit and community. The classical examples of Estonian athletes from the late 19th and early 20th centuries stress the heroic quality of the weight lifters and wrestlers who were active at that time. These narratives in turn support the identity of a nation. For example, the heroic stories and tales about the first Estonian wrestler Georg Lurich are still known and told among people. Kalle Voolaid, who has studied the question of truth and imagination in the narratives about the said wrestler, has maintained, grounding his claims on the analysis of about a hundred folk stories, that most of them did not really take place (2001: 186). Instead, some known motives from old heroic stories have been borrowed and integrated into these narratives.

Longstanding traditions and public attention in the media support the emergence of national sports. In Estonia, one of the national sports is certainly cross country skiing, which is sustained by the keen interest of the audience and amateurs; its reputation is also backed up by outstanding results in big competitions. It is of no less importance that the climatic conditions favour the field as well. The high international ranking of Estonian cross country skiers has

further perpetuated the important role of the sport for the Estonian identity. Andrus Veerpalu, who is a positive hero *par excellence*, in terms of character traits and behaviour, has acquired the status through hard work, effort and considerable talent. Veerpalu has been known to the Estonian audience as an honest, hard-working man, a “true Estonian”, and is equally praised for being an exemplary head of the family, raising five children, most of whom do cross-country skiing on a competitive level. The image of an idol was quick to emerge from this; the difficult journey and misfortunes of a strong national hero were a recurrent motive in the stories that circulated at that time. All these aspects were brought to attention by different experts and laymen during the scandal that followed Veerpalu’s positive results in the doping test. For example, a lecturer of public relations at the University of Tartu, Aune Past, gave an interview for the biggest daily newspaper *Postimees* (The Courier) (Smutov 2011), explaining the strong support and extraordinary affection of the people by stressing how the audience wanted to identify with the hero. At the same time, the scandal tore into the open a number of contradictory issues and questions, asking if Veerpalu was telling the truth or lying, and whether he was closer to a hero or an anti-hero (*ibid.*).

From a folklorist’s point of view, the article written by psychologist Volde-mar Kolga (2011) is thought-provoking as well. The author explains the strong public support by using the theory of Joseph Campbell who in the 1940s coined the term monomyth (Campbell 2004: 28). According to his concept, a hero is a person who leaves his everyday life in order to undertake a journey into the unknown, into a different world, where he accepts challenges, overcomes his fears, and, as a result, brings back trophies or awards that he can then share with his people, his community (Kolga 2011).

In a similar vein, we can see the role of a fairy tale hero emerging as an athlete wins an Olympic medal. The classic study by Vladimir Propp (1969 [1928]) has established the universal structural model of fairy tales, which regards the journey itself but also the successfully solved challenges as central to the tale. The model has been used in analysing folklore about athletes also before.<sup>3</sup>

People are motivated to maintain a positive self-esteem and this can be achieved through witnessing the success of their role models or heroes. As a result of experiencing this process, which Habimana and Massé (2000: 22) have termed as reflection, people feel better about themselves in the light of the others’ fame. We can describe the national longing for Olympic medals and other victories using this notion, seen as an expression of national reflection. This does not always lead to a positive outcome: the wish to identify with the hero Andrus Veerpalu brought along a situation which was aptly described in the Estonian media as “a collective shock, a national trauma, which has

assumed even religious features” (Delfi column from April 8, 2011<sup>4</sup>). Not only did the sportsman and his reputation get a strong blow; so did also his supporters and fans. At the same time, Veerpalu’s incident was definitely distinct from all previous similar cases: doping cases do not usually end positively for the accused (cf. Canadian sprinter Ben Johnson, American cyclist Lance Armstrong, Finnish skiers Harri Kirvesniemi, Mika Myllylä, etc.). Thus, in a way, the negative event had positive outcomes, as it boosted national feelings and created cohesion among people.

Nowadays, a successful sportsman is simultaneously a celebrity figure. His results are in correlation with the quality of the system he works in (professional team, sponsors, and fans). He represents the entire country and the nation, not just himself. This makes it possible to state that the success of the athlete is also the success of the community, i.e., the nation, and it directly affects national identity and self-esteem. Talking about the connection between sports and nationalism, Jyrki Pöysä has claimed that in the globalising and media-dominated late modern world, it is exactly sports that allows people to experience nationalist feelings in comfortable and (mostly) safe settings, although in some cases nationalism can change from open-minded patriotism into banal, aggressive and xenophobic hooliganism (Pöysä 2004: 56).

The image of the Olympic athlete as a mythical hero is not very different from (quasi-religious) belief. This is an emotional question: it has almost nothing to do with the rational and measurable facts like doping test results or other numeric entities. People’s attitudes are based on subjective evaluations on both group and individual levels. In the context of the current article, the notion of belief is treated as a metaphorical (or rhetorical) expression of trust towards the national hero. This belief displays similar features of worshipping celebrities. István Povedák, while writing about celebrity cult in Hungary, has maintained that “the cults of different celebrities hold religious components to a different degree. [...] This kind of celebrity cult can function as religion in sub-cultural level and can act as religion among fans” (Povedák 2009: 9). This is defined not as vernacular religiosity but rather as quasi- or pseudo-religious belief.

This is not the first time that doping scandals have affected the Estonian sports communities; this has also happened before. For example, on January 23, 2002 (just prior to the Salt Lake City Olympic Games), the Estonian Ski Association received a note from the International Ski Federation that the most successful Estonian female cross country skier Kristina Šmigun tested positive in a doping test. Yet, the B-test results, disclosed a week later, were negative, and overruled the accusations. She ranked seventh in the competition, which was much lower than had been expected, and the rumours suggested that the

accusations had been a deliberate sabotage with the aim of weakening the athlete psychologically before the important test of strength.

