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The Effects of Steroid Use in Sports

by Jake Page

For thousands of years, sports have had a lasting effect on a large portion of the world's population in how they live their lives. Up until the late 1900s, there was little controversy about individual players turning to what some call "foreign substances" to give them an advantage over the competition or to improve a facet of their game to become equal with the others. However, scandals began to unfold, and controversy arose as more and more cases across all sports were brought to attention. With many conflicting opinions about certain topics involving steroids, the question has been brought up about whether steroids should be more or less regulated moving forward in sports. Rules and regulations regarding steroid use in sports should be substantially increased due to negative effects of scandals and health problems derived from athletes' tendency to use them.

Steroids in Baseball

Steroids have given players unfair advantages. It is quite commonly known that baseball and the MLB have by far had the largest scandals when it comes to steroid usage. Particularly in the 1980s and 1990s, steroids provided certain players with a large

advantage, which is clearly shown by statistics from before and after they began using steroids. For example, when analyzing a player like Ivan “Pudge” Rodriguez, it is important to note that although he was a superstar, he was aligned with controversy: “Rodriguez has been identified with steroids in the following ways: Jose Canseco publicly stated that he personally injected Pudge with steroids; When asked if he was on the list of 103 (in reference to a leaked, unofficial list of players who were steroid users in 2003), Rodriguez responded ‘Only God knows;’ He played for the Texas Rangers (dubbed the ‘Steroid Sluggers’) in the 1990s; and his physique varied fairly radically over the years, with it being beefier pre-testing and noticeably smaller once testing was implemented” (Antinori and Blackman). Although Rodriguez was never officially confirmed to have been a steroid user, it is evident that his sudden body and statistical improvements led most to believe that he was a user as these trends are directly linked to confirmed users.

Many talented steroid-clean players have been overshadowed because of controversies like these. Players in the steroid era who were incredibly talented without the use of steroids had to overcome much larger obstacles to be considered a superstar. One of these stars was Japanese born Ichiro Suzuki: “The outfielder who appeared too small to survive a league bloated on steroids was baseball’s best player in 2001. He hit .350, had 242 hits, stole 52 bases and threw out runners from right field with throws so

long and true they were almost impossible to believe, even as he made them” (Carpenter). Ichiro’s became successful because of how unique of a player he was compared to fellow superstars, in that he was small and scrawny while they were large and bulky. This goes to show how incredibly difficult it really was to reach stardom in this era while steroid free because players had to be the complete opposite or else they would be overshadowed by bigger, stronger steroid users.

Steroids and the Baseball Hall of Fame

Stats for steroid user stars are too inflated. While many stars made their mark in the steroid era and produced numbers that would normally get them into the Hall of Fame, it has been a very controversial issue for those players to be accepted because of the advantage they received. This goes for players like Mark McGwire, Sammy Sosa, and Barry Bonds. Each of these players had illustrious careers due to the sheer power they possessed, and Barry Bonds even remains to this day as the all-time homerun king as he hit the most ever in a career: “Bonds began using steroids as a member of the San Francisco Giants at age 33. Instead of his career declining at a natural pace like all other players in the league, Bonds revamped his career and was a far better hitter than before as his batting average went up by 26 points and his home run rate went up 20 percent”

(stg5143). These eye-popping statistics, that should not happen late in any player's career, show how large of an affect steroids have on their output.

The cons of allowing steroid users into the Hall of Fame highly outweigh the pros. When evaluating the reasons each side of the argument have given forth, it is evident that the cons of allowing steroid users into the Hall of Fame greatly outweigh the pros: "The Baseball Hall of Fame is a beautiful tradition that deserves to stay clean. This means leaving players who used PEDs out of it. After all, the players who used steroids chose not to play the game fairly. Nobody is asking to put them to jail, just not to give them baseball's highest honor – as a Hall of Famer" (Piccioto). To add to this, "[t]here are so many clean professional baseball players who have never used PEDs. These clean players were forced to compete against players who had an illegal advantage over them, and they consequently may have lost opportunities to earn more money and advance in their career and status" (Piccioto). Letting steroid users in would open the gates for eventually allowing a substantial amount of steroid era stars to get in. This would then provide incentive for current players to begin using steroids to make themselves Hall of Fame caliber players as they could get in without putting in as much effort as steroid clean players. Alongside the cons of players inside the game using steroids and the effect it has on other players, it also has an effect on the popularity and revenue of the sport. When a player gets caught using steroids, studies "find that suspensions

decrease attendance at baseball games by as much as 8% after controlling for the gameplay effect associated with the loss of the player” (Cisyk). It would not make sense to let players who have made the game lose fans and money due to them cheating to be in the Hall of Fame. All it would do is bring more bad publicity to baseball.

