

Letter to the Editor: The Pundit Speaks

By Randolph M. Howes, M.D., Ph.D.

April 23, 2017

“Steroid Abuse Among Athletes”

Steroid use has been rampant throughout the recent history of modern day athletics. In 1954, Americans learned that the success of the Soviet weightlifting team was due to their being given testosterone. John Bosley Ziegler, MD, a physician for the US weightlifting team in the 1950s and '60s decided that US athletes needed a chemical edge to remain competitive. Ziegler worked with the CIBA Pharmaceutical Company to develop an anabolic steroid, methandrostenedione (Dianabol), which appeared on the market in 1960. The weight- and strength-gaining results were so impressive that steroid use quickly spread from weightlifters to other athletes. By the 1964 Olympic Games, the startling improvement in many strength athletes was impossible to ignore and it quickly followed that steroids were being extensively used by athletes in all strength sports. By the mid-1960s, most top-ranking shot-putters and discus, javelin, and hammer throwers were taking steroids. By 1968, sprinters, hurdlers, and middle-distance runners had joined them. At the 1968 pre-Olympic training camp, an estimated one third of the entire US track and field team had used steroids, usually taking between 10-100 mg of steroids a day. A US weightlifting team doctor said, "I don't think it is possible for a weight man to compete internationally without using anabolic steroids." Other sports quickly reached the same conclusion. Arnold Schwarzenegger, former Mr. Olympia and Mr. Universe, admitted taking steroids in a 1977. Between 1956 and 1972, shockingly, a U.S. medical team attempted to set up extensive research into the effects of steroids on weightlifters and throwers "only to discover there were so few who weren't taking them that they couldn't establish any worthwhile comparisons." However, we were soon to learn of the downside of taking anabolic steroids. Even when used to treat medical conditions, anabolic steroids have all kinds of common side effects but do not confuse anabolic steroids with corticosteroids. Anabolic steroids are used to build up muscle and strength. Corticosteroids are used to dampen overactive immune responses and reduce swelling and inflammation. The anabolic steroids abused by athletes are synthetic versions of testosterone, a male hormone. Side effects are primarily related to your sex and age. Men may develop breasts, prostate enlargement, have testicular shrinking, decreased sperm count, become aggressive, infertile and impotent. Take the time to learn about the potential benefits, the health risks and the many unknowns regarding so-called performance-enhancing drugs such as anabolic steroids, androstenedione, human growth hormone, erythropoietin, diuretics, creatine and stimulants. You may decide that the benefits aren't worth the risks.

In the America that I love, the competitive drive to win is fierce. But, resorting to performance-enhancing drugs is risky business. Also, be aware of the federal and state illegalities of steroid use and/or sales.

Prof. Randolph M. Howes, MD PhD
Surgeon ~ Scientist ~ Patient Advocate
27439 Highway 441, Kentwood, LA 70444
985.229.6955 H 985.514.0578 C
rhowesmd@hughes.net | www.iwillfindthecure.org