The following question and answer joke was popular at the time, although today it needs an explanation even for an Estonian audience: “What is the difference between an Estonian and a Finn?” – “The Estonian has a negative B-test”. The joke which must have boosted the national feelings of the Estonians referred to Finnish athletes who had tested positive in both A- and B-tests. The case found resonance in tongue-in-cheek comments about the case, bringing out ethnic stereotypes about the Finns. The joke no longer works after the Veerpalu doping scandal. Nevertheless, it would be fruitful to inquire in future research which ethnic issues were taken up in Veerpalu’s case.

### **1.3. Conspiracy stories**

Contemporary conspiracy stories about doping scandals form a new subgenre of sports folklore, displaying common features with urban legends and quasi-belief. The narratives, based on a conviction central to the story, carry a distinct moral and are usually spread as anonymous rumours (Kalmre 1996: 137–139). The doping stories that are disseminated in the Internet commentaries also address (allegedly) true events; although they contain supernatural elements and may be ironic, they are still believable.

Researchers have pointed out that similarly to present-day urban legends, conspiracy stories are also told in crisis situations. The general atmosphere of suspicion and fear, poor availability of information through the institutionalised channels, its vagueness and even inconsistency are typical of such situations (Kalmre 2000; Fine & Ellis 2010; Madisson 2012). The excess of information from multiple sources on the Internet may often lead to an opposition between mainstream and alternative media. Researchers have noticed that the “official truth” reported in the mainstream media may become the synonym of a lie in the alternative media (Renard 2005: 225), and the belief in conspiracy theories engenders the scepticism towards public institutions and their statements (e.g. Keeley 1999: 121; Dentith 2012: 84). The same conditions were present in Veerpalu’s case. Although plenty of information was being presented through the media, its content was often contradictory and did not provide reliable facts. People were uncertain if they should believe in the athlete who claimed to be innocent. The media carries an important role in the process of creating rumours, but it is not able to answer all the questions that people might have. Conspiracy theories tend to offer putative explanations for the data unexplained by or contradicting the alternative information (Coady 2006: 119). Besides, journalism

sends out fuzzy signals that force the audience to build their intuitive theories on the existing information, complement this by fantasies, and rely on earlier experiences with similar events. Like other forms of contemporary legends, conspiracy theories are most effectively spread in the context of overall confusion. The conspiracy stories that appeared in connection with Veerpalu's case definitely did not point to the "truth", but they did indicate the attractiveness of the topic. The doping stories supported the importance of the subject matter: it was intriguing, topical and worth retelling.

The depiction of doping scandals in the media is a broad research topic. Varied accounts of the issue often reach beyond the limits of sports-related groups. For the outsiders, the stories are more about the reputation of the nation and the country than strictly about sports. The audience reacts to the doping scandals by taking sides, displaying their prejudices and telling stories. Speculations about forbidden substances in sports are reinforced by the increasingly dominant and institutionalised intolerance towards doping use, but also by the fact that there have lately been many doping cases. All these scandalous events instantly get reflected in the media and reach the interested audience. One of the most talked about cases on the global scale in the recent past was the doping scandal of American cyclist Lance Armstrong, whose all seven victories of Tour de France were annulled by the International Cycling Union, and the United States Anti-Doping Agency (USADA) banned him from competitions for life. In this case, the prevailing attitudes in the media reflect the disappointment with the athlete, the sense distance from him, and negative opinions about his dishonest behaviour.

#### **1.4. Humour and irony in online comments**

Irony conveys a subversive meaning in a seemingly straightforward manner. It is double-voiced, creating an incongruity between what is being said and what is meant. Linda Hutcheon, in her seminal book about irony (1994), argues that marginalised groups (in her discussion, the postcolonial and feminist ones in particular) use irony as a playful counter-discourse to make a general point about the dominant, serious one. Irony is thus a play with crucial concepts in a *non-bona-fide* mode, and its message is masked by seriousness, e.g., through the adoption of the prevailing serious form of communication. Jūratė Kavaliauskaitė (2009), writing about ironic discourse in the media, focuses on the intertextuality, both in form and content, that it is based on. Playing with genres and ideas is a common feature of the ironic discourse. Jamie Warner (2008) maintains that stressful events (taking 9/11 in the USA as a case in



point) bring about irony that feeds on the dominant serious discourse that rigidly labels all interpretations deviating from the official ones as “suspect, unpatriotic, or even treasonous”, arguing against those who have interpreted such events as the end of irony (ibid.).

In Veerpalu’s case, monochrome dualism became the powerful interpretive frame for the audience; they were divided into believers and non-believers. In addition to that, there were people who refused to be governed by this frame – they were the proponents of the ironic discourse. They did not take the categories of right and wrong too seriously, instead opting for criticising the dualist point of view as such and its reflection in the media.

Another aspect that needs to be taken into account is the fact that the source of the material for the present analysis is the Internet, where humour and irony are frequent phenomena. Playful sequences of conversation can be encountered in different online contexts to a different degree, depending on the nature and function of this environment. Online playful comments are socially gratifying because they express feelings and attitudes (Virtanen 2013: 270), be they sincere or ironic, and this immediately attracts the audience. It is a time off from the main concerns, without verging too far from the main topic. The abundance of playfulness, humour, and wit, particularly in synchronous modes of computer mediated communication, has been amply documented (see, e.g., Danet 1995; Danet et al. 1997). Ray Oldenburg (1999) argues that seriousness is often disliked in online communities; instead, frivolity, verbal word play, and wit are appreciated. Although it has been hypothesised that due to reduced cues and subsequent greater risks of misunderstanding Internet users would be careful with using either humour or irony, research shows the opposite (e.g. Hancock 2004). The analysis of the ironic discourse is essential in Veerpalu’s case because playful attitudes expressed in online comments provide a powerful alternative for the serious discourse.

