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Congress takes on PEDs

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SPORT AND SOCIETY FOR H-ARETE
Congress takes on PEDs
JANUARY 18, 2008

I have been distracted for the last few days contemplating the fact that the United States has 2.7M candy bars in Iraq and 1.6M cans of soda. Is this "the surge" that has been much discussed over the past few months?

Luckily I have more intellectually stimulating things to occupy me because I watched too much of the Congressional Hearings on the Mitchell Report. These were truly inspiring and informative, and reassured me that there are people in Washington who really do care, who feel our pain, and who eventually will be able to address the "candy bar factor" in Iraq.

Most inspiring of all was the repeated concern over our children expressed by our representatives, who couldn't tell the "Blackhawks" from the "Black Sox." It seems that too many children are using steroids, and furthermore it is all the fault of major league baseball players. Over and over again the youth of America were invoked at the Mitchell Report Hearings. We must protect them. We must save them from these terrible things that baseball players are inspiring them to do.

Yes, it's the role model factor. I certainly would be the last to deny that baseball players are role models for America's youth. Some, no doubt, are. Whether they are role models in their baseball role or in their role as a human being is of course a question. Do the youth model their swing, their batting stance, or the way they wear their cap after their baseball heroes? Or do they seek to emulate every aspect of the lives of these players?

Whether baseball players are more important as role models than those from America's Game is another matter. We know that over the past half-century baseball has been eclipsed by football as the National Pastime and that the National Football League is far more popular than the National or American League. Wouldn't it be more likely, then, that the youth of America would choose NFL players as role models rather than baseball players? My grandsons wear jerseys of NFL players and NBA players, but I am not sure they could name a baseball player.

Now, which sport has offered more examples of the steroid look on the field of play, baseball or football? The exponential

growth of the size of football players over the past three decades has been stunning, and it's not just the size of their heads. Not all of this expansion has come from natural causes.

Beyond the world of sport there are other role models for our youth. The stars of the film and music industry are clearly not averse to the chiseled look of the steroid user. Any action movie, action video game, or action television series offers any number of over-developed muscle bulging heroes who are clearly beyond the norms of natural human development. Spend a few minutes looking at magazines devoted to any of these subjects and you will see more than a few examples of body sculpting and body enhancement displaying ideal body types for our youth.

Are these people more popular than baseball players? Do they influence our youth more than baseball players? Of course they do. Baseball is but a very small drop in the bulging role model bucket.

Watch commercial television for a few hours and take in the advertising for drugs. First, there seems to be a drug for every ailment, real or imagined, for both humans and pets. For all of them there is a pharmaceutical solution. Discussions and presentations of the ideal body saturate the advertising world, while the means to attain the ideal body, both natural and artificial, are touted to the American public. Even children notice this and some may be influenced by it.

Performance enhancement and performance enabling drugs are all over our drug infested society and are advertised as solutions to any and all performance problems. Advertising seldom touts natural solutions to any of our physical problems, because the drug companies have easier solutions. Pop this pill or that and you will be made whole again.

Looking at this larger picture, I find it difficult to take seriously the Congressional concern over protecting our youth from steroids. We live in a drug culture and that will not change. Until it does, holding hearings about the drug usage of a few hundred baseball players is the height of foolishness.

Listening to the hearings also revealed how little command Commissioner Selig and Donald Fehr have over these issues. The approach to these problems in baseball, as indeed most other areas of life, has not been serious. The Commissioner mentioned at one point a policy requiring anyone in baseball to report any knowledge he or she has about illegal drugs in the game. From

the subsequent reactions it appears that virtually no one in or around baseball knew that such a policy even existed.

Both men also seemed surprised to learn that in the past year the diagnosis of Attention Deficit Disorder in baseball players has taken a very sharp jump. This has led to players being allowed to take banned stimulants for therapeutic purposes.

One might also wonder how many members of Congress need some "little helper" to get through the day or through a mind numbing congressional hearing. Perhaps the U.S. Congress should take a closer look at the candy bars of Iraq. Answers to that mystery are likely to be much clearer than anything found at this week's hearings on the Mitchell Report.

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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