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Steroids in Baseball: Say It Might Not be So If You Can

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I am shocked!

There may be crying in baseball, but certainly not steroids. Say it isn't so Bud, Mark, Sammy, Barry, Ken, Jose and all the rest!

Tell me please that all those chiseled looks out there romping in the Green Cathedrals are the result of hard work, discipline imposed by personal trainers, and an expression of nature's way.

Tell me that when Pete Rose in days gone by told the Playboy interviewer that there were "greenies" all over major league clubhouses it was an aberration and an exaggeration. Tell me that amphetamines were not part of the Breakfast of Champions.

Tell me that when the Pittsburgh Pirates of yesteryear were busted for drugs in the locker room it was another aberration. Tell me that baseball players unlike those in other high profile sports never look for a competitive advantage through chemistry.

Tell me that when Mark McGwire openly used androstenedione during the season of his glory this "supplement" was irrelevant to his success. Tell me that when it took baseball two years to determine if andro was a dangerous substance related to steroids it was because Bud Lite wanted to make certain his research had the same accuracy as his profit and loss figures. Tell me that although Selig's research panel found that andro increased testosterone levels the report does not languish in some dark corner of the Commissioner's office.

Androstenedione is a banned substance in many sports and part of the reason for the banning is that it acts like a steroid once it settles into the human body. Other supplements provide athletes with a competitive edge in a world where such an edge can mean millions on the bottom line of salary and endorsements. Of course people are using them in baseball just as they were used at the Olympics, at the Tour de France, and wherever athletes gather for competition over the age of ten. (Is that too high?)

Not many people were actually shocked by this season's round of revelations that began with Jose Canseco claiming that 85% of the players use steroids, to Ken Camaniti's reduced figure of 50% in his SI Interview, and then his backtrack to only a few players when he was interviewed by Dan Patrick on ESPN Radio. Not even Camaniti's claim that he was taken out of context by Sports Illustrated was surprising in an athletic world in which superstars are misquoted in their autobiographies.

We have heard all this spin before and no doubt we will hear it again, not just in baseball but across the athletic world. So what is to be done?

Clearly the warnings that steroids cause many complications including personality disorder and death has had little impact on the athletes seeking cash and glory, or just cash for that matter. If death is not a deterrent to use, what could be?

Should this be a concern? What harm beyond that to the individual is there? For years training techniques and technologies have recast our sports and games and restructured the record books. If we can have better living through chemistry and better health and well-being through drugs, why not better hitting, more powerful hitting?

If steroids and supplements can enhance our athletic performances, is that not the same thing as Viagra enhancing our sexual performance? Rafael Palmeiro endorses Viagra, Nolan Ryan to Advil, and Mark McGwire gave testimony to the effectiveness of andro. Why stop there?

No one really wants to discuss these matters. We live in a world littered with drugs designed to deal with our every difficulty, mental or physical. We turn to drugs to solve problems and we turn to them to enhance experiences. We live in a world not that far from Huxley's Brave New World of "soma." More significantly we live in that world without the slightest hesitation that anything might be amiss.

We accept drugs as a part of our environment, as part of our daily existence, with little thought about the consequences. Why stop at aspirin, advil, or viagra? How many of us use anti-inflammatory drugs with some frequency? How many of us have taken steroids in order to keep on functioning in the face of debilitating pain? How many of

us find alcohol a means to face the requirements of daily performance?

How many of us if we thought that some drug would likely improve our performance in some aspect of our work and could lead to a doubling, tripling or quadrupling of our salary, would take that drug without being deterred by long-term consequences?

We live in a world of our own making that has long since abandoned the reality of a natural existence. How and where should we place the boundaries on the artificial?

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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