## **2. ANALYSIS AND DISCUSSION**

### **2.1. Chronology of the case in the media**

The World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) found forbidden substances in Andrus Veerpalu’s A-test taken on February 14, 2011. This was supported by a positive B-test analysed in a German laboratory on April 5 and 6 of the same year. In between these dates, on February 23, Andrus Veerpalu announced at a press conference that he was going to end his career. The first snippets of information about the doping case, however, did not start to circulate much before the

end of February and the beginning of March, when the article by Tuuli Koch and Peep Pahv (2011) was published in the newspaper *Postimees* on April 2. The sensational article that explored the claims about positive A-test results (discussing information that was obtained from an anonymous source) caused much reverberation among the audience.

In the following days, the public, shocked by the news, quickly organised support groups for the athlete. Sports enthusiasts and firm believers in Andrus Veerpalu's innocence created a Facebook community "We believe in Andrus Veerpalu". In addition to that, public meetings took place in order to support the sportsman. Public anger and indignation was channelled, among other ways, into a communal enmity against the first article published in *Postimees*. These feelings were expressed in open protests against the article, its authors, and the newspaper itself.

The belief in the innocence of Andrus Veerpalu was vested in prior media reflections of his predominantly positive character as an honest sportsman. Before the decisive date of January 29, Andrus Veerpalu had taken over a hundred doping tests, and none of these had shown any traces of forbidden substances. A test taken in Davosi training camp at the beginning of February, the same year, just before the one that gave the unfortunate result, was also clean. All his compulsory doping tests from before and after Olympic and World Championship competitions had been negative.

## 2.2. Material and methods

For the analysis, responses to the news texts and articles related to the doping scandal were collected from the news portal Delfi ([www.delfi.ee](http://www.delfi.ee)). Asynchronous observation of Internet communication was used to select the most relevant articles concerning the doping case. Although well over 300 news texts were published in the portal during the period of observation – characterised by introducing multiple, sometimes contradictory points of view and having diverse effects on the audience – the material includes a selection of 30 news texts and their comments (threads ranging from containing 30 to 1150 single posts). These were chosen to represent the crucial moments in the long-lasting public dispute over the scandal. The majority of the threads were recorded from the beginning of the scandal in April 2011, when the topic was still "hot"; the intermediary stages (e.g., those articles that dealt with postponing the court hearing of the case) were included in the material; and finally the numerous comments that followed the article concerning the final decision and rehabilitation of the hero, "Veerpalu Won in the Sports Court!" ("Veerpalu sai spordikohtus võidu!"<sup>5</sup>), published on March 26, 2013, were added, forming a quarter of the entire dataset.

The active involvement of Delfi commentators and their pervading interest in the topic was visible all throughout the period, but the article announcing the positive decision of the court (from March 26) was most intensely commented on. We may hypothesise that the reason for this was a general feeling of relief of tension, the need for reinstating the hero, and the feeling that this might be the last chance to speak up on the issue. Furthermore, the media had been withholding information at the beginning of the scandal, handing out only small pieces of the whole puzzle in daily write-ups. These were also actively commented on; yet, the final article was preceded by a long silence, and all the interested commentators finally had a chance to express their concluding opinion in the matter. The total number of comments collected for the study was 4000.

For comparison, Facebook postings related to Veerpalu's case were collected, mostly expressing support for the athlete – e.g., volunteers who offered to translate and post research results on the topic of growth hormones – but also representing the ironic discourse through humorous posts. The most visible of these communities was titled “We believe in Andrus Veerpalu”.

### **2.2.1. Characteristics of the media: Delfi and Facebook**

Delfi news portal is the most popular commentary board in the Estonian online media. It is also the least regulated environment for public discussion on the Estonian Internet. As such, it is the most suitable source for studying public sentiments and their relation to larger scale cultural phenomena and processes like creating myths and rumours, negotiating matters concerning (national) identity, etc. It displays and even intensifies the wide range of opinions that the Internet users have. In the course of actively advocating one's point of view, opinions clash and become more delineated. The popularity and diversity of the particular environment justifies our choice of material and explains the omission of others. For example, the biggest daily newspaper in Estonia, *Postimees*, was left out of the sample because its comments represented only a narrow section of the public opinion as this newspaper published the first article of the topic and subsequently became the object of public loathing and attack, mostly against the unethical approach of the journalists. Delfi commentators expressed a greater variety of opinions, although the impulse to attack the media, the messenger, is not absent from there either. A study of the media responses to Veerpalu's scandal maintained that the majority of the articles were biased (Haavala et al. 2011: 15), and this affected the opinions of the audience. Not only the comments themselves but also the news texts that sparked the online discussions were often formulated in an emotional and provocative style. This

constitutes a perfect hotbed for rumours, stereotypes and conspiracy stories, while rational dispute becomes less attractive.

