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### Steroids in Sports

In recent months stories of steroid use in professional sports have been all over the news, most notably with Lance Armstrong. To many he was seen as a hero, a superhero even. Overcoming cancer and winning the Tour de France an amazing seven times, but then came the allegations of doping. What are you giving up as an athlete by using steroids? In the case of Lance Armstrong he had to give back all he worked so hard for, his tour victories and the name that he had made for himself with his Livestrong charity. What message do athletes like Lance Armstrong send to the younger athletes? It seems the message being sent is that steroids make you bigger, faster, stronger, but at what cost? What are the health risks?

The National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) estimates that more than half a million eighth and tenth graders are now using these dangerous drugs, and an increasing number of high school seniors don't believe steroids are risky. Another study indicated that 1,084,000 Americans, or .5% of the adult population, said that they had used anabolic steroids. These are just a couple of examples of how widespread the problem has become.

One of the nation's foremost authorities on steroid use, Dr. Gary Walder teamed up with ESPN as part of a concerted effort to educate the public about the dangers of anabolic steroids. Anabolic steroids, specifically anabolic-androgenic steroids are

synthetic derivatives of naturally occurring male anabolic hormone testosterone.

Testosterones natural androgenic effects trigger the maturing of the male reproductive system in puberty, including growth of body hair and deepening voice. The hormones anabolic effects help the body retain dietary protein, which aids in development of muscles. "Although there are many types of steroids with varying degrees of anabolic and androgenic properties, it's the anabolic property of steroids that lures athletes" says Dr. Walder. "They take them to primarily increase muscle mass and strength."

Steroids have a unique characteristic from almost all other drugs, their dangers may not show up for months, years, even decades. So long after you've given them up you may develop side effects. Side effects for men can include, development of breasts and shrinking of the testicles. Although anabolic steroids are derived from the male sex hormones men who take them may actually experience "feminization" effect along with a decrease in normal male sexual function. On the other hand women often experience "masculinization" effect from the steroids which can include facial hair growth, deepened voice and menstrual cycle changes. Continued use can cause some life threatening effects like clotting disorders, liver damage and premature heart attack and stroke.

Steroid use has become more widespread among school age children in recent years. The "Monitoring our Future" study conducted in 2002 determined that since 1991 there has been a significant increase of steroid use by school age children. This annual study supported by the NIDA and conducted by the institute for Social Research at the University of Michigan surveys drug use among eighth through twelfth graders in the United States. In 1991 1.9% of eighth graders surveyed said they used steroids. That number jumped to 2.5% in 2002. Among seniors surveyed 2.1% said they used steroids in 1991 and in 2002 the number went up to 4%. In addition, the 2002 survey

also determined how easy it was to get steroids. The survey indicated that 22% of eighth graders and 46.1% of twelfth graders said steroids were fairly easy or very easy to get. My brother is a junior in high school and plays football and baseball. When I asked him about steroids he said he knew kids who used steroids and said that if he wanted to he wouldn't have a problem getting his hands on them.

Steroids are generally in the news for the role that they play in sports, where steroids, strength and scandal have gone hand in hand across sports for decades.

Steroids came to weight lifting in Russia in the 1950's and to the United States in the 60's. By the end of the decade other elite athletes discovered the drugs. For nearly two decades starting in the 1960's East German women dominated the international sports stage aided by an organized system of anabolic steroid use. In recent years, much of the focus has fallen on Major League Baseball and cycling, though the Olympics has also come under scrutiny. In the 2012 summer Olympics in London, 11 athletes were barred for illegal drug use.

Major League Baseball has had continued revelations of widespread steroid use among players. Some of baseball's most cherished stories have been tainted by performance enhancing drugs, including the accomplishments of record setting home run hitters and dominating pitchers.

In August 2012, cyclist Lance Armstrong, one of the best known and most accomplished athletes in recent history, ended his fight against charges that use performance enhancing drugs. Armstrong, who won the Tour de France an amazing seven straight times said he wouldn't continue to contest the charges which claimed that he doped and was one of the ring leaders of a systemic doping on his Tour winning teams. As a result of his decision Armstrong was stripped of all seven of his Tour titles,

the bronze medal he won in the 2000 Olympics and all other titles, awards and money won from 1998 to the present. He's also barred for life from competing, coaching or having any official role with the Olympic sport or other sport that follows the world Anti-Doping code. The truth is that there may not be a system of testing, no matter how tough, that will scare professional sports straight.

That being said there were many articles about legalizing steroids in sports. Chris Smith, a sports writer for Forbes Magazine says "The primary reason why performance enhancing drugs are outlawed in professional sports is that they give the users and unfair advantage over the rest of the field. If we want we want to level the playing field it may be time to head in another direction: legalize performance enhancers. Not only would the playing field suddenly be even for all players, it would be at a higher level. Legalizing performance enhancers would allow athletes climb even higher. Steroids and doping will help pitchers throw harder, home runs go farther, cyclists to charge for longer and sprinters to test the very limits of human speed. He also says "Detractors will argue that steroids and doping can pose a health risks to athletes involved, but the athletes undertake serious health risks by simply walking on the field or straddling a bike. Just last year, a media car ran Johnny Hoogerland off the road during the Tour de France sending him into a barbed wire fence."

Another proponent for legalizing steroid use in sports is Nelson Montana, a writer for the Huffington Post. He says "Attempting to stop steroids in sports is about as dumb as trying to stop drugs in general. Wasn't that tried once before? Oh yeah, it was called prohibition. How'd that work out again? If I got my facts straight alcoholism rose, along with related crime, tax revenue from sales we lost, exacerbating the Great Depression, all the while profits were being reaped by the underworld. Nice work DEA." He make

another good point, "Are steroids cheating? They sure will give you an advantage, but so do many things. Caffeine is a drug that will increase focus and endurance and it can be purchased by children. Is Tommy John surgery cheating? Aren't supplements and modern training techniques an added benefit?"

I see the point of both these articles, but I think there's a piece missing, non professional sports like the NCAA and high school sports. By allowing performance enhancers in pro sports it opens the door for kids. How do you get into the pro's? You do well at the college level why not start doping then? It's the only way to keep up with the new level playing field. Why not start doping at 15 or 16? What better way to catch the eye of the scouts then by crushing 50 home runs a season in high school. Where do we draw the line?

The most important thing we can do to help reduce steroid abuse is to educate athletes. By working together we can greatly reduce the abuse of anabolic steroids and related products. It's important to recognize this problem and take preventative measures to protect athletes and help them understand that they can excel in sports and have a great body without steroids. They can focus on getting proper, diet, rest and good overall physical and mental health.