

# Steroids in sports today



**ASSIGN  
BUSTER**

The United State is a country that thrives on competition. We idolize our sports stars and practically make major athletic events holidays. Children grow up with their favorite athletes plastered to the wall of their bedrooms and dream that one day they will be the next Barry Bonds, Shaquille O'Neal, or Tom Brady. Professional athletes train year-round to be in ideal physical shape in order to perform their best. But what happens when their best just isn't good enough? We expect our sports stars to be perfect, upstanding citizens and role models but this isn't always the case. The recent exposure of athletes using steroids has exploded into a phenomenon involving athletes all around the world. It has cheapened sports and cast doubt on the integrity of our athletes. Steroid use is not exclusive to professional sports. More and more college and high school athletes are beginning to use steroids for many of the same reasons that the pros do; to enhance performance, get an edge on the competition, and improve personal appearance. Non-medical use of anabolic steroids is illegal and banned by most, if not all, professional, intercollegiate, and interscholastic sports organizations. No matter what justifications are given for using steroids, one cannot overlook the fact anabolic steroids can cause serious physical and psychological side effects. So what exactly is this substance that appears in the headlines of our newspaper's sport section? Anabolic steroids "are the synthetic derivatives of the naturally occurring male anabolic hormone testosterone" (Wadler 1). Testosterone's natural effects help a boy going through puberty grow hair, develop a deeper voice, and retain dietary protein, which aids in the development of muscles. Athletes take the drugs "to primarily increase muscle mass and strength" (Wadler 2). Steroids do not, however, improve agility, skill, or cardiovascular capacity. Steroids can be

taken orally or they can be injected. Most recently, the steroid of choice has been the kind that is injected and is short-lasting and water-soluble. Many steroids that come in the oral form have proven to be hazardous to the liver, but as Dr. Wadler explains, "injectable steroids aren't free of side-effects either. There is no free ride and there is a price to be paid with either form." Some effects in men of frequent steroid use include; impotence, shrinking of the testicles, acne, rapid weight gain, liver damage, high cholesterol, and premature heart attacks and strokes. Even though there are so many known risks that go along with steroids, why do more and more athletes seem to be "roiding up"? Many athletes feel like they have to take steroids to keep up with everyone else and be competitive. "If you don't, you weren't as strong as everyone else, you weren't as fast as everybody else," stated Jim Haslett in an interview with Sam Farmer of the LA Times. Haslett, now coach of the New Orleans Saints and former linebacker for the Buffalo Bills, goes on to say, "That's the only reason to do it. Everybody's looking for that competitive edge" (Farmer 1). Aside from professional sports, many high school and college athletes feel the pressure to take steroids to gain an edge. They feel like they won't be able to perform at the next level without steroids. All many young athlete have to do is look at today's sports stars to see the size, strength, and speed it takes to be a successful professional athlete. Unfortunately, most of the athletes that the young people are looking at have taken or are currently taking steroids. It is then only rational for kids to think that if they are going to be the best, they need steroids too. Only the best of the best in professional sports get the biggest contract, the top agent, the covers of the magazines, and, seemingly above all, the priciest paycheck. Many athletes feel like they can only lift so much and run

so hard until they can't get any better. That's when some turn to steroids. "Money is the root of all evil" is a very well-known saying. Is it possible that money is also the root of the steroid phenomenon? Salaries in professional sports continue to rise and steroid use among professional athletes has been increasing: this should not be viewed as a coincidence. In an interview with Sports Illustrated, Ken Caminiti, former National League MVP and admitted steroid user, estimated that 50 percent of pro baseball players today are injecting steroids. Jim Haslett has stated that, during the 1980's, about half of the players in the NFL were using, including "all the offensive and defensive linemen, linebackers" (Farmer 1). It would be ideal if we were able to say that all athletes play for the love of the game, but that assumption is very naïve. A lot of athletes do it for the money. So it is sad but it may be true that in order to make the biggest amount of money possible, athletes rely on steroids. Being better than the next guy and receiving a bigger paycheck are not the main reasons why athletes take steroids. Performance enhancement is cited by experts and athletes alike as the chief benefit of steroids. The superficial benefits of steroids are easy to see. The user gains muscle mass and strength almost immediately without having to work as hard. For those reasons, most, if not all, athletes use the steroids to enhance their performance. Athletes want to hit the ball farther, run the sprint faster, or sack the quarterback quicker. Several double blind studies have been done to exactly describe the actual effects of anabolic steroids on physical performance and results have been conflicting and unclear. However, on average body weight increased by about four pounds, lean body weight by about six pounds, bench press increased by about 15 pounds, and squats increased by about 30 pounds. Thomas Fahey of the University of California