Equally relevant to the research questions (see below) is the analysis of social media content. In Facebook people post under their real names and this affects the content of their posts. Besides, their attitudes were more positive to start with because the community was meant for Veerpalu's supporters. The community "We believe in Andrus Veerpalu" grew hour by hour right after it was created and reached over 60,000 members. Facebook users simultaneously "unliked" *Postimees* for its critical approach towards the scandal and the athlete.<sup>6</sup> The popularity of the community shows clearly how national feelings can be invigorated and actions stimulated by the news concerning a sportsman who has earned the admiration of the nation. In fact, the public show of affection reached such magnitude that a foreign journalist commented on that in the article "Only a Revolution Has Seen Greater Public Feelings" (2011). The article described the Facebook community as an extraordinary case of public involvement and compared this public reaction to other countries that have a history of similar doping cases. The author concluded that if the doping scandal had taken place in the USA or Great Britain, the athlete would have suffered public disgrace, whereas the Estonians mobilised themselves in order to support their hero. During the first 24 hours, 50,000 "believers" who were convinced that Veerpalu was innocent joined the community, which is equivalent to 250,000 people in Great Britain, but which is most unlikely to happen there (ibid.). Other supportive communities also followed the case, for example the community "Revenge on the Estonian Media" ("Tagasilöök Eesti meediale")<sup>7</sup>, created



**Figure 1.** Supportive picture with the caption "We trust, we support, we love!" from the Facebook community "Revenge on the Estonian media" site (<http://www.facebook.com/photo.php?fbid=178960598818880&set=a.178960595485547.35199.178912058823734&type=1&theater>).

on April 8 (see also Figure 1). Its main aim was evident in its slogan “Revenge on the Estonian media for tearing Andrus Veerpalu apart during tough times!!”

On April 10, meetings were held in the main squares of some Estonian towns, and human chains were organised through the social media, e.g. “Human chain / meeting to support Andrus Veerpalu” (“Andrus Veerpalu toetuseks inimkett/kogunemine”)<sup>8</sup>.

The mushrooming of support campaigns was soon attacked by opposition groups. On April 8, a community under the name “We believe in Santa Claus” (“Usume Jõuluvana”)<sup>9</sup> was created. Both the slogan (“The man who has brought us Christmas for a number of times, the provider of the real winter feeling, the man in our hearts, has lost people’s trust! WE BELIEVE IN SANTA CLAUS!”) as well as the profile picture (Santa, wearing skis, is set to a winter landscape, and the caption “Sportsman/Athlete”; see Figure 2) refer to Veerpalu’s case. The community did not become particularly popular (gathering less than a thousand members by February 5, 2013) and it remained an interesting pe-



**Figure 2.** The profile picture of the Facebook community “We believe in Santa Claus” (<https://www.facebook.com/pages/Usume-Jõuluvana/216788421669360>).

cularity rather than the mainstream. It is possible to suggest that the nation was not yet ready to joke about the issue, and that this accounts for the small number of likes in the “Santa community”. What is more likely, though, is that people did not simply consider this group attractive enough. This community is by no means the first to satirise popular social phenomena. Estonian online society has a considerable history of social criticism, and there have also been similar subversive communities that aim at undermining an initiative, event, or phenomenon (e.g. “Will this cucumber get more fans than Edgar Savisaar [politician]?”<sup>10</sup>; and the subsequent “Will this radish get more fans than the cucumber that everybody worships?”<sup>11</sup>; etc.).

The two separate datasets, comments and Facebook posts were then analysed by using qualitative data mining software Leximancer, in order to pin down the main concepts (“concept seeds”) in the material. The analysis indicates that the central theme evident throughout the data is that of belief. Other slightly less relevant concepts include the opposition between “us” and “them”, or “me” and “the people”. Constantly recurring concepts were also those connected with the technical vocabulary used in the scandal: growth hormone, WADA, Ski Association, etc. This justifies the setting of the focus of analysis on the notions of belief and trust.

The questions central to the analysis are the following: (1) How is the information provided by the media interpreted by the audience and what topics do these interpretations bring to the table? (2) How does the notion of belief emerge in the discussion, what is being believed in, and what is the justification for the belief? (3) What folkloric and other cultural texts have taken inspiration from this doping scandal?

### **2.3. Belief, trust, and related topics**

The national trauma, collective shock and the subsequent reaction (referred to as “revenge” in one of the online communities) was described quite adequately in the Delfi column from April 8, 2011<sup>12</sup>. The column was titled “We believe in Andrus Veerpalu” (citing the Facebook group), and it explained the whole process by placing it within a religious discourse:

There is a martyr (Veerpalu), there are believers (“If you are real Estonian, you’ll believe in Veerpalu!”), and there are heretics (journalism and the rational part of the audience). There are only two choices – you are either with us or against us.

This extract also illustrates the strong polarisation of opinions.

On February 23, 2013, the Delfi news portal organised a Gallup poll entitled “What to think about Andrus Veerpalu’s doping case?”, in order to establish the dominant opinions of its readers. 3212 people voted for one of the four claims that were postulated by the journalists working in the portal: (1) Veerpalu was unjustly victimised, it was a conspiracy (26.4%; 848 posts), (2) faulty doping tests produced the positive results (48.7%; 1563), (3) Veerpalu was treated justly, there was something suspicious about all this (9.9%; 319), and (4) positive doping tests are not accidental, and everybody says they are innocent in the beginning (15%; 482). Although none of these statements address the topic of belief directly, they are all implicitly based on the notion, examining whether people believe that Veerpalu was unjustly victimised and they still trust him, or if they believe that he was guilty and has, as a consequence, suffered a considerable loss of trust.

The media introduced the topic of belief right from the beginning and fostered it throughout the scandal. The abovementioned Delfi column from April 8, 2011, states:

Veerpalu’s words “I can swear that I have not used any forbidden substances” are trustworthy enough for these people [the fans]. His words are enough to believe in his innocence.

“These people”, whose firm belief is displayed in the article, remain true to their inner convictions and are the real, whole-hearted supporters of the athlete: “I believe in Andrus Veerpalu and his entire team. I hope to God that this mess will end one day and justice will win” (virukas..... to Ruu, Delfi, June 12, 2012<sup>13</sup>).