Steroids in Other Professional Sports

There have been surprising negative results of steroid use for former NFL players too. Steroids in professional sports have mainly been highlighted in baseball due to the huge scandals that have taken place. Recently, it has been found that steroid use in the NFL has been much more common than many thought: “Nearly 1 in 10 retired National Football League players polled in a confidential survey said they had used now-banned anabolic steroids while still playing” (Reinberg). This is obviously huge data that has not been talked about enough. Ten percent of an entire organization is a huge amount, and some former players referred to as “legends” today could very well have been steroid users. The need for an increase in testing is crucial, and even though it is expensive, “testing . . . increased competitive balance through reductions in player costs which compressed the distribution of team wins per dollar” (Brave 747). Basically, it is

more beneficial to increase testing because the price of tests cancels out with less players using steroids.

Steroid use also occurs in the NBA, and as recently as just this past year multiple cases of were uncovered: “Three weeks into the 2019-20 NBA season, three players have tested positive for banned substances, resulting in 25-game suspensions. In late August, Brooklyn Nets forward Wilson Chandler tested positive for Ipamorelin. In late October, Suns center Deandre Ayton tested positive for a diuretic. On Nov. 5, Hawks big man John Collins tested positive for Growth Hormone Releasing Peptide-2” (Ellentuck). The fact that players are still taking steroids even with large suspensions and other consequences involved is definitely concerning and should be taken more seriously. Currently, “[t]he NBA tests every player at random between 0-4 times per year (0-3 times for WNBA players). Tests only occur at practices and games; none are conducted during the offseason” (Professional Sports Leagues Steroid Policies). This can most definitely be improved as there are chances for players not to be tested at all for an entire season and offseason. Multiple tests per year and per player would be very beneficial for the NBA.

Steroids and the Olympics

Scandals surrounding steroids have even made their way to the Olympics. At the Rio Olympics in 2016, it was discovered that hundreds of Russian athletes were given steroids to enhance their performance in the games: “Over 100 Russian athletes who would have competed in Rio have been barred due to an investigation into a state-run doping program that involved administering a cocktail of anabolic steroids to the country’s world-class athletes” (Oskman). The fact that steroids are a problem for hundreds of athletes at one of the largest events in the world shows that steroids have an incredible effect on the abilities and performance of each athlete, so much that an entire country is willing to risk being caught and removed from the games for using them. In as early as 1967, steroids at the world stage were known to be powerful, so “the International Olympic Committee (IOC) establish[ed] a Medical Commission in response to an increase in the usage of performance enhancing substances” (“Performance Enhancing Drugs in Sports Fast Facts”). Thankfully, the medical commission that was established, foreshadowed a future of Olympic steroid scandals that could be addressed.

Lance Armstrong is another example of a massive scandal related to steroids. Considered to be the best cyclist ever, Lance Armstrong was caught with steroids in his system after having won seven Tour de France titles: “In 2012, Armstrong was stripped of

his record seven Tour de France titles from 1999-2005 for doping during that stretch. He was also stripped of a 2000 Olympic time trial bronze medal. All of his results from Aug. 1, 1998 forward were annulled” (OlympicTalk). As mentioned previously, with the NFL, there are former athletes regarded as “legends,” who used steroids without anyone knowing. While some athletes were never caught, Lance Armstrong was and was rightfully stripped of his titles, and as a result, many people no longer consider him as a legend.

Effect of Steroids on Mental and Physical Health

The use of steroids also has a large effect outside the world of sports. Players who have previously used steroids often show very serious symptoms directly related to them: “The consequences of steroid abuse are far-ranging and potentially permanent, including: Insomnia, Paranoia, Irritability, Acne Delusions, High cholesterol, Increased blood pressure, [and] Headaches” (Gonzalez). The side effects at hand, along with many more, are damaging to the human body and also require lots of treatment and money. Some are even untreatable and stay with former users for a lifetime.

Along with physical consequences attributed to steroids, there are also mental factors. This includes increased aggression, psychiatric disorders like hypomania and depression, and it is a possible gateway to the use of other drugs (NIDA). Like the physical

consequences, mental consequences also are very damaging to the human body in its own way as they mess with the brain. Those who suffer from some of these mental disorders a lot of the time end up ruining relationships with friends and family due to their actions. Also, when users get highly addicted, they develop a mental block in their brain called steroid dependence: "Steroid dependence occurs when a person can no longer function without the use of steroids" (Otterson). Some users begin to believe that there is no turning back from their addiction, and they continue to further dig themselves into that hole.

Conclusion

It is evident that steroids have had quite the negative impact on individuals and entire sporting organizations. Baseball has definitely had the biggest impact when it comes to steroids, and based on the findings, steroids have had a completely negative impact on the sport; further, players who used them should not be in the Hall of Fame. In other sports, the same idea applies as organizations should continue to implement harsh, if not even harsher, restrictions and consequences for steroids use. Currently, there should be more research done on finding ways to prevent future users from ever getting their hands on steroids through education and close monitoring. This research can

continue more broadly and even have an effect on steroids use by non-athletes for their personal gains in the gym or in other physical settings. As the negatives of steroid use greatly outweigh the positives, the common person should begin to realize this and join the fight against steroid use.

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