

Should steroids be banned for everyone



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A sports fan can hardly open a newspaper or turn on the television without seeing a story about steroids in sports. From baseball to football to bicycling, the accusations of steroid use often cloud the greatest accomplishments of the day. Combined with other banned substances like Human Growth Hormone (HGH), it seems that athletes are increasingly seeking illegal means to improve their performances. While there have already been many high profile athletes found guilty of using steroids, as well as many who have openly admitted using steroids, there remain some who continue to perform under the dark cloud of steroid suspicion.

And, while steroids and other performance enhancing drugs are grabbing headlines today, the problem is not a new one and efforts have been made for the last twenty years to eradicate steroids from sports. While steroids have been used to treat many ailments and should not be removed in this respect, they should be banned in regard to athletes for health and social reasons. Because steroids increase the production of testosterone, some of these negative side effects include acne problems and dramatic mood swings. They can cause infertility, reduced sperm counts, and shrink testicles.

They also have much more dangerous side effects including liver and kidney damage, and increased risk of heart attacks and strokes. But, one of the most obvious and dramatic negative side effect of steroids is that it causes the user to experience violent and more aggressive tendencies, commonly known as "roid rage." As stated in *The Steroid Game*, "roid rage is the descriptive term for spontaneous, highly aggressive, out-of-control behavior where the police were called or should have intervened" (Yesalis 60).

There have been many instances of psychological problems created by steroids, with the most recent example being the murder/suicide by professional wrestler Chris Benoit. The most dramatic story to emerge recently about steroids and their terrible effects came when WWE wrestler Chris Benoit and his family were found dead in his home. After police conducted their investigation, they discovered that Benoit had strangled his wife, and asphyxiated his seven-year-old son, before hanging himself with cord from a work out machine.

The deaths perplexed authorities, but they soon found steroids in Benoit's house, as well as needle marks on the arms of his son. When a toxicology report was performed on Benoit, it was found that he had increased levels of testosterone, signifying that steroids were in his system. " This level of testosterone indicates that he had been using testosterone at least within some reasonably short period of time prior to the time that he died," said Dr. Kris Sperry, chief medical examiner for the state with the Georgia Bureau of Investigation, as he released the results of the toxicology report (Bonisteel).

Besides the physical effects of steroid abuse, this horrible incident illustrates that they may also have deadly effects on those around steroid users. While Benoit killed himself and his family in a steroid induced rage is still up for debate, however he was often described by those around him as prone to depression and moody, which are each psychological side effects of steroids. But, the negative and dangerous side effects to steroids are nothing new, and steroids have been part of the national consciousness for over twenty years.

While many authors like Ellis Cashmore argue that steroids should be legalized and regulated as a standard part of any sport, their cynical take on modern society makes their arguments undesirable to pursue. As Cashmore asserts: "The joy of competing for competition's sake has ceded place to a winner-takes-all mentality, nurtured by professionalism. This has been made possible by corporate sponsorship on a scale that makes the World Bank envious" (642 par 10). Even if corporate profit is behind the ultimate pressure athletes and teams feel to use steroids, it is hardly a good reason to legalize a drug with dangerous side effects.

The thing that must be cemented into the minds of young and old alike is that sports are nothing more than entertainment and are not a reason to seek unnecessary treatment. In addition to the danger it poses to the athlete, it sets a bad social example for children that believe that winning is the only thing that matters. The many authors who have endorsed steroids as no different than Lasik surgery may be right in principle, as everything that gives a medical advantage could be seen as performance enhancement, but the dangers of Lasik are nowhere near as bad as steroids, nor as widespread a problem.

And, they miss the overall point that athletes are often heroes to young children, and the example they set, whether they adopt the role model label or not, is a negative one. Jose Canseco's book about steroid use in baseball, while nothing more than the sour grapes of a cheater that profited by steroid use, created a lot of attention on steroids. Multiple ballplayers including Canseco, Sosa, McGwire, and Raphael Palmiero testified before Congress in ongoing investigations into steroids in baseball. The only forthcoming

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witness was Canseco, who reiterated that a large percentage of players were on steroids.

Palmiero pointed his finger and swore that he had never done steroids, only to test positive just a year later. His career was immediately ended and his surefire Hall of Fame credentials were thrown into question. The same went for Sosa and McGwire, who each performed terribly in front of Congress and cast more suspicion on themselves. Bonds has become one of baseball's biggest problems. The evidence against him overwhelmingly suggests that he used steroids, and he continues to break some of baseball's most prestigious records.

According to a report in ESPN Magazine, Bond's possible steroid use creates two problems for baseball's bean counters: one, that it enhanced his performance, and second, that his performance has been enhanced to a degree that is completely unclear (Klosterman 48). Bonds would still have been one of the best baseball players ever without steroids, but with them he became almost superhuman. But, when children are able to understand that Bonds used steroids and other illegal performance enhancers to reach his goals, they become more apt to take the easy way out of life's challenges, just as their most successful heroes do.

Steroid use is not new, and chances are it will not go away any time soon. New forms of steroids and other performance enhancers are still being used in football, baseball, track, bicycling, and just about every other sport that athletes wish to gain an unfair competitive edge. The only way to discourage steroids is to have a zero tolerance policy towards it. Suspensions do not

work, as football player Sean Merriman was suspended four games last year for steroids and still got Defensive Player of the Year, a trip to the Pro Bowl, and new endorsements.

Obviously, baseball and football do not want to do anything to threaten their profit making abilities, and expelling their most famous players will certainly hurt them. However, it will send a clear message to fans, children, and potential steroid users that there is no tolerance for it. In the end, steroids should not be legalized for athletes, as they are not only a dangerous drug that has many more drawbacks than benefits, but they also contribute to cheating in the worst degree.