Supporters claimed to be behind him during the difficult times, praising his positive characteristics:

[...] Veerpalu is a tough guy and has brought Estonia so much fame. Skiing broadcasts will now surely be cancelled. Nobody is interested in an athlete who ranks 28th in a competition, even if this is regarded as success. (Ambur, Delfi, April 6, 2012<sup>14</sup>)

A number of those who firmly believed in him stressed the unreliability of the testing method. In order to find a rational and most objective justification for their belief, they built their argument on the fact that a high percentage of growth hormone in the human body is biologically normal and this does not prove the administration of any forbidden substances. This claim was proved true in the court by a team of Estonian top scientists and it finally became the basis of Veerpalu’s subsequent acquittal.

Commentators also felt that there had been an attack on the Estonian national image:

[...] the aim of the opposition is to prove that they have always done the right thing and that there was a doping substance in the athlete's blood – but if there is even a slight chance that he has not intentionally done anything wrong and the accusations against him have been unjust, we have to do all we can to protect him. His whole life, as well as that of his family, has been ruined; the sports-related reputation of the nation and the state has been torn down. (Ruu, Delfi, June 12, 2012<sup>15</sup>)

From there on, it was only a small step to the dissemination of all kinds of conspiracy theories, which were quick to emerge in the atmosphere of misinformation, mistrust, and suspicions. Plenty of coincidences reinforced these stories: for example, as Veerpalu was seen as the main competitor of the Norwegian skiing team, this gave rise to rumours about a “Norwegian conspiracy”. This theory was further supported by the quite remote fact that the newspaper *Postimees*, which was the first to address the issue in the media, belongs to the Estonian Media Group, and this in turn is a part of the Norway-based Schibsted media conglomerate. The comments argued that as the sportsman is only “a small pawn in a great game”, the doping case may be an act of revenge. This argument was also presented in the context of another “lead” in the story, the recent speculations about the coach of the Estonian skiing team, Mati Alaver, leaving to coach the Russian women's skiing team instead:

The reasons here might be connected to the fact that Alaver has postponed his reply to the Russian skiing team. If things are as they are with Andrus [Veerpalu], then it is highly unlikely that he [Alaver] will ever get the job. (Spordisõber, Delfi, June 6, 2011<sup>16</sup>)

Or, developing on the same idea:

I wonder why Delfi attacks Veerpalu in such a bloodthirsty manner – it aims at humiliating the guy as best as it can. Has the poisonous stance been ordered from above? This leads to the question whether this is revenge against Alaver who dared to think of joining the Russian team [...]. (vandenõuteooria, Delfi, April 8, 2011<sup>17</sup>)

Some commentators were quite resolute in their opinions, backing up their support and belief with a conspiracy theory:

I have watched his beautiful skiing for years. I BELIEVE IN HIS INNOCENCE 100 PER CENT. I BELIEVE THAT HE IS ALSO SUSPECTING SOMETHING. (Idavirulane, Delfi, June 12, 2012<sup>18</sup>)

Similarly to almost all topical events that are reflected in the media, the case was transferred to and became intertwined with other areas of life, e.g., politics:



“Such a pity that veerpalu is as rotten as the state of Estonia... fish rots from the head!!!!” (kahjuks jah, Delfi, April 6, 2011<sup>19</sup>).

There were also people who sincerely believed that Veerpalu had taken forbidden substances; although their belief was in opposition with the ones who believed in the athlete’s innocence, they were equally sincere in their attitude. The uniting aspect is that there is no underlying irony in their statements. They voiced their support even though they believed he had sinned. The commentators also stressed that even if Veerpalu was guilty, this was not a new thing or a problem; it was just a trifle: “Hey you naive people, all the top athletes do doping, be it forbidden or yet unlisted... the question is who has the best developed sports medicine” (vr, Delfi, April 6, 2011<sup>20</sup>). They claimed that, as taking doping is the norm, there is nothing spectacular about this particular case:

I would like to know who does not use these substances. Everybody does; why would you think that people just get faster for no reason? This is illogical – as illogical as that people have evolved from apes. In this case new ape-men would be evolving every day:))). (mök, Delfi, June 12, 2012<sup>21</sup>)

Another commentator expresses a similar opinion, pointing out that everybody uses doping, but not all get caught: “Well who would not use doping (or asthma medications) in contemporary sports? Everybody does, only in some cases it doesn’t dissolve from the body before the right time, etc.” (Kalle, Delfi, April 6, 2011<sup>22</sup>). Some accuse the audience who look for culprits: “Only the naive believe that top sportsmen run on porridge and potatoes, regrettably this is what life is like and it is unjust to call anyone names” (ibid., Delfi, April 6, 2011<sup>23</sup>).

