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Jason Grimsley and HGH

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Jason Grimsley and HGH
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Up to this point in his less than distinguished major league baseball career, Jason Grimsley was best known as the player who crawled through a ceiling passage in the visitor's clubhouse at Comiskey Park to get Albert Belle's corked bat from the umpire's room. It was July of 1994 and the umpires had confiscated Belle's illegal bat.

Jason Grimsley's major league baseball career began in Philadelphia in September of 1989. A journeyman pitcher, Grimsley has spent time in the majors in fourteen of the seventeen years since then. Used mostly in relief, Grimsley's most productive years were between 1999 and 2004 when he collected two World Series rings with the Yankees.

Last week, Jason Grimsley came out of the shadows of the bullpen in Arizona to become the new poster boy for performance enhancement drugs. He was busted for the possession and use of Human Growth Hormone (HGH) and a number of other pharmaceutical wonders of our time.

Certainly no one is surprised to learn that baseball players and other athletes are using substances other than steroids. Just as no one would be surprised to learn that people in all walks of life are using various substances to enhance their performance while conducting a wide variety of tasks. HGH has become one of the latest drugs of choice for those seeking to speed the healing processes from injury and for those seeking to stem the aging process. Baby boomers think they have found the fountain of youth and perhaps even immortality, while many doctors prescribing HGH regard aging as a disease.

HGH is a controlled substance, a major misnomer of our time, legally obtained only with a prescription. It is used to treat any number of problems including the wasting away of the body in AIDS patients and dwarfism in children. It is the mainstay drug of the anti-aging movement. HGH also happens to be very effective in treating sports injuries.

HGH is also very difficult to detect, as there is no urine test for it. There is a blood test, but its reliability and utility are in doubt.

Since the raid on Jason Grimsley's home, the noise calling for "something to be done," one of the most predictable and meaningless phrases in the American vocabulary, has reached high decibel levels in the press and across the wasteland of talk radio. Listening to the din, it would seem that baseball has once again violated its mythical sacred trust to keep America drug free.

Note, however, how quickly the NFL Players' Association let it be known that blood testing for HGH is not on their agenda. This is the sport where the big keep getting bigger, and where taking the needle in order to play is one of the one of the highest qualities a player can display. The NBA Players' Association has said that no blood tests will be permitted on its members. The NHL declared all its players drug free in a report issued recently.

No one has asked why HGH is banned in most sports. Why isn't it available to treat injuries? It certainly is as safe as much of what is taken into the body for what allegedly ails us in this drug-addicted society. Under the supervision of a physician, HGH should be as safe as most of the wonder drugs peddled to a more than willing public.

According to Jason Grimsley, HGH, amphetamines, and steroids are widely used in baseball. How wide is widely? We know that, since the implementation of the new drug policy in baseball, 111 players have tested positive for steroids. We also know that over half of these have been pitchers. Only ten of these have been at the major league level. Grimsley said that when steroid testing began, he switched to HGH. How many others did the same?

What this little bit of information points up is that the users almost always find a way to stay ahead of the detectors. There will always be another drug to use, another way to beat the tests, as long as there are researchers out there. And those on the margins, the Jason Grimsley's of sportsworld, who may lose their job if they miss too many games from injuries, will be among the most likely to use the wonder drug of the moment.

What lies ahead promises to be even more interesting. The next generation of performance enhancement will be through gene manipulation rather than drugs. Whether this will be detectable at all is very much in doubt, and if it is, the development of tests is a long way off and will be extraordinarily expensive.

It is interesting to note that the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA) is already spending millions of dollars to develop reliable tests for illegal substances. Simultaneously, WADA's director, Richard Pound, is chastising everyone in sport for lax drug enforcement. His verbal attacks on FIFA, Lance Armstrong, the National Hockey League, baseball, and others have become nearly laughable.

As for Major League Baseball, it will spend a half-million dollars this year to support research to find a reliable urine test for HGH, something that many think impossible. Praying for divine intervention at Faith Nights might be more productive.

So we see once again vast amounts of money thrown at this alleged problem, enormous human effort being expended, and considerable hysteria being generated. Is this all a waste? Very likely. Is this really a problem? Probably not. Does that make any difference to anyone? Certainly not.

So let the public flagellation proceed, the righteous condemn the sinners, and the hypocrites have their day. In the end little will change.

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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