explains that " increased strength is mainly due to an improved ability to recruit motor units" (Fahey 2). The gains witnessed by athletes in the real world have been much more impressive. Fahey observes " weight gains of thirty or forty pounds, coupled with thirty percent increases in strength, are not unusual." However, taking steroids does not mean that athletes stop going to the gym. Athletes still have to watch what they eat and workout regularly. In fact, athletes on steroids often go to the gym more than those that are not taking the drugs. Jim Haslett states " You can lift Monday, Tuesday, Wednesday, Thursday, Friday – you never get tired. Your muscles recovered from it ...When you take steroids and it rips the muscle ... it repairs itself right away. That's why you never feel tired, you never feel sore." While it is obvious that steroids increase muscle mass and strength, they do not improve agility, skill or cardiovascular capacity. Even though many experts, athletes, and fans think that professional athletes take steroids for the sole and main reason of performance enhancement, there are others who disagree. Athletes are constantly under the scrutiny of the public. Whether there is a high school quarterback in a small town being watched by all of the townspeople or a superstar in the NFL being hounded by the media everyday, all athletes experience public pressure. The stress and anxiety to perform well may be too much for some athletes. Those athletes may crumble under the pressures of the public and turn to steroids for answers. Sociologist Hisham Khalek sites the sociological aspect as the main reason behind using steroids. According to Khalek, many people associate large and strong muscles with masculinity. He writes, " the attitude that winning is the only acceptable option and one must do anything it takes to win, may drive some people to take steroids" (Khalek 3). Central Michigan

University sports psychologist Tracy Olrich supports Khalek's beliefs. He goes further to say that athletes use steroids do it not only for social reasons but also for personal acceptance. " When people used steroids, they were the center of attention," Olrich said. He found that steroids are not so much a physical addiction, but a sociological one. " It is unbelievably addictive," stated one athlete interviewed by Olrich. " You feel like you can do anything." This way of thinking may be popular amongst some people, but it is not the most logical answer to the reasoning behind the steroid phenomenon. Saying the sociological pressure is the reason that athletes use steroids almost completely takes all of the responsibility off of the athlete's shoulders. Ultimately, it should be the athletes that take the blame for the steroid controversy, not the public. Professional athletes are public figures and childhood heroes. They are fully aware of the negative effects, both psychical and emotional, of steroids. Blaming society for steroid use is too complex an answer for a simple question. Athletes use steroids to get bigger and better faster. So many athletes today are motivated by money and popularity, not fairness and the love of the game. Steroid use feeds into this egocentric attitude. It is not society's choice whether or not an athlete will take steroids; that choice ultimately belongs to the athlete himself. Kent Pegg of the Los Alamos Monitor says the reason athletes take steroids is because they work. Although that argument may seem elementary, it is the truth. Athletes that take steroids seemingly get what they want. Because athletes that use so vastly outperform the ones that don't, they get noticed. They get the bigger paychecks and all the media hype. So are steroids the only viable choice today for someone who wants to excel in professional sports? Recently, we have approached a crossroads of the steroids

phenomenon. There almost seems to be an ultimatum in today's professional sports world; either you take steroids and succeed or you stay clean and sit the bench. Many people think that steroids are ruining the integrity and awe of professional sports, while many others believe that steroids are good for the game. Fox News write Mike Straka addresses baseball fans when he asks, " Will you watch small ball? Will you watch a game where pitchers don't throw 98 miles per hour, where homers are fewer and where stars aren't rippling with muscles or burning around the bases? Will you pay big bucks to see athletes who look just like you?" Many sports fans would rather see a 'roided up star who breaks home-run records than a regular athlete who hits .200. This controversy involves three major parties; the athletes, the individual sport's administrative body, and the fans. All three together must come to a consensus if the steroid problem (or some say solution) within professional sports will ever be resolved. After the professional sports world, figures everything out, hopefully college and high school athletics will follow suit. Even though there are differing arguments as to what to do about the steroid controversy, the reasons behind the phenomenon is basically universal. Athletes are always striving to be the best and to take their game to the next level. Steroids may drastically enhance their performance and give them a valuable competitive edge. Because so much attention and money is directed towards professional athletics, athletes are now more than ever in the public's spot light. Today, like it or not, the athletes that take steroids get most of the attention. Children dream of being the next superstar, but will future superstars be clean or will steroids continue to dominate professional sports? Only time will tell. Bibliography Barczy, Jason " Olrich Centers Study on Steroids." Central Michigan Life 8 April 2005 " Drugs

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