The widely spread and popular discourse of sincere (dis)belief is complemented and opposed by an ironic and sceptical discourse that displays superiority towards the sportsman, the whole scandal, the media, etc. It is subversive towards all the passionate and honest discussions and foregrounds an attitude of indifference. This is evident in a number of negative or ironic comments, but also in the multiple humorous parodies of the scandal. Ulla Lipponen has stated, talking about an earlier doping scandal in Finland in 2001, that this discourse did not appear right after the event – people, shocked by the news, were unable to joke about the matter (cf. Lehtinen 2001: 13). After some time, however, humour became prevalent (ibid.). These two discourses, sincere and ironical, are in no way clearly delineated; they may intertwine in a number of ways. The ironic discourse is often related to the critical discussion about the media, especially the professionalism and the issue of journalism ethics. The most



**Figure 3.** One of the few picture manipulations entitled “WADA does not believe in tears”. This refers to a Soviet blockbuster “Moscow does not believe in tears” (mostly on the linguistic level), as it brings about the topic of belief and tears and has become a widely known phrase in the Estonian colloquial language. There was one copy of the poster in Tallinn, and the image was later spread on the Internet (e.g. <http://urbanepiphany.wordpress.com/page/5/>).

frequent question is why the media are so prone to spread accusations and who benefits from the excessive campaign of denigration of the top athlete. The speculations take the form of various rumours, some of which were addressed above. The critique does not spare the Estonian Ski Association:

THIS MEANS THE ENTIRE GANG WHO BELONGS IN THE ADMINISTRATION OF THE ESTONIAN SKI ASSOCIATION HAS LIED TO US!!!! SO – WE CAN’T TRUST THEM IN OTHER MATTERS EITHER!!!  
(nii on, Delfi, April 6, 2011<sup>24</sup>)

There were also some comments that imitated journalistic style, to criticise the media for spreading the rumours and confusion (referring to several members of the Estonian government):

Here’s how we should do it: the print media has to first find an official source and bring hard facts on the table, or we will not discuss the topic

any more. Nobody [in this forum] has to confute the rumours. We can well blat about Ansip being an alien and it's the truth – until he refuses to comment on the topic. And then we take aim at the next public figure... Laar has an illegitimate child. People smoked pot on Lang's birthday party. Keit Pentus is actually a man, but for 10,000 Euros he agreed to dress as a woman so that there would be at least one female in the Estonian government... Actually I would have nothing against it if Keit Pentus now refutes the statement by posing on the cover of Playboy... So, "free journalism", fire away! (qwe, Delfi, April 6, 2011<sup>25</sup>)

In a similar vein, the insufficient and in some cases misleading information is paired with a more generalised critique against the Estonian media as a whole:

Doping scandals are not a recent invention and they have to be publicly addressed. This is done everywhere. But the way Delfi, *Postimees* or *Ekspress* [the biggest news portal / daily newspaper / weekly newspaper] present the topic is rather like a vulgar witch-hunt, which has nothing to do with journalism. The so-called "news" was only meant to raise the number of readers and earn yellow money. (Rusikas, Delfi, April 8, 2011<sup>26</sup>)

The disbelievers who refrain from referring to a "bigger plan" as a way to deny or belittle Veerpalu's own share of responsibility in the event are straightforwardly negative towards the athlete:

I can't stand this whining anymore. If you have shit in your pants, it's obviously you who shitted in them. That's it. There is no more hero. He just had to soil himself just before the end of his career because of greed and hunger for fame. (sic transit gloria mundi, Delfi, April 8, 2011<sup>27</sup>)

The article (Soonvald & Rinaldo 2013) that first announced the positive court solution to the audience needs individual attention to document the various emotions and attitudes that were prevalent at that time. The article collected 1150 comments, and the majority of these were carried by feelings of joy and exaltation; people congratulated each other, the "believers" pointed post-factum at the correctness of their previous judgements and at the foundations of their blind belief that the scandal could not affect in any way: "It really doesn't matter what they have decided. In any case Andrus has offered us unbelievable thrills throughout many years and nothing can erase these memories. :)" (Jaak, Delfi, March 26, 2013<sup>28</sup>).

It is also worth describing the ironic reverberations of the topic in channels other than journalism. The case was addressed on December 31, 2012, in a parody in the yearly New Year's Eve programme *Tujurikkuja* (Moodspoiler).

Märt Avandi and Ott Sepp, an Estonian comedy duo, made a sketch entitled “We believe in Ita Ever” (“Usume Ita Everit”), where the famous actress is accused before a panel of judges for performing all the best of her roles under the effect of forbidden stimulating substances. The parody evoked numerous reactions, including an almost immediate creation of a Facebook community page “We believe in Ita Ever!” (“Usume Ita Everit!”)<sup>29</sup>, which acquired over 2000 members by the next day (by February 5, 2013, there were 3588 members to this community).

## **2.4. Topical humour**

A number of virtual fights were held in the online community at the beginning of the scandal – as soon as someone intended a joke at the expense of their “god”, commentators reacted immediately and sharply, and the consequent discussions all led to the topic of belief. The shock, lack of reliable information and an overall complexity of the issue did not give much ground for joking (cf. Laineste 2009: 58, on the best conditions for jokes to arise). Folklore, including narratives and humour, has been noted for its therapeutic effects (see, e.g., Kaivola-Bregenhøj 2005: 311; Kalmre 2009; Kuipers 2002: 453). The shock is relieved through jokes, although not very much so in this case. The commentaries cite or create only a few jokes about the doping scandal. However, the Facebook community “We believe in Andrus Veerpalu” was more prone to sharing doping jokes. The plots referred to the strong rivals of the Estonian skiers, for example, Norwegian cross-country skiers (e.g. Odd-Bjørn Hjelmeset), whose innocence was also commonly doubted at the time:

Yesterday I had a dream... I saw that Hjelmeset (after the recent events) is visiting Otepää... He steps into the local pharmacy, grins widely, and asks: “Do you happen to have growth hormones?” – “Well yes, we do, but we have run out of asthma medications... the problem is that the Estonian skiing team all suffer from asthma and they bought the entire supply.” Hjelme looks at the pharmacist in disbelief, his forehead suddenly covered with cold sweat, and storms out of the door... fading untranslatable Norwegian cursing could be heard for some time. That was my dream:). (Facebook community “We believe in Andrus Veerpalu”, April 12, 2011)

This spontaneous anecdotal joke was developed by another community member who added a sequence to the story:

