

Should steroids be legalized? essay sample

[Health & Medicine](#), [Drugs](#)



Doping has widely become known as the use of banned substances and practices by sports personnel particularly athletes in an attempt to improve sporting performances. No sensible fan of sport today denies the prevalence of drugs in virtually every major sport, yet none would argue they can ever be eliminated completely. Money alone would seem to guarantee that much. High profile athletes today are competing for high stakes, not just millions, but dozens of millions. The fear of losing everything career, opportunity, contracts, name, fame, and money is pushing more sportsmen all over the world to use performance enhancing drugs, mainly anabolic-androgenic steroids, to either gain a competitive advantage, or to simply keep pace with other athletes using performance enhancers. The primary reason why PED's are outlawed in professional sports is that they give users a perceived unfair advantage over the rest of the field, while potentially putting their long-term health at risk if the drugs are used irresponsibly and without proper medical supervision. Various professional sports leagues have attempted to level the playing field by testing for drug use and suspending, banning, or fining those found guilty.

It's a noble effort, but is it working? Stiff punishments have done little to reduce the number of sportsmen caught doping every year. Cycling hero Lance Armstrong was recently implicated in a doping scandal that vacated his record 7 straight Tour de France titles. But as it turns out, the would be inheritors of all seven of the vacated titles have all been implicated in doping scandals themselves. Major League Baseball also hands down more and more suspensions each season to players caught using banned substances, and it's ridiculously naive to think those players are the only ones guilty of

doping. If the various governing bodies of sport really want to level the playing field, could it be time to head in the other direction and legalize performance enhancing drugs? While opponents of legalization argue that performance enhancing drugs should remain outlawed from sport to protect athletes from possible long-term health risks and to preserve the honor, integrity, and ethical aspects of sports. Proponents of PED legalization believe that the removal of doping controls would save money and resources, lead to less cheating, increase solidarity and respect between athletes, put more focus on sport and not on rules, all while making it safer for athletes who do decide to use PED's responsibly.

The use of drugs and herbs to enhance performance in sporting events dates all the way back to antiquity. In Ancient Roman gladiator competitions “ Chariot racers feed their horses substances such as hydromel , an alcoholic beverage made from honey, to make them run faster and gladiators ingested hallucinogens and stimulants such as strychnine to stave off fatigue and injury and to improve the intensity of their fights” (Aziz). It wasn't until the 1930's when Anabolic-androgenic steroids (AAS) were first isolated, identified and synthesized, initially they were exclusively used therapeutically in medicine to induce bone growth, stimulate appetite, induce male puberty, and treat chronic wasting conditions, such as cancer and AIDS. AAS use in sports began in October 1954 when John Ziegler, a doctor who treated American athletes, went to Vienna with the American weightlifting team.

While there he met a Russian physician whom he repeatedly asked “ What are you giving your boys?” the Russian said that his athletes were being given testosterone. Upon Returning to America, Ziegler tried low doses of testosterone on himself, and on two lifters. All gained more weight and strength than any training program would produce but there were adverse side-effects. Ziegler sought a drug without adverse side-effects and hit on an anabolic steroid, methandrostenolone also known as D-BOL. The results D-BOL yielded were impressive, so impressive that lifters began taking increasingly higher doses. Steroids then began to spread to other sports where bulk was a contributing factor. Olympic records show the weight of shot putters increased 14% between 1956 and 1972, whereas steeplechasers weight increased 7. 6% (Mottram). The 1972 Munich Olympics also saw an American medical research team attempt to set up extensive research into the effects of steroids on weightlifters and throwers, only to discover that there were so few who weren’t taking them that they couldn’t establish any worthwhile comparisons. In response to the surge in steroid use the International Olympic Committee added anabolic steroids to their banned substances list after a reliable test was finally developed (Mottram).

As we’ve seen with other government bans on consensual activity, from alcohol to gambling, to cocaine to prostitution, prohibitions not only don’t work, they make the activity in question more dangerous by pushing it underground. Performance enhancers are produced or bought on the black market and administered in a clandestine, uncontrolled way with no monitoring of the athlete’s health, and because doping is illegal, the

pressure is on designers to make performance enhancers undetectable, rather than safe. Julian Savulescu, Professor in practical ethics at Oxford argues that “Allowing the use of performance enhancers would make sport safer as there would be less pressure on athletes to take unsafe drugs and more pressure to develop new safe performance enhancers and to make existing enhancers more effective at safe dosages” (Savulescu).

Bennett Foddy, Professor of Bioethics at the University of Oxford also stated in a August 2008 article that “Rather than attempting to detect undetectable enhancers, we should spend our limited resources on evaluating health and fitness to compete. There are good reasons to allow performance enhancement, to make sport fairer and to narrow the gap between the cheaters and the honest athletes. It would provide a better spectacle, be safer and less coercive” (Foddy) Therefore, with the legalization of PED’s not only would the playing field suddenly be even for all players, it would be at a higher level. Furthermore, athletes on the way up whose entourages don’t yet include savvy physiotherapists and doctors would be less likely to overdose and do themselves harm.

