

## **Steroids: The Achilles of the Baseball Universe**

Sitting in a well-lit room, Barry awaited his math test. Barry has always been good at math, but this calculus chapter hasn't been easy. Besides that, he hasn't studied for the test, nor has he paid attention in class. He knew, however, that he needed an "A" on this last test to get into Harvard. Barry had a plan though, a plan that did not involve effort. He had an "out:" his girlfriend, Stephanie. She had given Barry her answers to the same test, which she had taken three hours earlier. As the test was passed out Barry's hands became clammy. But with Stephanie's answers, the test was a breeze. Barry had cheated his way into the top five ranking in his high school class. He could easily get into Harvard without anyone besides Stephanie knowing of his unfathomable act. Yet, cheating isn't an occurrence only at schools. Cheating takes place in many sports, but baseball has been bombarded with rampant allegations of steroid use. Steroid use is a thorn in baseball's side. This thorn may cause irreparable damage to the sport because baseball's steroid legislation has been ineffective, steroids have negatively impacted baseball's reputation, and steroid use has negatively affected youth.

At the heart of the controversy is that current steroid legislation is too weak for a sport with so much history and documented records of success. Throughout the sporting world, steroid policies have been implemented; however, baseball is almost the last to create a policy. Unfortunately, the 2002 policy was practically no policy at all. The penalties set forth by the commissioner, Bud Selig, and the Player's Union were too soft. So in January of 2005, the policy was updated. At that time, Congress accepted the terms of the policy. However, when Congress got its look at the printed policy in March, the men and women of Congress were left unsatisfied. One was John McCain, and Republican Senator. He thought the original draft in January was "a significant breakthrough," yet when he got to see the printed document, he believed changes still needed to be made. In the new policy, the penalties range from the first offense being a ten-day suspension to the fourth offense being a one-year suspension. According to a 2005 article in the Journal Gazette, the commissioner may only act after a player's fifth offense ("Editorial"). This system would make perfect sense if the players would be publicly identified on the first offense; however, that isn't the case. As with many other things in life, there is a loophole. For example, if players are willing to pay a \$10,000 fine then they can keep their names clean and not have to serve suspensions. As the Christian Science Monitor, in a 2005 edition, states, "These fines are concession-stand change to these well paid athletes" ("Baseball's Drug"). These athletes may mock the \$10,000 fine, but most would not mock drug testing by an independent agency. In fact, while most sports have gone to independent agencies to test their athletes, baseball is very adamant on not allowing these agencies to test baseball players. In accordance with Howard Bryant, who wrote a 2005 Boston Herald, article, if an independent agency attempts to test baseball players, then the drug testing program is abandoned. This makes many feel baseball, or more importantly Selig and Donald Fehr, and negotiator in the Player's Union, have something to hide. All information seems to point to Selig's inability to create concrete rules; however, the Player's Union is also a roadblock in creating effective steroid regulations. In fact, a few years ago, Harvard University did research on a new testing policy that was considered harsher than any other policy developed by baseball at that time. This plan was implemented in the minors, but since the Player's Union holds too much power, it did not allow that testing to be done in the major leagues (Bodley). What allows the Union so much power? That's easy! A SportsIllustrated.com interview with Ken Caminiti stated that the collective bargaining agreements that the Major League Baseball offers give too much power to the individual and their lawyers, and not enough power to keep the sport clean and truthful ("Caminiti"). Since legislation is so weak, it is allowing many baseball players to continue abusing the system without penalty.

While legislation may allow these athletes to get away with cheating, another part of baseball's deterioration as a national pastime are the effects of steroids on baseball's reputation. Baseball has been and is a sport recognized for its heroes. Whether from the era of Babe Ruth, Hank Aaron, or to the present-day Barry Bonds, all astounding records in between have been kept. However, baseball has entered into the "tarnished record" era. Steroids have caused many people to question the credibility of

the present-day athletes' records. Though these athletes are being attacked for credibility, they are still paid the big bucks to play an honest game. These big salaries are going to keep this "juiced" sport "juiced." No players are going to give up their chance to make millions of dollars to stay clean. If it is between the chance for a guaranteed multi-million dollar contract or a life of mediocrity in baseball, what will the athlete decide to do? It is sad that is the moral state of baseball has come to, but, in essence, this is the way baseball is being played, not on ability, but on profit. Baseball continues to protect its investment on players using steroids, an investment that started in the 1998 season. Many people remember the 1998 baseball season. That was the year when Mark McGwire and Sosa had their homeruns chase. This was the chase that broke Roger Maris's single season homerun record. According to Lee Jenkins, who wrote a 2005 New York Times article, what most people do not know is that baseball had a disappointing 1997 season and experienced lows for televised audiences. A steroid policy was not yet implemented in 1998. After the season that "saved baseball," baseball banned the supplement that McGwire was using. It seems convenient that after a season that resurrected baseball, the supplement that may have been used to create the rush was later banned. This kept McGwire's homerun record safe (until Barry Bonds broke it) because he used the supplement before baseball banned it. But it, however, does not save McGwire's reputation from being tarnished. Fans have also done their part to tarnish the game. Fans seem to fuel a players drive to achieve great status. As former baseball slugger and advocate of steroid use, Jose Canseco, stated in his book Juiced, he knew on any given night he had to play to what the crowd and the media wanted. He had to be a superhuman athlete (116). Today's generation of fans live for entertainment. They don't care about how homeruns are hit. They just care that it is getting done. However, baseball has gotten on thing done. It has taken another step backwards in trying to clean the sport. In April 2005, two major league players were found using steroids. These players were no Barry Bonds, no Sammy Sosa, and no Gary Sheffield. As Bryant's articles stated, baseball is punishing "no-namers," but is leaving the higher paid, more visible athletes alone. Baseball has taken some foot steps forward in attempting to clean baseball, but the fact of the matter is that baseball's reputation may already be permanently damaged.

