

Strike One, You're Out!: **A Response to the Steroid Scandal in Major League Baseball**

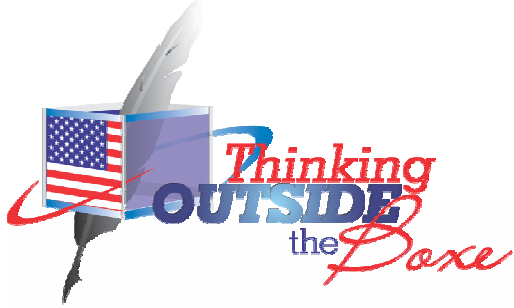
With the scandal over illegal steroid use resurfacing over allegations against Barry Bonds, it is time for America to examine the implications this may have upon Major League Baseball and its future. Baseball in America has a difficult choice to make with respect to the use of steroids or other performance enhancing substances in the sport. To condone the use of performance enhancing substances is to implicitly support cheating, which only serves to denigrate baseball, its history, the game's integrity, and the fans' good nature.

President Bush was right to claim in his 2004 State of the Union address that steroid use by professional athletes "sends the wrong message that there are shortcuts to success." Steroid or performance-enhancing substance use is nothing more than cheating. Webster's dictionary defines cheat as "to deprive of something valuable by the use of deceit or fraud; to violate rules dishonestly (as at cards or on an examination); to get something by dishonesty or deception." In America, we attempt to instill in our youth that cheating is wrong and morally reprehensible. Our education system, particularly at our universities, imposes stiff penalties (such as a failure or expulsion) on those caught cheating and plagiarizing.

Unfortunately, Major League Baseball has failed in punishing its athletes for illegal steroid use, which has been pervasive in the sport since the 1990s. (Ken Caminiti was the first major league player to admit using steroids back in 1996.) This has, in essence, condoned a corruption of youth in America, the young boys who idolize their heroes of baseball and strive to achieve the same greatness. Many parties share responsibility for this current deplorable situation.

First, the owners and players' union have done little to stop the use of steroids and performance-enhancing substances in the sport. Their opposition to testing regimes can only be evidence of their duplicity and quiet consent of illegal drug use. Certainly they know this has been an ongoing problem. However, in the wake of the players' strike of the early 1990s, they were all too willing to

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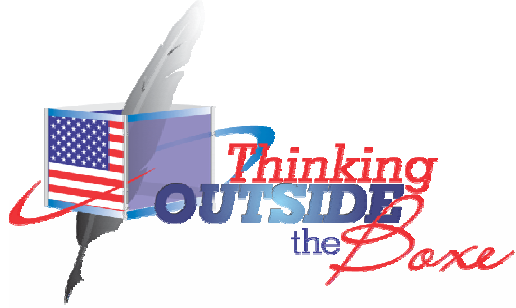
sacrifice the integrity of the game to win fans back. The race to see who could hit the most home runs (Mark McGwire or Sammy Sosa) did indeed provide a much-needed boost for the sport in the early 2000s seasons.

Second, Major League Baseball's Commissioner, Bud Selig, has been totally ineffective at leading a campaign against any performance-enhancing substances. Allowing the U. S. Anti-Doping Agency, which oversees drug testing for US Olympic athletes, to handle testing for Major League Baseball would be an important first step in setting a clear, anti-steroid regime. The current penalties, monetary fines and multi-game suspensions, are weak and do little to deter the use of performance-enhancing substances. If an Olympic athlete is caught using such substances, he or she is stripped of their medals and any record set in competition. Banning players who use performance-enhancing substances for life and stripping them of their records, a "Strike One, You're Out" policy, would send a very clear signal that this behavior will not be tolerated.

Third, the media elevates these players to near godlike status, which gives their steroid use an air of acceptability, rather than condemning them for their reprehensible behaviour. The media should make the effort to promote the many athletes who do not use performance-enhancing substances yet still manage to attain greatness. But to some extent, the players themselves also share some of the blame. Few, if any, have spoken out against the actions of their teammates. Those baseball players who do not use performance-enhancing substances should be vocal opponents of such substance use and should advocate anti-doping to young fans. Their behaviour and their actions carry great weight with these young people.

For example, in response to promiscuous use of chewing tobacco in Major League Baseball in the 1970s, Jim Bouton (of the New York Yankees and the Atlanta Braves) and Rob Nelson invented Big League Chew. This chewing gum, which was made to look like chewing tobacco, was a huge success, generating \$18 million in sales in the first twelve months following its release in 1980. This product has contributed greatly to a reduction in the use of chewing tobacco at many high schools and colleges.

To be sure, society has largely turned a blind eye to the use of performance-enhancing substances in Major League Baseball. A



difficult decision must be made by the Commissioner, the team owners, the players' union, and the players with regard to steroid policy. To take strong action to eliminate the use of performance enhancing substances is to restore faith in the organization and to show respect for those great players in history who worked hard to leave a lasting impression on this game. To allow this activity to go unchecked and unresolved is to implicitly condone corrupting behaviour and serves to destroy the integrity of America's favorite pastime. If this is to be the case, John McCain would be right in saying that "baseball can't be trusted."