

MEDIA'S ROLE IN THE REACTION TO THE STEROID SCANDAL IN MAJOR
LEAGUE BASEBALL BY THE PUBLIC AT LARGE

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I.) Introduction

The desire to win at all costs is not new to America; it is as old as the country itself. Athletes throughout time have embraced this desire to win. However, more recently it has become a major issue in sports and more specifically Major League Baseball. Since the issue of steroids in baseball has become a major media topic it has inspired adolescents to experiment with performance enhancing drugs. Such is the case of Taylor Hooton. In July 2003 Taylor committed suicide and it has long been thought that it was during one of his steroid “lows” that pushed him to the edge. (Kix, 2004) He hung himself in his room at his parent’s home in Plano, TX. He was a young baseball player at Plano West Senior High School and had recently put 30 pounds of muscle on his 6’2” frame and was an admitted steroid user. He took one pill a day and shot himself up with steroids twice a week to achieve this 30 pounds of muscle. While Taylor’s story is a tragic one it is not all that uncommon in today’s society for young athletes to experiment with performance enhancing drugs. Young athletes are trying to emulate their idols on the baseball diamond and having deadly results.

Let me begin by giving a brief overview of steroids as a whole. Anabolic Steroids we discovered in the 1930’s. They were originally used to treat young men that did not produce enough testosterone in their own bodies for normal growth. During this

same time period scientists also discovered that these anabolic steroids “could facilitate the growth of skeletal muscle.” (Volkow, n.d.) It wasn’t until the 1940’s that athletes became interested in using steroids. In 1952 when the Russian weight lifting team walked away from the Olympics with a plethora of medals the United States scientists began to think that maybe the U.S. athletes should have the same advantage as the Russians. Originally football players, weight lifters and body builders primarily used anabolic steroids. However, by the 1970’s athletes from other areas of sports had begun using steroids in order to gain a competitive advantage in their respective sports. (Anabolic Steroids, 1999) By the 1990’s steroids had gained a foothold in almost every major sport in America from high schools all the way up to the professional levels. In 1987 the NFL added anabolic steroids to its list of banned substances thus introducing its anti-steroid policy. It was at this point that Major League Baseball was left as the only major professional sport that had no anti-steroid policy. (Roberts, n.d.) Today, majority of the users of anabolic steroids are not athletes, they are people that want to become more muscular for strictly aesthetic reasons. (Buckley et al., 1988) Anabolic steroid use has been linked to many major health problems recently including gynecomastia (a common disease of the male breast where there is a benign glandular enlargement of that breast at some time in the male’s life. It usually consists of the appearance of a flat pad of glandular tissue beneath a nipple which becomes tender at the same time),

dyslipidemia (a disruption in the amount of lipids in the blood) and cardiomyopathy (the deterioration of the function of the myocardium for any reason. These people are often at risk of arrhythmia or sudden cardiac death.) (Kanayama et al., 2008) It has been shown in animal test to have a large dependency rate; it was shown that hamsters went as far as to inject themselves with the steroids because they became so dependent on the effects.

(Peters and Wood, 2005) To say the least it has been conclusively determined that steroids are addictive and can lead to major health problems.

Media now comes into play; it has been shown that “Media emphasizes the “sport manhood formula” and overwhelmingly feature core men’s sports.” (Bernstein, 2002) It has long been thought that role and gender differences are socially constructed, not as biological as once thought. (Hardin and Greer, 2009) This goes to show that the media has influenced the way lay people perceive sports. They have made us perceive sports to be a man’s domain and not just any man but big strong imposing men. Football has undergone a major transformation regarding its fans over the past decade. This is in large part due to the fact that NFL players are being looked at as products to be sold.

Also the transformation of the sports “fandom” can be linked to how the media has portrayed the NFL, through fantasy football leagues and video games. (Oates, 2009) I feel that this carries over into all major sports including baseball. However instead of being looked at positively as commodities to be bought and sold, baseball players are

becoming more known as villains and privileged athletes that have ruined the once great American pastime.

II.) Literature Review

The media has a large influence on not only female body image but also the male body image. Originally only the female body image issues were researched. However, within the past 10 years researchers have begun to focus more attention to the fact that media has had a large impact on male body image issues as well. (Borenstein, 2008)

While women strive for a thin toned body men have gone great distances to enhance their physique and add muscle mass and overall bulk.

“From 1967 to 1997, the male body type displayed in the magazines *GQ*, *Rolling Stone* and *Sports Illustrated* became more lean.” (Borenstein, 2008) This goes beyond just those magazines; the effects of this trend can also be seen in commercials and advertisements all over the country. The thin muscular man is always the “popular” one while the doughy man is funny or awkward and very rarely the love interest in movies and television shows. The media has portrayed the lean muscular men as “sexy” and this has pored over into the society at large.