Though legislation may be weak and baseball's reputation damaged, those problems pale in comparison to the problems steroids pose to young athletes. Many young athletes admire baseball's legends. These children will closely follow their favorite players' training regimens. But when training regimens also include steroid use, then what are youth supposed to do? Some aspiring athletes know their limits. However, others know no limits in becoming the "training twin" of their favorite baseball player. And why not? Senator Jim Bunning, a hall of fame pitcher, believes that baseball has created the image that "the only path to the majors is through a needle full of performance enhancers" (Editorial"). There are many youth around the U.S. that have only seen that image, unfortunately, the total continues to grow. More young athletes feel the need to bulk up and gain exceptional strength through steroids. Chris Wash is one of many youth who have been impacted by steroid use. He started taking steroids his sophomore year and probably would not have stopped if his friend, Taylor Hooton, had not committed suicide after steroid use (Wash and Labrecque). Was is not alone. Bret Saberhagen is a former Cy Young award winning pitcher for youth. Saberhagen sees his players idolize Major League players and act just like them on the field. But, he acknowledges that it's not just outside appearance that some of these athletes try to emulate. Although Saberhagen knows he has to talk about the dangers of steroids with his players, he and other coaches are undermined by athletes who actually stud weight-room chemistry. Yet, he further r stated that bulked-up youth athletes are looked down upon by peers who see muscles and suspect steroids (Plaschke). These days, no one believes that muscles are pure strength can be obtained through legal training habits. This is the shame that baseball has brought onto itself by sidestepping the steroid issue. Baseball has created the problem, but now it is up to educate youth of steroids' dangers.

Steroid use has reached a dangerous high for young athletes as well as professional athletes. For that reason, baseball has been called upon to change the face of the nation. Baseball, however, hasn't answered that call. Baseball is still challenged with poor legislation, a weakened reputation, and a poor representation to youth. Amidst these challenges, baseball must acknowledge that its stars are no different that "get-into-Harvard-at-all-costs" Barry. All of them illustrate former Green Bay Packer coach

Vince Lombardi's motto, "Winning isn't everything; it's the only thing." However, he didn't intend for success to occur at the cost of integrity. It is about time baseball goes to bat for integrity.

## Works Cited

- "Baseball's Drug-Testing Error." Christian Science Monitor.com 3 Mar. 2005 23 Mar. 2005  
<http://www.csmonitor.com/2004/0305/p08s01-comv.htm>
- Bodley, Hal. "MLB, Teams, Even Media Share Blame; Despite Steroid Rumors, Too Many Turned Away." USA Today 18 Feb. 2005, final ed.:C4-.ProQuest Newspapers. Proquest. Western Wisconsin Technical College Lib., La Crosse, WI. 23 Mar. 2005.
- Bryant, Howard. "Baseball's Testing Policy Isn't so Tough After All." Boston Herald 17 Mar. 2005:107-.ProQuest Newspapers. ProQuest. Western Wisconsin Technical College Lib., La Crosse, WI. 23 Mar. 2005.
- "Caminiti Comes Clean." Sports Illustrated.com 23 Mar. 2005. 23 Mar. 2005  
[http://si.cnn.com/si\\_online/special\\_report/steroids](http://si.cnn.com/si_online/special_report/steroids)
- Canseco, Jose. Juiced. New York: Regan-Harper, 2005
- "Editorial: Outsource Steroid Testing." Journal-Gazette [Ft. Wayne, IN] 18 Mar. 2005, final ed.: 12A-.ProQuest Newspapers. ProQuest. Western Wisconsin Technical College Lib., La Crosse, WI. 23 Mar. 2005.
- Jenkins, Lee. "Perfect Season to Perfect Storm: Steroids Taint McGwire Legacy." New York Times 15 Mar. 2005, late ed.:A1-.ProQuest Newspapers. ProQuest. Western Wisconsin Technical College Lib., La Crosse, WI . 23. Mar. 2005.
- Plaschke, Bill. "Baseball Must Step Up to Plate on Steroid Issue." Los Angeles Times 13 Mar. 2005, home ed.: D1-.ProQuest Newspapers. ProQuest. Western Wisconsin Technical College Lib., La Crosse, WI. 23 Mar. 2005.
- Wash, Chris, and Ellen Labrecque. "Steroids Messed Up My Life." Sports Illustrated for Kids Oct. 2004:52-.MasterFILEPremier. EBSCOhost. Western Wisconsin Technical College Lib., La Crosse, WI. 15. Mar. 2005.

May 6, 2005