



Back To School Supplies: Pencils, Paper, Books and Steroids?

by Sarah McCoy

Weights aren't the only thing high school athletes are hitting to get bigger and stronger

High school baseball player Taylor Hooton was described as the family clown, confident, competitive and popular. He held a 3.8-grade-point average and was passionate about baseball. When a junior varsity coach suggested he get bigger before senior year, Taylor began using steroids. A month after turning 17, he killed himself. Doctors believe his suicide was related to the depression brought on from quitting steroids.

"When it comes to drugs, we tend to think that it isn't our kid," says Don Hooton, Taylor's father and the founder and president of the Taylor Hooton Foundation.

In 2007, the National Institute on Drug Abuse (NIDA) surveyed 48,025 students from schools across the country. The results were surprising: 2.2 percent of high school seniors confessed to using steroids for performance enhancement.

"And that's only 12th graders who admit use," says Dr. Linn Goldberg, a professor of medicine at Oregon Health & Science University and director of NIDA-funded studies on student steroid abuse. "Imagine a teen steroid abuser trying to get a college sports scholarship and somebody asks: 'Have you ever or do you currently use illegal anabolic steroids?' For every one

that says yes, how many say, 'Forget you! I'm trying to get a scholarship.' The numbers are skewed."

Goldberg believes the Use Risk Behavior Survey, conducted by the Centers for Disease Control and Prevention, provides a better look. The last survey showed that 1 in 24 U.S. high-schoolers used steroids, totaling 600,000 to 800,000 kids per year.

Hooton understands what might motivate teens to secretly use. "Across the board, kids face so much pressure to excel. One of the things we went through after Taylor's death was asking ourselves if we pushed him too hard," he says. "But it's an accumulation of everything—parents, peers, coaches, teachers, college scholarships."

For Hooton, the challenge is getting parents to realize that steroids aren't rare in high school. "I look back at the spring of 2003, almost every symptom was in Taylor's life. We just weren't knowledgeable. We didn't know to equate it with steroids," Hooton says. "At 16, our son had no one in his support infrastructure to help him make an educated decision. Now, I'm getting the word out so other parents understand the risks."

The Risks

Steroid users are often fooled by the initial "good-feeling" high, the increased muscle mass, the ability to quickly from injury and a seemingly endless plify of energy. For a time, they're s man. But let's not forget, even Si was nearly done in by kryptonite.

"Teens don't get the message. Clearly, the harmful side effect outweigh any benefits," says Frar Uryasz, president of the Natio Center for Drug Free Sport and man of the Joint Commission o: Medicine and Science.

However, the psychological ar cal effects are exceedingly destru developing teens, according to Goldberg. "These are powerful hormones that young



people haven't been naturally exposed to yet. So when you flood the teen body with massive doses of hormones, you change the neuro-chemical balance in the brain, resulting in much more than 'roid rage.'"

And while not everyone experiences "roid rage," Goldberg says, mood swings and depression shouldn't be overlooked. Hooton knows best: "We knew something was up emotionally. We wondered what happened to our happy kid. But even our doctor missed it. Don't assume that your family doctor is aware there's a problem or has been trained to recognize the signs. Parents have to be the educated ones."

Physically, users face a laundry list of harmful side effects ranging from baldness and impotence to cancer and death. Unlike adult users, adolescents are at high risk for premature bone plate fusion, resulting in stunted growth, and young girls can have irreversible voice deepening and facial hair.

And these are just the known side effects.

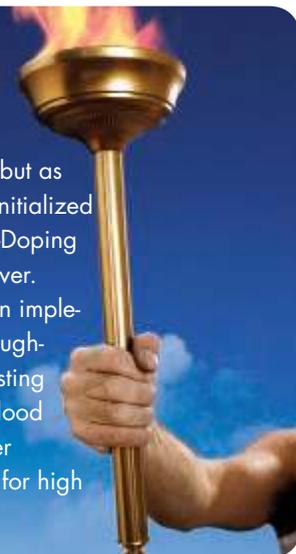
"We don't have a lot of information about what happens to adolescent steroid abusers after 10, 15, 20 years," Uryasz says. "Can steroids lead to permanent infertility? Do they impact cardiovascular and liver function? Probably. But we can't do a study where we inject teenagers with steroids and watch the damage over time. We know the consequences will be bad, and we aren't willing to sacrifice young lives."



Beijing Takes Olympic Lead in Anti-Doping

China has long been a major exporter of steroids, but as host of the 2008 Summer Olympics, its officials have initialized a worldwide crackdown. According to the World Anti-Doping Agency (WADA), the Beijing games are the cleanest ever.

The Chinese government has teamed with WADA in implementing a zero-tolerance policy toward drug use. Throughout the Beijing Olympic complex, there are 41 drug-testing stations where athletes must undergo both urine and blood testing to ensure no unfair advantage taints the Summer Games. The 2008 Olympics wants to set the example for high school, collegiate and professional sports.



The Solution

How do we curb this quietly growing epidemic? Some say steroid testing. Others believe worldwide education programs. Goldberg is the director of the SATURN, ATLAS and ATHENA prevention programs that address nutrition, strength training and healthy goal setting in sports. These have been scientifically proven to reduce the use of steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs.

But some are skeptical as to the effectiveness of education alone. "It's like education on speeding," Uryasz explains. "People understand that if you drive too fast, there are risks. Most people choose to drive the speed limit to remain safe. But there are some who decide to exceed the limit and

one of the deterrents is the threat of being caught—getting a speeding ticket. That's how I believe drug testing works. Educate, yes, but also impose penalties."

Whatever the public action, the seeds of change begin at home. "Parents need to talk to their sons and daughters about their athletic expectations—whether that's to gain or lose weight or recovery from injury. They need to steer them in the right direction and not impose unrealistic goals," Uryasz says.

Hooton's foundation is committed to taking legislative action. It's currently working on Taylor's Law, a bill calling for stringent steroid testing and education in high schools.

For information, visit taylorhooton.org or ohsu.edu. 

And So They Came to Roost

The beginning of steroids can be traced to the castration of a rooster. This was in 1849 when science knew little about the testicles. Arnold Adolph Berthold, the scientist performing the castration, was surprised to learn the rooster suddenly lost interest in young chickens after being separated from its testicles. Further testing, where the testes were surgically relocated in the abdomen, proved the existence of a substance—at the time referred to as "humors"—in the testicles that was active in the bloodstream.

It would be another 100 years before a refined form of testosterone would be created, but this time it was extracted from a bull and injected into dogs. The scientists found that the dogs produced more nitrogen in their bodies after the injection and gained weight, primarily muscle. Nazi scientists performed these experiments shortly before World War II and it is rumored that Adolf Hitler had the chemical injected into thousands of German soldiers, although no historical proof exists.