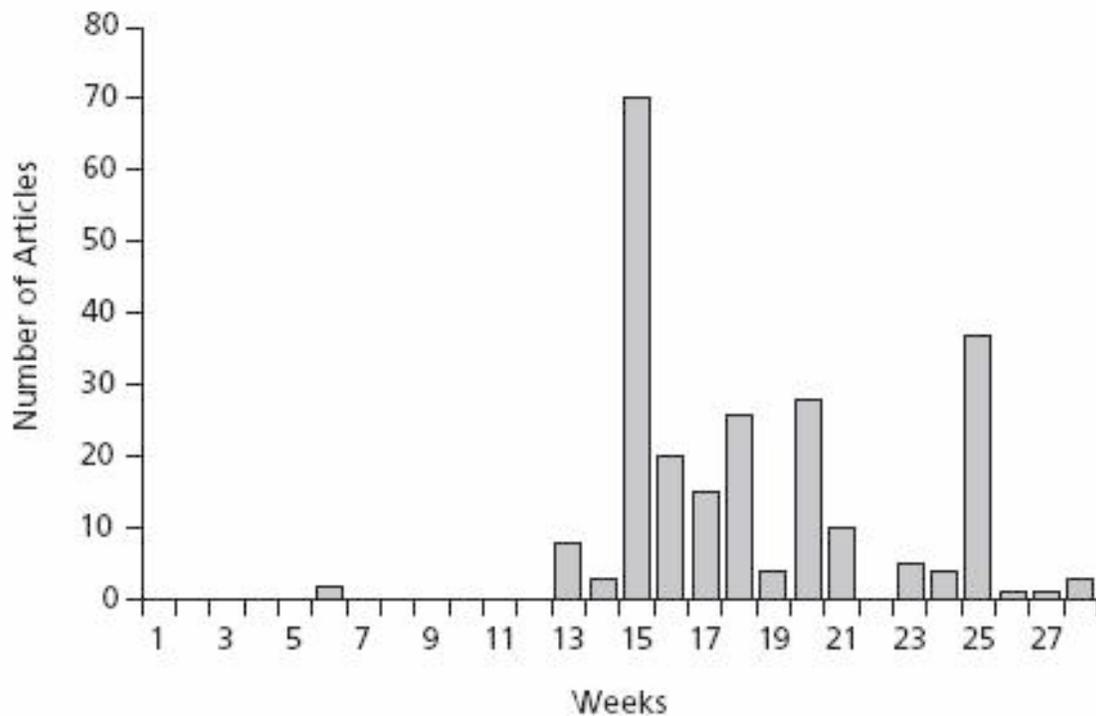
Anabolic steroid use in high schools has been on the rise since the 1980’s when research first began on the subject. It seems that the scare tactics that parents, coaches and people in authority of these children’s lives have tried are not working. The only way to combat the glamour of steroids is to be honest about the pros and cons that are associated with the steroids. (Roberts, n.d.) In high schools across the nation the

percentage numbers are relatively low only about 6% of high school students are taking anabolic steroids. Most are student athletes however there are a few that are taking them in order to gain muscle mass. It has been found that nondependent users of anabolic steroids have very few long-term consequences from their use as compared to heavy users. Light users had comparable consequences to those that never used steroids. However, dependent users of anabolic steroids differed drastically they showed a more frequent history of conduct disorder than nondependent anabolic steroid users. There is a stronger link between dependant users having a life long issue with opiate abuse as opposed to nondependent and nonusers. (Kanayama, 2009)

In 2002 there was an interview printed in the June issue of *Sports Illustrated*, in which Ken Caminiti admitted to using steroids and gave his estimates as to how many other professional baseball players were using them. Caminiti said:

“It’s no secret what’s going on in baseball, at least half the guys are using steroids. They talk about it. They joke about it with each other. The guys who want to protect themselves or their image by lying have that right. Me? I’m at the point in my career where I’ve done just about every bad thing you can do. I try to walk with my head up. I don’t have to hold my tongue...”(p.36)

This shows me that baseball knew about the issue that steroids could potentially cause. If their players knew it was a big deal then the commissioner and the other people that run the organization had to know what was going on in clubhouses around the Nation. After Caminiti's admission to having used steroids there was a major jump in media coverage of the issue. The following chart shows this jump in coverage. Caminiti's interview was published during the week 14 period and you can see the drastic jump in media coverage after there was a confirmed account of steroid use in Major League Baseball.



(Roberts, n.d.) There is no reason to believe that media coverage of steroid use in baseball does not affect the way fans feel about the issue. There would not have been such a massive jump in the amount of coverage that the topic received immediately following Caminiti's admission if people did not want to know about it.

