

Steroiditis

by Jack A. Medina, M.A.

February 2005

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In case you missed it, the December issue of TIME magazine had some great information on the current steroid epidemic. I have been telling people this for years, but no one seems to listen. Maybe now you will, as I highlight some of the important information in this article by Jerry Adler.

Side Effect: Suicide

"It can take years to hit bottom with many drugs, decades with alcohol. But on steroids Chris Wash managed it in just 12 months, starting with the dream of playing for a top college basketball team and winding up on a highway overpass, waiting for the moment to jump. In that time Wash, a 6-foot-2 guard on the Plano West High School team in Plano, Texas, went from a rangy 180 pounds to a hulking 230, with shoulders so big he could barely pull on his backpack in the morning. And he developed a whole new personality to match that intimidating physique: depressed, aggressive and volatile.

[More Info on Performance-Enhancing Aids Click Here](#)

Facts About the Current Steroid Epidemic

After a series of fights in his junior year his coach threw him off the team, but by then building muscles had become an end in itself. He switched from pills to injecting himself with steroids in the buttocks, often with a couple of friends, including a promising high school baseball player named Taylor Hooton. That went on for several months, until one day Hooton was found dangling from his belt in his bedroom, an apparent suicide. Frightened, Wash gathered up his vials and syringes and threw them down the sewer. But an insidious thing about steroids is that stopping them abruptly can lead to depression. A few weeks later Wash drove to a bridge across a Dallas freeway and walked to the middle of the bridge, looking down at the rushing traffic.

Major League Baseball will no doubt eventually solve, or at least paper over, the explosive charges involving steroid use, and the athletes will live with the consequences to their reputations and their health, cushioned by their eight-figure contracts. But their examples have placed a generation of teenage athletes at risk for the same mistakes, which could end their careers - if not their lives - long before they reach the big time."

Dr. Jordan D. Metzler of the Hospital for Special Surgery in New York, an authority on youth sports, calls steroid use: "a burgeoning epidemic."

The use of steroids by high school students increased throughout the 1990s before dropping off slightly in 2003; a Newsweek analysis indicates that last year more than

300,000 students between the eighth and 12th grades use steroids. And they were not all athletes; as many as one third were girls, and experts say there is a growing problem with steroid use by boys whose heroes aren't baseball sluggers but rather the rock-jawed models from the pages of the Abercrombie & Fitch catalog.

More Side Effects

For teenagers who use steroids, the side effects may begin with severe acne and run through hair loss, infertility, male breast development, violent mood swings and paranoia. Steroids can cause stunted growth and injuries that could end the very career they were intended to enhance. And they don't even get you high. Consequently steroid users don't consider themselves addicts. None of the kids see steroids as a drug, but they have their own seductions. "They make you feel pumped, aggressive, hypersexual, and that's going to feel good to a lot of these kids," says Dr. Kirk Browner, an addiction-treatment specialist at the University of Michigan. Athletes who train on steroids can gain muscle mass at phenomenal rates, as much as two pounds per week.

Joshua Dupont, a star running back at a Southern California high school and a highly ranked wrestler, began taking steroids in the summer before his junior year because he was getting jealous of the praise a stronger, faster teammate was getting from the coaches. He began seeing results, he claims, within three days: "I could spend the entire day at the gym and just keep pumping iron, working the same muscle without fatigue. After a week of taking this stuff, I went from a 4.7 seconds to a 4.6 in the 40-yard dash. It was incredible."

For those taking steroids that can tolerate them, or have yet to experience a side effect, there isn't much motivation to give them up. "If you're big and muscular and people admire you for that, why would you seek treatment to become smaller?" asks Harrison Pope Jr., a psychiatrist and addiction specialist at Harvard-affiliated McLean Hospital in Belmont, Mass. "I could count on both hands the number of patients who have sought treatment from me for addiction to steroids."

[More on Steroids-Click Here](#)

Why They Use Steroids

"If you just took steroids by themselves, you would gain some muscle protein, but not nearly as much as if you do it with exercise", says Dr. Alan Rogol, a pediatric endocrinologist at the University of Virginia. "The combination can make a skinny Pittsburgh Pirate into a San Francisco Giant who hits 73 home runs, but we won't mention any names."

Steroids are hormones, and for body-building purposes the ones of interest are "anabolic" steroids - a number of related compounds that mimic the effects of testosterone, the male hormone secreted by the testes. There are several other classes of steroids, including the female hormone estrogen and the drugs called corticosteroids, which are used to treat inflammation and asthma; neither of these builds muscle, and their side effects are very different. Anabolic steroids build strength by entering a muscle cell and switching on the genes that manufacture muscle

proteins. Weightlifting amplifies the effect by stressing the muscles.

Most body-builders obtain steroids in a black market of pills, gels and injectable solutions purchased over the counter in countries such as Mexico, on the internet, or from a guy at the gym whose cousin knows a batboy. Since the market is unregulated, products claiming to be steroids might in fact be almost anything, in concentrations that can only be guessed at by anyone without an analytical lab at his disposal.

Until now, teenage body-builders have been able to get around obstacles to obtaining steroids by substituting androstendione, a chemical "precursor" that is converted to testosterone in the body. Androstendione has virtually the same effects, and side effects, as steroids, although it requires a much higher dosage. And this does not begin to exhaust the list of performance enhancing drugs in circulation.

TO BE CONTINUED NEXT MONTH...

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