Again, visiting Otepää, Hjelmeset comes out of the pharmacy and complains: “They wanted to punch me in the snout!” A passer-by asks: “How

do you know?” Hjelmeset: “Otherwise they wouldn’t have punched me in the snout!” (Facebook community “We believe in Andrus Veerpalu”, April 12, 2011)

The same community shared a joke at the expense of the World Anti-Doping Agency. The unusually big difference between the two tests was a frequently discussed issue in the media. It formed also the main argument for the defence in sports arbitration court, as this decreased the reliability of the test as such:

The WADA spokesman answers questions about Veerpalu’s doping test results on an international hearing. A person in a white lab coat stands up and asks if he made the difference between the A and B tests too big (in his report). Spokesman: “Slightly, yes, because this drew unwanted attention to our work!” (Facebook community “We believe in Andrus Veerpalu”, April 12, 2011)

Ironic attitude was visible in those posts which joked about the reasons why Veerpalu decided to end his career; for example, hinting that his superiority over his competitors was so great that in order to do them a favour, he had to quit:

Super black humour: [...] his [Veerpalu’s] doping tests did not correspond to the competition standards anymore and he thus decided to quit top sports – he had become too superior to the others. I apologise for those who didn’t understand the joke: the thing is that he wouldn’t need any extra help in competitions :). (Facebook community “We believe in Andrus Veerpalu”, April 12, 2011)

As is visible also in sincere discourse, Veerpalu’s doping case was depicted jointly with politics or daily events and problems. In April 2013, a joke spread on Facebook that made fun of the Estonian spring that happened to be very cold. This was taken as a punishment for believing in Andrus Veerpalu instead of God:

“Oh God, please be merciful, let Andrus be freed of accusations!” people pleaded in tears. “Show me that you believe!” said a thundering voice. “We believe! We believe!” screamed the crowd. Things were thus put right and Andrus was redeemed of his sins. “Do you still believe?” asked the thundering voice. “We do!” screamed the crowd. “We have always believed in Andrus. Since the beginning of times!” – “What? You believe in a false god!” God shouted in indignation. “I condemn you to live in a quasi-spring forever, and may you eternally have a bad skiing weather!” (Facebook, April 2, 2013)



**Figure 4.** Urmas Nemvalts's daily caricature in *Postimees* from April 7, 2011, illustrates the column entitled "Hands off Andrus Veerpalu!" (The caption reads: "I am telling you, Kalevipoeg [hero of the national epic]! If now it turns out that anyone wants to hurt our Andrus, then you'll have to take these planks off your feet and lash out!") (<http://arvamus.postimees.ee/415846/paeva-karikatuur-kaed-eemale-andrus-veerpalust>).



**Figure 5.** Urmas Nemvalts's caricature WADA and Spring, published in *Postimees* on March 27, 2013, a day after Veerpalu was acquitted in court (The caption reads: "Well, this one, bigger than the others, must have grown on doping! Bring out the bottle! I will not let it get away from us, as it happened with Veerpalu.") (<http://arvamus.postimees.ee/1183244/paeva-karikatuur-wada-jatkab-voitlust>).

The importance of the topic is also echoed in the caricatures published during the discussion, the examples reflecting the general attitudes from the beginning (Figure 4) and end (Figure 5) of the case.

## CONCLUSION

Our aim was to analyse the collective attitudes inherent in the Veerpalu doping case. The main threads in the comments analysed within this study could largely be divided into two opposing, although intertwining, categories: the sincere and the ironic discourse. Within these, there were people who believed in Veerpalu's innocence, and others who did not; besides them, there were those who showed their superiority towards the entire discussion. What was most striking about the particular discussion was that the doping case activated a quasi-religious movement, which was built around the belief that the athlete was sacred, and he must not have been attacked or accused in any way. The main points of discussion, identified in the material, are the strong role of the media in the whole scandal, the question of belief introduced and fostered by the media, and the numerous folkloric narratives that emerged in the course of these two years.

In the Veerpalu doping case, the media shaped the message by introducing the metaphorical and rhetorical concept of belief. This provided a lens through which the whole scandal was seen. The online poll that the Delfi news portal organised in order to find out how strongly the readers believed in Veerpalu's innocence was formulated through the notion of belief. This and other references to belief (e.g., calling Veerpalu a martyr) created a context for the subsequent discussion, framing it as a private as well as sensitive issue. In some cases, the focus shifted away from the scandal and the sportsman. The media discussed the topic in an inconsistent and confusing manner. To make the decision about Veerpalu being innocent or not was rather a choice based on an irrational belief in the hero than one based on hard evidence. The interpretation of the news is dependent on various factors: the knowledge of the subject, the context made up by related pieces of information taken from the social media or from previous experience, the existing narratives and stereotypes, folkloric texts; all of these convey different subjective truths and are quite far from giving an impartial and objective picture. This in turn forms a perfect ground for conspiracy stories: they take off instantly, inspired by old conspiracy theories and rumours and adding details from the present discussion. In the current case, these stories were quite often connected to important emotional issues, one of which was that of national belonging and stereotypes. Journalists are gener-

ally interested in nurturing and developing the nationalistic line of narrative because the discussions that trigger nationalist feelings get plenty of public attention and raise the number of readers. Provoking the discussion and making people think along is useful for the media, and this principle is often used in the write-ups, news texts and columns (Laineste 2012: 214). People were aware of the manipulations and unreliability of the media and this was evident in the criticism on how the scandal was presented. Both the sincere as well as the ironic discourse criticised the media for spreading one-sided, unreliable information. In their opinion, the media mined for trouble and intrigue, which was largely unprofessional and unethical.