Steroids have been looked at as strictly a baseball problem. This is not the case at all. Steroids were originally found in Olympic sporting events and professional football quickly followed in the consumption of the anabolic steroids. The reason that it seems as if steroids are primarily a baseball issue is because until recently there was no written steroid policy. In 1989 the NFL instituted a steroid policy leaving baseball as the only professional sport with out official steroid policy. They finally came up with a policy of their own in 2005 and that was only because of media and fan pressure. (Baseball Almanac, n.d.)

The NFL has recently experienced wide spread growth based on the strength of the media it uses. They do not simply use one medium to get their product out to the masses, but do so by using video games (*Madden NFL Football* franchise) as well as television. (They have their own network NFL Network, as well as contracts with FOX, NBC, ABC and ESPN.) They have used media flawlessly to promote all the teams in the league as well as the players. By making the players a marketable commodity they have transcended sport and turned the NFL into a brand not just a place to play football.

(Oates, 2009) The NFL has also marketed their draft to lure more fans in a feat, which Major League Baseball is trying to copy with limited success. The NFL has used the popularity of college football to help them market themselves. They try and have college

football fans follow their favorite collegiate athlete to the “next level” and watch him play on Sundays in the NFL. Baseball is struggling with the marketing of their draft because college baseball is not a very popular sport in America. Media such as ESPN and FSN (FOX Sports News) have helped baseball become more marketable and it has also made players more marketable in recent years. It has been found that over 80% of Americans that were polled by ESPN are concerned about steroid use in Major League Baseball. The same study also found that people who consider themselves baseball fans as well as those who do not, both believe that congress should not be involved in Major League Baseballs steroid scandal. They do think that it should be left up to the commissioner of the MLB to take care of. They generally believe that this should be an issue of self-regulation. (ABC News, ESPN, 2005) In this same study it found that people who consider themselves fans of Major League Baseball, believe that issues regarding rules and regulations of the sport should be left to the people that run the organization. Most fans and non-fans agree that Major League Baseball is not doing enough to take care of the problems that have arisen from the use of anabolic steroid issue. In this same study it has been shown that everyone is concerned about the fact that young athletes are being influenced negatively by their idols that play professional sports.

III.) Methodology

While evidence exists that steroids have been used in baseball. As well as the fact that media is a good way to promote your business and they at least in some small part affect how lay people view things. I am looking to draw a correlation between the two. Only a small amount of research has been done regarding the effects of media on fans outlook on the MLB steroid scandal. Given the previous research on the topic the following questions need to be considered:

-RQ1: What is the relationship between media coverage of steroids in baseball and fans reaction to the steroid scandal?

-RQ2: Do different media (magazines vs. television) differ in how they present information about steroids?

-RQ3: Do steroid presentations in the media have generally positive or negative connotations?

In 2005, several events took place that made the issue of steroid use in baseball more of a globally known subject. Everyone from the players to the MLB administrators as well as politicians were called before a grand jury to testify about steroid use in baseball. This hearing featured stars such as Mark McGuire, Rafael Palmeiro, and Sammy Sosa. These were very well known players with McGuire being at the time holding the record for the most home runs in a single major league baseball season. These congressional hearings led to the BALCO investigations, which was the biggest investigation into

steroid use in baseball and helped bring the problems with the issue of steroid use in baseball

I am looking to draw a random sample of students from Appalachian State University. I will ask for a list of current students from the registrar's office and choose every seventh student until 1,000 participants are selected. I feel that by using such a large sample it will be much more accurate. The sample will be drawn in August I feel that at this time the Major League Baseball season is winding down and most of the articles and television presentations will have been made about steroids. It is also around this time that the baseball playoffs will begin thus making fans more aware of the sport because it is the only major sport currently being played. I will also use blogs in order to do further research on fan reaction to the steroid scandal. I feel that this will give a better view of what the overall view of this issue is across the United States. One potential problem I see this that there may be a limited base of knowledge about the steroid scandal at Appalachian State University in order to draw conclusive results. In order to gauge knowledge of the steroid in baseball issue at Appalachian State University there will be a series of question on a general self administered survey about the entire steroid scandal. Using such a large sample I feel that a survey would be a great way to find out how much knowledge my subjects have about the issue at hand. Using a quantitative research method will make it easier to draw definitive conclusions from the data at hand. I also think that it will make the information easier to understand to the layperson because a

solid number is easier to understand than an abstract idea about a subject. With a self administered survey I know there will be a fair amount of drop outs however to overcome this issue we will send out 1,250 to randomly selected potential participants in order to get my desired number of 1,000 participants.

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