

Professional athletes and illegal steroid use

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Athletes of the modern sports are pushing their body to the limits, not only through rigid practice and training, new techniques and strategies but also by enhancing or altering the body's physiological make up. Admittedly, the use of drugs in today's sport is widespread. Statistics show that athletes even the amateur ones as young as 12 years old are already taking steroids or drugs to enhance their performance in their respective fields. In a survey conducted by the NCAA in 2004, it was reported that among 19-22 year-olds, 18.9% of them responded that they knew friends within the same age bracket who are taking steroids and who are playing a sport and 3% of high school seniors are using steroids as performance enhancers, how much more for the professional athletes who have a lot more at stake than just name, reputation, medal and trophy.

So what are steroids and why has it raised so many clamors, not only among the field of sports but also among the field of science? If an athlete takes steroids, would it be tantamount to cheating as he is not utilizing his own body's capabilities but that of a drug? Drugs commonly referred to as steroids are classified as anabolic, androgenic, and corticosteroids. Corticosteroids are used to control inflammation. Anabolic steroids which have been the object of media attention are the kind of drugs which is used by athletes and body builders to improve and bulk up their profile and body's physiology. Anabolic is a Greek word which means to "build up" and these are synthetic hormones that cause the body to produce more muscle at the same time preventing muscle break down. In the United States, it is illegal to take anabolic steroids without prescription from a doctor. Androgenics or androstenedione (andros) is a lesser or weaker kind of anabolic steroid. It

primarily works by increasing testosterone and muscle proteins and many of weigh lifters take this steroid.

The Benefits of Steroids

The human body produces steroids naturally. In the case of anabolic steroids, they resemble the chemical structure of the male sex hormone testosterone. It facilitates the development of the male secondary sexual characteristics as well as facilitating muscle growth. [Hobart, Sarah]. But just like any other development in science, steroids were not developed in order to enhance an athlete's capabilities. Rather it was developed in the 1930s in order to treat hypogonadism. People with such disorder do not produce enough testosterone and the use of steroid helps replace the much needed testosterone. Such success caught up with the athletes. In 1956 Olympics, Russian athletes who used steroids were observed to be using catheters when urinating. Ironically, the athletes had trouble urinating because their prostates have enlarged because of the excessive use of the drug.

Subsequent observations and studies have manifested the benefits of the use of steroids by professional athletes. Weight lifters who used steroids were seen to have increased their muscle strength and muscle growth. In comparison to those weight lifters who used steroids, those who took placebo or did not take anything at all showed a very slow increase in muscle growth and strength. Steroids not only enhance the athletic performance of athletes, it also provide for the development of a physically fit, tighter and toner body not only for men but also for women.

The Risks and Effects

Just like any other drug, steroids have also its share of risks and side effects. One of the particular concerns of health officials over steroid use for a prolonged period is liver damage, increased risk in heart disease. The side effects of the steroid use are also severe. For men who use steroids, they tend to develop “ breasts” or gynecomastia, painful prolonged erection (priapism) and edema due to water and sodium retention. In the case of the Russian athletes in 1956, they had trouble urinating due to the enlargement of their prostates. Cardiovascular problems also occur due to the increase of “ bad” cholesterol or the low-density lipoprotein levels instead of enhancing the “ good” cholesterol or the high-density lipoprotein levels. With these harmful physical effects, psychological problems also come up. There was an indication that man who takes steroids showed behavioral changes like being aggressive.

On the other hand, women who use steroids suffer irreversible damages unlike the men who can correct what ever side effect they have after discontinuing the use of such drug. Women develop facial hair growth, enlarged clitoris, and coarser skin. They also increase the same cardiovascular problems like the men do. Women also are at risk of infertility and other reproductive disorders. Admittedly, professional athletes both men and women still continue to use illegal steroids disregarding the risks even death because of their desire to win.

Ethics

The debate of the use of steroids is not only limited to the health concerns. Rather, the use of steroids by professional athletes is centered on ethics. One argument over steroid use by professional athletes is that it is a form of cheating. When using steroids as performance enhancing drugs, they tend to depend on the drugs capability instead of their own. Athletes using performance-enhancers seek to increase their athletic ability via drugs rather than through the training process, which requires true commitment and effort on the part of the athlete (“ Steroids: Play Safe,” 2004).

The athletes who are the center and the heart of the game use steroids to win or better their chances in winning, they gave into the power of the drugs over them instead of wielding and showcasing their strengths. This is ultimately being unfair to other athletes and professional players who only depend on their prowess, not of the drugs. And since professional athletes play to win, as they are paid to do so, those who do not use steroids are extremely pressured to use them too in order to compete with the other athletes who have exceedingly enhanced performance.

Another point raised on the ethical perspective of the use of steroid is that such use of a performance-enhancing drug allows professional athletes to tap into their undiscovered potentials. Although as discussed above, the athletes are the hearts of the game and they should be the one controlling it, not some drug, still with the aid of the drug, they are only harnessing their potentials to full use. The privacy and the rights of the athletes to do to his body whatever he thinks is beneficial to him must be respected. Providing a stricter regulation on the use of steroid among professional athletes will not solve the problem.

The decision to use or not to use such drug must be left to the discretion of the athlete. The use of steroids among professional athletes may ultimately have been the result of “ media hype”, and the ban on the use of such has been based on moral panic. By the making the use of steroids criminal, through drug testing may be even the cause of more health risks for the athletes. As it is impossible to acquire the drug through a doctor, they instead turn to the underground or black market. Instead of providing adequate help to the athletes who may limit or control the use of such drugs, banning it is ultimately forcing them to continue using steroids thereby driving them to further health risks in the first place.

Athletes especially the professional ones are the role models of society especially the youth. They have been looked up to by the society as pillars that are looked up to. While each individual have the rights to do what he thinks is best for his own self, the state or the government can still impose regulations among its citizens especially if it concerns the health of many. The question of ethics should not come first but the health concerns.

Although there have been reports and studies about the longtime effects of the use of steroids, published cases of tumors and cancer-related cases, health experts and researchers do not exactly know the consequences of steroid abuse. Even with all the data and reports submitted by researchers and users alike, still this are not conclusive and may be inaccurate. And so the federal government has issued a ban on the use of such. Possession of steroids with the intent of distributing it is considered illegal and punishable by law. Likewise, the use of steroids in sports is considered to be a violation of sports leagues and councils even the ethics of sportsmanship.

But even with all the ban and regulation made by the government for the use of steroids especially in professional sports, many athletes still continue to use it despite warnings of its risks. As drug testing is one way of determining whether an athlete is using steroids or not, professional athletes have found a way to go about and escape such drug testing. Just like the Ben Johnson who failed to bring home the gold in the 1988 Summer Olympics when he tested positive for steroids. The catch is, he took 19 drug tests before that before he failed in the Seoul Games which eventually led to the forfeiture of his gold medal. Ultimately, it is really up to the athlete whether he will use steroids to enhance his athletic performance or not notwithstanding the ban and regulation made by the federal government and the question of ethics as well.

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