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Steroids In Baseball: Who Cares?

You hear the word "steroids" and you cringe. Then you hear the words "steroids" and "baseball" in the same sentence, and you go berserk. Recently, Rafael Palmeiro failed a drug test in which he tested positive for steroids and has sent baseball fans into a frenzy. Speculation has been raised that slugger Barry Bonds unknowingly used them, raising "questions" of ethics among the nation's elite in terms of their athletic performance. And yet, why are we so surprised about this behavior of professional athletes? In recent months, we have become aware of the vast number of athletes that have used steroids. How big of an advantage is it if so many are using? The power of propaganda regarding the steroid "scandal" truly demonstrates the absurdity and ludicrousness of the media's influence today.

A recent poll of teenagers suggests that most have lost respect for Bonds because they think he is a "cheater". What these people really are saying is that they think that hitting a 97-mph is routine and that steroids are responsible for having incredible hand eye coordination. Hard work and perseverance are irrelevant in their minds. Little do they know that professional baseball is made up differently than any other professional sport. From the get-go, aspiring Major League Players must start at the very bottom on what's called a "farm" team, then move up from single-A ball to triple-A ball. Throughout this time, they rack in average salaries and are simply a member of America's working class. Once the rare exception – the player that gets a big league opportunity – is called up, the pressure and desire to succeed are calling. And for many,

steroids provide the answer. However, this is more a mental claim than anything else, as it can be proven that steroids don't make miracles.

Although not baseball, take for example, track star Ben's Johnson performance at the 1988 Summer Olympics. After the closing ceremonies of the games had concluded, Johnson was found to have willingly used steroids. During one of his track and field events, the 100-meter dash, Johnson had "shaved" .08 seconds from his time. As a spectator, there is absolutely no way we could pinpoint a steroid user from a non-user. In addition, .08 seconds can easily be accommodated for through a change in technique or simply recovering from an injury. To immediately conclude that this type of difference in time is a result of a substance, legal everywhere but in the world of professional athletics, is absurd.

Sure, the steroid user may enjoy some advantages. The immediate conclusion is that these advantages are unfair. Everyone in a society enjoys advantages, however. All of us are advantaged in relation to people living in third world countries. A promising young tennis player may have access to the best coach in the business, creating a wide gap between him and the rest. Is anyone telling us as a society that we are "cheaters"? Is that young tennis player brought to court because of him taking advantage of a great resource? In baseball, it is incredibly difficult to pinpoint the effects in relation to performance on the baseball field. Currently, there is no concrete evidence that suggests that steroids provide any sort of unfair advantage. And yet, Congress, yes the United States *Congress,* has began an attempt at regulating steroids when essentially they have no concrete proof to back up their claims.

Take into consideration the athlete that has not bought into the steroid-crazed revolution in the clubhouse. Because he has not used the type of steroids that would fail a drug test, does not mean that he is not finding legal ways to "cheat". This hypothetical player is not the virtuous, honest, and ethical person one might initially think. Rather, it is more realistic that he wants to avoid the public scrutiny that has become the norm in today's media-focused society. Understandable. However, this player up until recently had taken loads of andro, creatine, other supplements, and with every meal enormous amounts of protein drinks. In other words, this player *is* becoming a so-called "chemical factory", but in ways that the owners and the upper echelons of baseball approve of. Who are these powerful figures to say which "performance-enhancing" drugs are acceptable and which others are not?

Next time you are caught gawking at the front page of the sports page with the news of another player found to have used steroids, force yourself to avoid siding with the minority; those that understand the logic behind the use of them and the actual "advantages" they supposedly employ. In addition, keep in mind the hard work and perseverance that those players needed to reach the top and once they did, being faced with a 97-mph fastball. Above all, do not fall into the trap of reaching the generalization that those players that have used are horrible individuals and cheaters. Understand that these are players whom are trying everything possible to give you, the fan, the pleasure of experiencing the joy of a walk-off home run.