Society has an odd relationship with pharmaceuticals and medical technology. If something can be said to be ‘natural’, we tend to be ok with it. If it seems lab-made or synthetic we tend to be wary. But even synthetic drugs and manmade technology seem to be okay if the aim is to make sick or broken people well again. Steroids and doping help pitchers to throw harder, home runs to go further, cyclists to charge for longer and sprinters to test the very limits of human speed. A huge part of watching sports is

watching the pinnacle of human athletic ability, and legalizing performance enhancing drugs would only help athletes climb even higher. Radley Balko stated in an article for Reason magazine that “ Sports is about exploring and stretching the limits of human potential. Going back even to the pre-modern Olympics, when athletes ate live bees and ate crushed sheep testicles to get a leg up on the competition, sports has never been some wholesome display of physical ability alone. Ingenuity, innovation, and knowledge about what makes us faster and stronger (and avoiding what might do more harm than good) has always been a part of the game” (Balko).

He makes an interesting point here. In March 2005 Mark McGwire was hauled before a congressional hearing and branded as a cheater for using a then legal, performance-enhancing steroid precursor when he broke baseball’s single-season home run record. A week later, Tiger Woods was celebrated for winning golf’s biggest tournament, the Masters, with the help of superior 20/15 vision he acquired through laser surgery that year. What’s the difference? Weren’t they both taking advantage of current medical technology to enhance their performance in their respective sports? What many of us don’t realize is that steroids don’t give you a free ride. They are not magic substances. If an average person were to take anabolic steroids and sit down on the couch all day, they would not build muscle, speed, or increase their endurance. Steroids allow you to train harder. They are designed to help you recover more quickly from a intense workout session so you can work just as hard again the next day with no ill effects. Some PED’s boost the body’s propensity for building muscle or its ability to use oxygen, but at the end of the day the athlete still has to put in the work.

Dick Pound, the head of the World Anti-Doping Agency was interviewed in 2007 by CBC Sports Online, and was asked, “ What drives you in the fight against drugs in sports? Why do you feel this is such an important issue?” He replied “ Well, sports is so important to so many people, particularly young people, and it’s a precursor to how you’re going to behave in other aspects of social intercourse. It’s very important to have some kind of activity where you can say to people ‘ this is on the level’. You respect the rules, you respect your opponents, you respect yourself. You play fair I don’t want my grandchildren to have to become chemical stockpiles in order to be good at sports and to have fun at it. It’s a completely antithetical view to what sport should have been in the first place. It’s essentially a humanistic endeavour to see how far you can go on your own talent” (Foddy). The current perception is that performance enhancement in sport is wrong. As Pound’s response shows, this belief is predicated on the view that performance enhancement violates a classical conception of what sport should be.

Regardless of ones perception on what sport should or shouldn’t be, there is a reason why the world’s sporting bodies are undertaking such a concerted effort to eliminate doping in professional sports. There’s a reason why there are no pro-doping movements and no formal legal challenges to the laws against doping in sports. It’s because it is technically the most widespread form of cheating. The World Anti-Doping Agency, which defines which drugs will be banned in international athletics, bans a drug if it has at least two out of three of the following criteria. First, it must have the potential to increase sporting performance. Second, it must represent an actual or potential risk

to the athlete's health, and third, its use must be contrary to the 'spirit of sport'.

The spirit of sport is best defined by Thomas Murray in a 2003 article published in the WADA magazine. In it he states " the spirit of sport to be embodied not only in the Olympic Games, but in the strivings of every amateur athlete who kicks a ball, runs on country paths, or pedals up steep hills. The spirit of sport is learning what we can do with the natural talents we have, perfecting them through admirable, persistent effort. Humankind could devise a trans-humanist competition for cyber-athletes if it wished. I would not be at all surprised. But, as long as people care about human excellence, natural talents, and the dedication and intelligence required to perfect those talents, I believe the spirit of sport, and the Olympics, can and should survive"(Murray).

Many feel that the point of sports is to recognize natural talent and the pursuit of maximizing it with a sound mind, and a sound body. Dr. Thomas H. Murray again says in an article that " When performance-enhancing drugs have the power to overcome differences in natural talents and the willingness to sacrifice and persevere in the quest to perfect those talents, we cannot avoid confronting the question, What do we value in sport? Emerging technologies, from hypoxic chambers and carbon fiber prostheses to genetic manipulation, will force us to consider what, after all, is the point of sport?" (Murray). When natural talent eventually becomes less essential to an athletes success it may lead us in the direction of " changing sports from a competition of athletes to one of chemists" (Djerassi). Steroid legalization

also “ has the potential of creating a slow-motion public health catastrophe. And we may also lose whatever is most graceful, beautiful, and admirable about sport” (Murray). It is very possible if steroids were made legal that they would spark an arms race to get the best drugs. Leading to a potential epidemic of drug use in the sporting world which undoubtedly would influence many young athletes as well.

While steroid legalization still seems like a long ways away one thing that can be easily said is that more and more sportsmen will be taking on steroids in the future. And, sport governing bodies will eventually have to take a final stand whether to legalize steroids or not. The decision surely will not be an easy one as steroids have changed the way games are played today and the fear of failure may even prompt governing bodies to give a final nod. Either way the distinction currently drawn between which substances should be allowed, and which should be prohibited, ultimately says a lot about what is valued in sport and little else. We can't prevent sport from evolving, but we can and should begin to direct its evolution for the better. Whatever decision that may be steroids will remain a very significant part of sports, legal or not.

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