

Biogenesis

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR ARETE
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It is likely that Marvin Miller is spinning in his grave. Bud Selig may have achieved something that baseball owners have long wanted in their battle with the Major League Baseball Players Association. And that something would be a victory, or at least something resembling a victory, over the players.

Over the past several weeks the MLBPA has found itself cooperating with or being strong-armed by the Commissioner and his staff in the pursuit of the players identified as clients of Biogenesis, an anti-aging clinic in Miami. Where else? The MLBPA watched as Selig's office got the cooperation of a shady South Florida operator, paid for documents implicating players involved with Tony Bosch and his clinic, and in the end saw the executive director of the Players Association advise the implicated players to cut a deal with the Commissioner.

If either Marvin Miller or Donald Fehr were still leading the MLBPA it is nearly impossible to imagine that this scenario would have played out in the way it has. Miller, and to a lesser extent Fehr, insisted on a united front from the players and they were seldom inclined to cooperate with the Commissioner. Miller operated on the premise that the owners, and the Commissioner as their lackey, were not to be trusted. He assumed that their aim was to regain the power over the players that they had lost since the growth and success of the MLBPA.

It has been clear in the last few days that the players are no longer presenting a united front. Some players have publicly praised the suspensions handed down by Selig, and others have called for more draconian measures. Miller would have quashed this trend quickly, and most players understanding what Miller had done for them would have listened.

Players in the major leagues today do not have the same historical memory as those who were in the labor struggles of the 70s, 80s and early 90s. This is a new generation of baseball players. None of them experienced the fierce struggles of those early years and the unrelenting attempts by the owners in league with the Commissioner to crush the MLBPA. The last great battle of that struggle was played

out in the strike that wiped out the playoffs and World Series of 1994, and nearly cost the 1995 season which was saved by a court order.

How the Commissioner and the owners will react to the crack in player unity is an important question. If they see this as a chance to weaken the MLBPA and turn back the clock, it could be the beginning of a new era of baseball labor strife. If on the other hand they see it as another way to build trust and cooperation among themselves and the players, it could be a positive development.

The MLBPA for its part will need to rebuild player unity and do so at a very difficult time as the leadership of the association is in transition. The Executive Director, Michael Weiner, is battling a potentially fatal brain tumor, and the choice of his replacement will be critical.

The Biogenesis case raises many other questions concerning drug use in sports. There are many reasons why a player might choose to use various types of PED's. Some seek to enhance their level of play in order to get a performance edge on their competitors, especially those who are competing with them for a place on the team. Some seek to prolong their careers. Some are looking for that quick boost in performance that will bring quick rewards of fame and wealth.

There is another category of user that few want to acknowledge as legitimate. One of the common explanations offered by players who have admitted to use is that they were seeking to expedite recovery from injury. In the group of twelve players just suspended at least two have explained their actions in this way. This may or may not be true in these cases, but it is nonetheless a potential reason to use certain drugs and treatments.

The question to be asked is what is wrong with that? When I am sick I take medication. Some of these drugs are high powered and would no doubt be seen as PED's if I was an athlete. Many medical conditions call for a drug regimen for use in healing and recovery.

If my energy is depleted by illness, stress, and fatigue, I might turn to something in the pharmacological world for assistance. Shouldn't these drugs be available to athletes as well as non-athletes? In cases where use is controlled

why is it not possible for athletes to be treated by physicians and the drugs be taken under supervision?

Then there is the other issue of the line between what is legal and what is not. It is useful to think of this in terms of the difference between performance enhancement and performance enabling substances. It would seem that this is a distinction without a difference. If an athlete is injected with pain killers and numbing agents in order to enable them to play with pain, how is that different from enhancement? Clearly the use of the drug is required to allow the athlete to perform, and without it they could not perform. Is this not performance enhancement?

If an athlete has failing eyesight, a facility critical in many sports, and that athlete has lens implant surgery, is that a form of performance enhancement? Clearly it is, and yet there is no ban on such treatment.

We live in world in which science and technology have altered the definition of what is normal, and blurred categories of what is or is not possible. We use our accumulated knowledge to enhance many aspects of our lives, to live longer, to increase our stamina, to stay physically fit. Medical advances appear everyday. Why do we insist that in sport the use of this knowledge is acceptable in some cases but not in others?

These questions are not going away after Biogenesis vanishes into the murky world of South Florida. As we put this latest episode of sensational journalism behind us, it would be well to discuss these matters in a more calm and rational atmosphere and reassess our policies on these matters.

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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