Steroids, A Quick Way To The Top Essay, Research Paper

Steroids: Quick Way to the Top

Hey wimp, was first thing Dan Brown heard his freshman year in high school. Needless to say, Dan promised himself that was going to be the last time he was ever called a wimp. With no girlfriends, no starting position on the football team, and no confidence, Dan was convinced he had finally found the solution with anabolic steroids. Dan kept his promise. His sophomore year brought not only the desired starting position, but also a beautiful cheerleader. With the goal of being bigger, stronger and faster, many teenagers are playing a risky game of chemical roulette. Anabolic steroids have a common use in the sport and medical community; however, there are conflicting views on the use and effect of these drugs on the human body.

In the book, Macho Medicine: A History of the Anabolic Steroid William Taylor talks about anabolic steroids or more precisely, “anabolic (constructive metabolism, or simply ‘to build’) and androgenic ( characteristics that are man like)” (19). These steroids are concocted synthetically to maximize the anabolic (growth) effect and minimize the androgenic (male characteristics) effects. Performance drugs have an ancient history. The first documented use of performance enhancing drugs dates back to 1860, where swimmers in Amsterdam used anything from strychnine to heroin to gain that competitive edge. The first synthetic anabolic steroid was developed in 1953, having a strength building effect five times stronger than the natural hormone male testosterone. Although it was soon realized the drug had unwanted side effects, it was too late to halt its spread. “Once drugs of elite athletes competing at the world-class level, anabolic steroids are now available to and being used by younger athletes and some teens who are not involved in competitive sports” (Wright and Cowart 3). Early users were mainly competitors who rely heavily on bulk and strength – bodybuilders, weightlifters, or football players. During the 1970s, demand grew as athletes from all sports wanted that extra edge. Nearing fifty years since their conception, steroids are the unspoken standard in today s competition, making natural talent almost obsolete.

Steroids, as with most drugs, have their share of pros and cons. When first introduced, steroids were touted as miracle drugs. Anabolic steroids, although mainly thought of as a sport enhancing drug, have found their way into a wide variety of medical practices. Synthetic steroids were originally created to treat illnesses and deficiencies. Selected anabolic steroids are currently being used to treat AIDS, types of anemia, some breast cancers, osteoporosis and endometriosis (Taylor 22). Some doctors believe that certain steroids improve the appetite as well as improve healing after surgery

Anabolic steroids are usually taken in pill form. Some that cannot be absorbed orally are taken by injection through a syringe. For medical purposes, the prescribed daily dose averages between 1 and 5 milligrams. Some athletes may take up to 300 milligrams a day, obviously far exceeding the recommended dosage. Operating on the theory more is better, some athletes indulge in a practice known as stacking. This term with respect to the use of anabolic steroids, means taking two or more drugs at the same time in hopes of achieving a synergistic effect (Yesalis and Cowart 25).

It is often said that anabolic steroids cause mental problems including mood swings and violent impulses. Uncontrolled bursts of anger and erratic behavior have a name in the steroid culture; “Roid Rages” (Yesalis and Cowart 60). Other psychological effects include, “suicidal thoughts, drug dependence and depression” (Wright and Cowart 51).

Some of the most common side effects are muscle cramps and spasms associated with the rapid changes occurring within their muscles. According to Anabolic Steroids: Altered States the following are potential and common side effects: Acne, jaundice, bad breath, reduction of HDL cholesterol (the good cholesterol), and high blood pressure (34-40). Additionally, side effects differ with gender. Male users may experience shrinking of the testicles, reduced sperm count, baldness, and development of breast tissue; referred in the bodybuilding world as bitch tits. Female users may grow facial hair, have changes in their menstrual cycle, develop a deeper, manlike voice, as well as a permanently enlarged clitoris (58-70). Although many of the long term side effects have not been determined, the short term effects can be harmful, even fatal. People who choose to use steroids must consider the delicate balance of the body. When a foreign substance is introduced into the body, a series of events will occur until the body regains its natural balance.

History has taught us that, in sports, winning is everything. Athletes have conditioned themselves with food, exercise and drugs to transform their bodies into fine tuned machines. Many athletes with a promising future are willing to pay any price for perfection. Shock waves went through the sports world when Canadian track superstar Ben Johnson was denied his gold medal at the 1988 Olympics after tests showed he had taken anabolic steroids (Bower 30). Although many believe professional athletes are the biggest users and abusers of steroids, statistics reported in American Family Physician indicates that use among teen-agers is on the rise at an alarming rate. Increasing numbers of adolescents are turning to steroids for cosmetic reasons (1493). The use of anabolic steroids for cosmetic reasons is so rampid the term joy rider has been coined to describe such users. Furthermore, the use of steroids is not confined to males. Professional and amateur females athletes feel the pressure to triumph as well.

