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Canseco and steroids

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Canseco and steroids
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The appearance by Jose Canseco on CBS's "Sixty Minutes," and the publication of his book *Juiced: Wild Times, Rampant 'Roids, Smash Hits, and How Baseball Got Big* has called forth another round of hypocrisy in the official and unofficial world of baseball. It is difficult to determine any winner in the hypocrisy sweepstakes, as the competition is stiff.

Where to begin? Like the preverbal ostrich Bud Selig prefers not to comment on Canseco's latest venture into the literary world. And who can blame him? Bud, as he has been doing for years, has sought to protect the product. That is his job. It is what the owners pay him massive amounts of money to do. So Bud's position is, let the past stay in the past, along with the FBI warning of ten years ago. What matters now is to take control of the future and those nasty substances that cause home runs and increased fan interest. Sandy Alderson, Executive VP of Baseball Operations, admits he heard the rumors when he was GM of the Oakland A's, but he did nothing because there was no testing policy in major league baseball.

As for the owners and general managers they too are trying not to deal with the steroid issue. The Yankees set the tone when George Steinbrenner offered a press release praising Jason Giambi's willingness to go before the press, saying that it takes a big man to stand up and apologize to his teammates. Giambi's apology for something he did not identify was both bizarre and counterproductive. At the press conference Giambi did his best to look contrite, Joe Torre did his best not to look too uncomfortable, and Brian Cashman looked somber, like a man who might be grinding his teeth in his sleep that night.

When asked by Mike Lupica if there had been any discussion of steroids when Giambi was signed by the Yankees to a multiyear multimillion dollar contract, the answer was no. The next day it was revealed that steroids had been listed in the contract under things not to do, but then removed.

As for the managers Torre has little to say even when he speaks about the issue. Tony LaRussa has joined the chorus condemning Canseco and defending Mark McGwire but he also says he knew Canseco was using steroids and did not report it because he felt

the Players Association would prevent any action. LaRussa's position is understandable, as he doesn't want to be perceived as negligent and it is easy to blame the Players Association. More of this can be expected.

The players themselves, at least those not named by Canseco, seem to be ready to dismiss the charges as the result of Canseco's need to make money. One player said the book was all right by him, as long as Jose didn't finger him. Those fingered are less magnanimous in their views of the self-proclaimed Master Juicer. They have denied the charges, have said they have never used steroids, or called Canseco a liar and/or an opportunist desperate for money.

Most interesting are the hysteria mongers in the press. The litany has come forth again suggesting that baseball has been permanently scarred, that the records must be reassessed, or that asterisks need to be fired off in all directions. Some even claimed that they feel "cheated" and "used." They had been so elated by the McGwire home run chase with the Sammy Sosa subplot; only to have it revealed that the players were juiced. They sound very much like Capt. Louis Renault in Casablanca when Rick reveals there is gambling at the Cafe Americain.

Such hypocrisy is wondrous. Steroid use and overdeveloped players have been discussed for at least a decade. In the middle of McGuire's run at the record came the androsteine revelations. What do these people think andro is? The quicker picker upper. That is not why it was already banned across a number of sports. A number of players were using supplements like creatine to increase their strength and energy. Didn't these qualify as "juice?" Don't these supplements change the equation from the days of Maris and Aaron? Some suggest that the Maris and Aaron records are the last "natural" records and should be regarded as separate and different from subsequent records.

This raises other issues. What if the ball is "juiced" at some point in the history of the game? Should the records set in those periods be distinguished from those of other times? Should the records of those players who trained in the modern training regimes with all the new training technologies be discounted as "unnatural?" Do we need new records kept for each different height of the pitching mound? Do we need different records for the years in which all sorts of "doctoring" of the ball by pitchers was legal? What about the era of the greenies, the glorious amphetamine days?

Competitive balances change for all sorts of reasons. Pharmacological changes come and go. Steroids are the fad of the past several decades in sport, and in the past decade they have reached the highly competitive world of baseball. If they disappear something else will come down the road to replace them and there will be another rush of shock and disbelief bandied about in the media.

The fans know this has been going on for the past decade or more. They have been talking about it for years and they will make their own judgments about the impact of drugs on records and will read them as such. Let the powers that be run around wringing their hands, while the fans just keep coming to the games to see those big flies leave the park.

Perhaps on this one the Commissioner of Baseball has the rich approach.

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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