

A new MLB steroid policy

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Richard C. Crepeau

University of Central Florida, richard.crepeau@ucf.edu

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
A new MLB steroid policy
NOVEMBER 17, 2005

Major League Baseball and the MLB Players Association have announced yet another new agreement on drug policy. It may even be the final such policy agreement of the year. As such we can now relax and know that drug use in baseball is under complete and total control. We also know that democracy is spreading across Iraq and throughout the Middle East. And Santa Claus is coming to town.

Under pressure from Congress there has been yet another revision of the baseball's drug policy. Despite the fact that a dozen or so major league players and countless other minor league players have been caught and punished under the previous testing procedures, grandstanding members of Congress were not satisfied and demanded more. This has kept their names in front of the voters as moral crusaders protecting the fabric of American life.

At each stage in this process the Commissioner of Baseball, Bud Selig, has pronounced his great satisfaction with the agreements he reached with the MLBPA. He has solemnly told the public that baseball is addressing the drug problem and that it would be solved by the latest agreement. Selig's satisfaction lasted exactly as long as Congress did not call for more. As soon as significant members of Congressional Committees called for a tougher policy, Selig discovered that the agreed upon policy was inadequate and called for a new policy.

The Commissioner apparently found that of the two groups that have made his life most difficult over the years, the Congress was the more formidable foe. So he chose to do their bidding and abandon his agreements with the MLBPA. He also noticed that this route allowed him to make life difficult for the MLBPA and Donald Fehr. In fact, he discovered early on that he had Fehr and the players over a barrel and was able to force them to do things they did not want to do. It must have been an enervating feeling after all those many decades of retreat.

Selig abandoned his agreements with the MLBPA in a fashion reminiscent of the U.S. Government's fidelity to treaties with Native Americans. There will be a price to pay for such actions. What looked like labor peace following the last collective

bargaining agreement is now clearly in jeopardy. The fallout from Selig's unilateral actions could have dire consequences. Unwilling to take on Selig and the Congress, Donald Fehr and the MLBPA way well be willing to take on Selig and the owners in the next round of contract negotiations. Bud Selig may be called upon to reenact the role of Custer at the Little Big Horn.

As for the latest drug policy itself, it is far more sweeping than those policies of the past. Not only are the penalties increased for testing positive for steroids, there are also penalties for the possession and distribution of steroids. In some ways even more interesting is the inclusion of testing and penalties for amphetamines. Positive tests, possession, and distribution will all carry penalties.

Frequency of testing for steroids will be increased, an independent administrator will be responsible for conducting the program, and in one of those lovely little signs of homage, the agreement "expressly recognizes the parties' cooperation with congressional investigations."

John McCain, Jim Bunning, and other members of the relevant committees of the House and Senate have given their nod of approval to the new agreement. They can now go back to their constituents and proclaim their role in saving Western Civilization and Sport in America. They have again protected the little kiddies of America from a horrible scourge. Judge Landis must be smiling upon them today.

How will all of this affect the game of baseball itself? It is clear that the amphetamine policy will have a greater impact than the steroid policy, if indeed the detectors can stay ahead of the drug producers and maskers. Greenies have been a staple of the baseball culture for several decades. Jim Bouton discussed their use in Ball Four, and Pete Rose discussed the omnipresence of greenies in baseball clubhouses in a "Playboy Interview" in September of 1979.

In the age of jet travel across several time zones, when a trip from the West Coast to the East Coast brings a team into its destination at 6 a.m. for a game that same night, greenies approach the level of necessity. For day games after a night game, in the grind of the 162-game season, in the fatigue of day after day of play with no days off interspersed with double-headers, greenies become the breakfast of champions.

If the season is not shortened, or if more attention is not given to transcontinental travel and scheduling, levels of performance will be affected and in some cases players will find themselves unable to take the field on a given day. If greenies are good enough for Air Force pilots fighting fatigue on bombing runs, why not for Major League Baseball Players? This raises the question of whether a performance enabling drug should be placed in the same category as a performance enhancing drug.

It will be interesting to see if the U.S. Congressional drug fighters now turn their attention to the National Football League to see if the shadow of Bill Romanowski is still stalking the football locker rooms. Or has the NFL so effectively lobbied the Congress and bought them off with Super Bowl privileges and well-placed franchises that the NFL is above all criticism?

On Sport and Society this is Dick Crepeau reminding you that you don't have to be a good sport to be a bad loser.

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