Competition in the workplace is just as fierce as it is in any sporting event. Police officers and firefighters are, like any athlete, looking for that extra edge to get the jobs. Physical agility tests are given to test strength and endurance of possible recruits, making steroid use a temptation. Once on the job, there are still physical requirements. Not only are yearly agility tests required, but also daily activities can be rigorous as well. Steroid use can fast become a psychological need to maintain these constant physical requirements.

Surveys and anecdotal evidence indicate that rate of non-medical steroids use may be increasing. In 1987, a survey of high school showed that nearly 7% of males reported using steroids at some time in their lives. The same survey showed that steroids were used within the last year by nearly as many students as crack cocaine and by more students than PCP (Yesalis and Cowart 8).

The media coverage of the health risks involved with steroid use have been well publicized. Articles about deaths of famous athletes associated with steroid use shock the public. This area has been covered again and again to deter athletes and youths from steroid use. Brain Cole, a Phoenix Firefighter and a former steroid user, feels the media completely blows the whole issue out of proportion. In an investigation called, Operation Roid Rage, Brian was the main suspect. Following a police search of his home he was cleared of any charges. According to Brian, the media did not feel this ending was good enough for their readers. The media continued to report stories always mentioning Brian s employer, Phoenix Fire Department. When the public scrutiny became overwhelmingly negative, the department suspended him for two years without pay. The Federal government has enacted laws and regulations to control anabolic steroid abuse. In addition to the federal effort, many states have taken action to control the illegal distribution and sale of anabolic steroids. Some states such as, Alabama, California, Florida and North Carolina have placed anabolics under their Controlled Substance Act. Colorado, New Mexico and Texas passed laws that make certain anabolic steroids transactions illegal and subject to felony charges. In 1990, Congress toughened the laws, passing legislation that classifies anabolic steroids as a Schedule II controlled substance, which puts steroids into the same class (legally) as heroin and cocaine. The new law also increases penalties for steroid use and distribution. Distribution to a minor currently holds a mandatory prison sentence.

The first name athlete to be sent to prison over steroids was former British track star David Jenkins. Mr. Jenkins was sentenced to seven years and fined $75,000 in 1987, for his part in a smuggling ring that prosecutors said dominated the US black market for steroids at one time. As with all controlled substances, if there is a demand for it, there is always a supply. The demand for anabolic steroids is so great, the black market currently handles up to 400 million dollars worth of the drugs a year. Black market steroids are either made overseas and smuggled into the United States or are produced in clandestine laboratories in this county. These counterfeit steroids may present greater health risks because they are manufactured without controls and thus may be impure, mislabeled, or simply poisonous. Sales are made in gyms, health clubs, on campuses and through the mail. Users report that suppliers may be drug dealers, trainers, physicians, pharmacists or friends. Chris Wood stated “The reason for the popularity of steroids is simple: they work are also easily accessible and relatively inexpensive ” (48).

It will take the cooperation of medical professionals and the sports industry to maintain the integrity of what athletics should be in our lives, the development and exercise of physical excellence. The conflicting views thus far only lead us to believe that more testing, studies, and education need to be done with the use and effect of anabolic steroids on the body. Currently there have been no conclusive studies done on the long term effects of anabolic steroids that is generally accepted by all concerned. Even without proper medical evidence, a county coroner in the state of Ohio, didn’t hesitate to blame a young football player’s death on anabolic steroids (Denham 260). Denham also sited a study that is sending shock waves through the medical community. The article titled The Effects of Supraphysiological Doses of Testosterone on Muscle Size and Strength in Normal Men. Illustrates that when healthy men between the ages of 19 and 40 were injected with a high dose of an androgen called testosterone enanthate and trained with weights, they gained a substantial amount of size (13.5 pounds of lean muscle) and strength while suffering virtually no side effects (260).

Currently, the sport and medical community are still lacking information regarding just how beneficial and how damaging steroids really are. It s been approximately 45 years since the development of synthetic anabolic steroids. Reality is that professional athletes as well as our high school football players, like Dan Brown, are still using steroids. Medically, steroids are prescribed to help many ailments. Only time will tell how much of a miracle steroids really are.

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