The topic of belief was developed throughout the discussion and was dominantly present until the end, when the article announcing the withdrawal of accusations was published. We have already mentioned some of the factors that affected belief and trust – Veerpalu's integrity, his image as an untouchable supernatural hero, his almost superhuman displays of strength in athletic competitions, which did not come without much training, hard work and some luck, but also his personality characteristics (honest, taciturn, modest, introvert character, all of which is curiously compatible with the image of a stereotypical Estonian). The tears that he shed at the press conference on April 7, 2011, showed everyone that the hero had been crushed, and this in turn hurt the feelings of almost the entire nation. The more or less genuine belief of the people was reflected through finding justifications for the tragedy and ways to fight against it (above all, through conspiracy stories, but also through social mobilisation to support Veerpalu). In the post factum commentaries, the majority of the people felt that their trust had been justified; they renewed their unremitting belief in the eventually acquitted hero. But the rather complicated end to the long case was also a confusing one, and this allowed for the ironic discourse to produce parodies, jokes and other critical comments.

The Veerpalu case found plenty of reflection in various cultural texts. New jokes emerged, as was shown in the examples above; at the same time, old jokes were being adapted to fit the current doping scandal. Some old jokes that used to be meaningful lost their impact. The parody that received most attention (concerning the actress Ita Ever) played with the idea of denigrating an old, important and hero-like public figure, stinging the media for creating drama as they dragged delicate issues to the open. The ironic discourse present in the online comments added fuel to the fire and it is quite possible that, as a result, the opposition's belief actually strengthened instead of waning. Among positive reverberations to the scandal, there were plenty of visual and verbal texts that were created to support the hero. The slogans on T-shirts of the demonstrators in human chains, posters, and catchphrases that spread like wildfire were



known among the believers and non-believers alike, and among the latter some of these gave inspiration for ironic texts, for example, in the form of graffiti (as seen in Figure 3). The plot of the drama series entitled *Alpimaja* (The Chalet), which was aired in 2012, and was quite popular among the Estonian viewers, was also woven around a doping scandal.

The functions of sports have expanded from dealing with only the healthy body and mind into creating and developing social relations. This enables us to think of sports and the related concepts and events not just as recreation, but as a cultural form, and stories about it form an independent folkloristic genre. Any top athlete is a public figure, whose life and actions are under constant surveillance. Everyone is entitled to expressing their opinions about the (mis)deeds, failures, personality characteristics, even the personal lives of athletes. When a public figure is involved in a scandal, his public image intertwined with known folkloric narratives (rumours, conspiracy stories, jokes, etc.) gives rise to stories about heroes, saints, and demi-gods, their journey against the hard fate, finding their destination, and sometimes also a happy ending.

## NOTES

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<sup>2</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Usume-Andrus-Veerpalu/194487653920408?fref=ts>.

<sup>3</sup> Sports historian Kalle Voolaid has compared the lives and careers of two national heroes – the Estonian wrestler Georg Lurich (1876–1920) and the Finnish marathoner Paavo Nurmi (1897–1973) from the point of view of Propp's functions (see Voolaid 1999: 55–64).

<sup>4</sup> <http://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/arvamus/juhtkiri-usume-andrus-veerpalu.d?id=43583009>.

<sup>5</sup> <http://sport.delfi.ee/news/suusatamine/eesti/andrus-veerpalu-sai-spordikohtus-voidu.d?id=65878360>.

<sup>6</sup> On April 10, 2011, the community was comprised of the following nationalities: 55,753 Estonians, 2,061 Finns, 848 Swedes, 517 English, 328 Americans, 317 Norwegians, 146 Irish, 140 Germans, 134 Australians, 124 Spanish, 113 Dutch, 98 Danish, 80 French, 76 Italians, 69 Latvians, 66 Belgians, 64 Poles, 38 Luxembourgians, and 33 Russians. Five months after the announcement of positive doping test results, on September 19, 2011, the number of community members had risen to 66,795 (Facebook community “We believe in Andrus Veerpalu”, April 10, 2011).

<sup>7</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Tagasil%C3%B6%C3%B6k-Eesti-meediale/178912058823734?ref=ts&fref=ts>.

- <sup>8</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Andrus-Veerpalu-toetuseks-inimkettkogunemi/216430721705353>.
- <sup>9</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Usume-J%C3%B5uluvana/216788421669360?fref=ts>.
- <sup>10</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/heakurk>.
- <sup>11</sup> <https://www.facebook.com/pages/Kas-see-redis-saab-rohkem-f%C3%A4nne-kui-see-kurk-keda-k%C3%B5ik-f%C3%A4nnavad/108589652511601>.
- <sup>12</sup> <http://www.delfi.ee/news/paevauudised/arvamus/juhtkiri-usume-andrus-veerpalu.d?id=43583009>.
- <sup>13</sup> <http://sport.delfi.ee/news/suusatamine/murdmaasuusatamine/delfi-lausanneis-veerpalu-kohtusaagas-algas-teine-paev-jaak-mae-ilmub-tunnistusi-andma.d?id=64528572&com=1&no=20>.
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- <sup>23</sup> Ibid.
- <sup>24</sup> <http://sport.delfi.ee/news/suusatamine/eesti/allikas-andrus-veerpalu-a-proov-oli-positiivne-sportlane-on-selle-vaidlustanud.d?id=43386223&com=1&no=140>.

- <sup>25</sup> <http://sport.delfi.ee/news/suusatamine/eesti/allikas-andrus-veerpalu-a-proov-oli-positiivne-sportlane-on-selle-vaidlustanud.d?id=43386223&com=1>.
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