

Muscle 'fertilization': Pressure pushes athletes to use steroids

New evidence proves results and dangers

By Mike Egan
Of the Emerald

This is the age of big time sports. From college football to the Olympics, the pressure to win is tremendous, the money needed to win is astounding, and the choices athletes must make to win are critical.

One such choice facing athletes in strength sports — football, track and field, wrestling and weight lifting — is whether to take anabolic steroids. The decision made can have a tremendous effect on an athlete's performance and health.

Anabolic steroids are compounds derived from the male sex hormone testosterone. They increase the body's capacity to synthesize protein, which is the major source of building matter for muscles.

Since steroid use in athletics first began in the 1950s, its effect on the body has been disputed.

Many doctors say there is no conclusive evidence that anabolic steroids increase strength or muscle mass. New studies, however, are beginning to show a change in that point of view and confirm what athletes have thought all along — steroids do work, but there are dangers associated with their use.

"There is no doubt that people who use anabolic steroids have an increase in strength," said Dick Brown, the former director of Oregon Athletics West track club in Beaverton. Athletics West claims athletes such as Mary Decker Slaney and Alberto Salazar on its roster.

Brown, an exercise physiologist, said steroids do not work alone to gain strength and weight but work in combination with other factors.

"If a person is going to use steroids in order to increase size, strength and power, activity and protein in the diet are essential," he said.

Steroids can be taken orally or injected and are normally prescribed for three main reasons, said University Health Center Director Jim Jackson.

They are used for males without enough male hormones when going through puberty, for impotent males and for severely ill people who need the drugs to build muscle tissue, he said.

Probably the most talked-about aspect of steroid use is its side effects. The results of scientific studies are conflicting as pointed out by Dr.

James E. Wright in his book, "Anabolic Steroids and Sports": "Just as the anabolic potential of these drugs has not yet been realized, neither have the potential hazards."

Some studies have shown the effects might not be as harmful as doctors have claimed, Brown said. But the effects are "certainly an area still in dispute," he acknowledged.

Short-term effects include lowered sperm count, mood swings, balding, increased facial hair and acne. In male athletes, many of the short-term effects seem to disappear after discontinuing use, Brown said.

Women who use anabolic steroids experience many of the same short-term effects, but these usually are not reversible, Wright said.

Brown tells of a female athlete he knows whom, after not seeing her for a while, he went to talk to after a meet. He could not recognize her and had to ask another athlete where she was. When he finally saw her, he saw she had developed facial hair, her voice was deeper, and she was balding. His reaction was, "You were foolish; God, I'm sorry you did that."

Long-term effects include possible damage to the liver, the cardiovascular and reproductive systems and an increase in the chance of developing certain types of cancer.

Few long-term studies have been done because of the time needed to conduct them and because of other factors, so not enough is known to make definite conclusions, Wright said.

Use of steroids has been reported at almost every level of competition — right down to high school.

In many cases, the extent of steroid use depends upon its availability. In Mexico, steroids can be bought over the counter, and a black market for the drugs has emerged between doctors, players, coaches, and recently, bulk mail-order dealers.

In May 1986, the FBI indicted two pharmacists and a partner in Dallas, Texas, for illegally prescribing and distributing steroids. The dealers had set up a distribution plant in northern Texas, and authorities found mailing lists, invoices and stocks of prescriptions, which they said contributed to a two-year, \$2 million business.

At Clemson and Vanderbilt universities, a major scandal surfaced in January 1985 involving the distribution and use of steroids among their

athletes.

Authorities estimated that more than 40,000 doses of anabolic steroids were diverted from prescriptions for use by athletes at the two schools. At Vanderbilt, it was estimated that 50 of its football players had used steroids over a two-year period and that they received the drugs from coaches and doctors.

About steroid use in the Pacific 10 Conference, University strength and conditioning coordinator Mike Clark said, "It varies from school to school; it varies a lot. It has to do with location, how easy it is to get. In California, it's a lot easier to get than here."

Oregon football player Brad Smith estimated that at least nine out of the 11 players he competed against this year used steroids, "if not all 11."

Clark believes steroid use has reached its peak in college athletics because, as the NCAA begins widespread testing, athletes will not need the drugs to compete.

This year the NCAA began a new policy of testing for steroids from the end of a team's season until it participates in an NCAA championship or bowl. The testing did catch a few players, most notably Oklahoma's Brian Bosworth and USC's Jeff Bregel, but most coaches and players don't believe it will solve the problem.

Head football coach Rich Brooks and track coach Bill Dellinger believe the NCAA will have to test year-round if they want to eliminate steroid use.

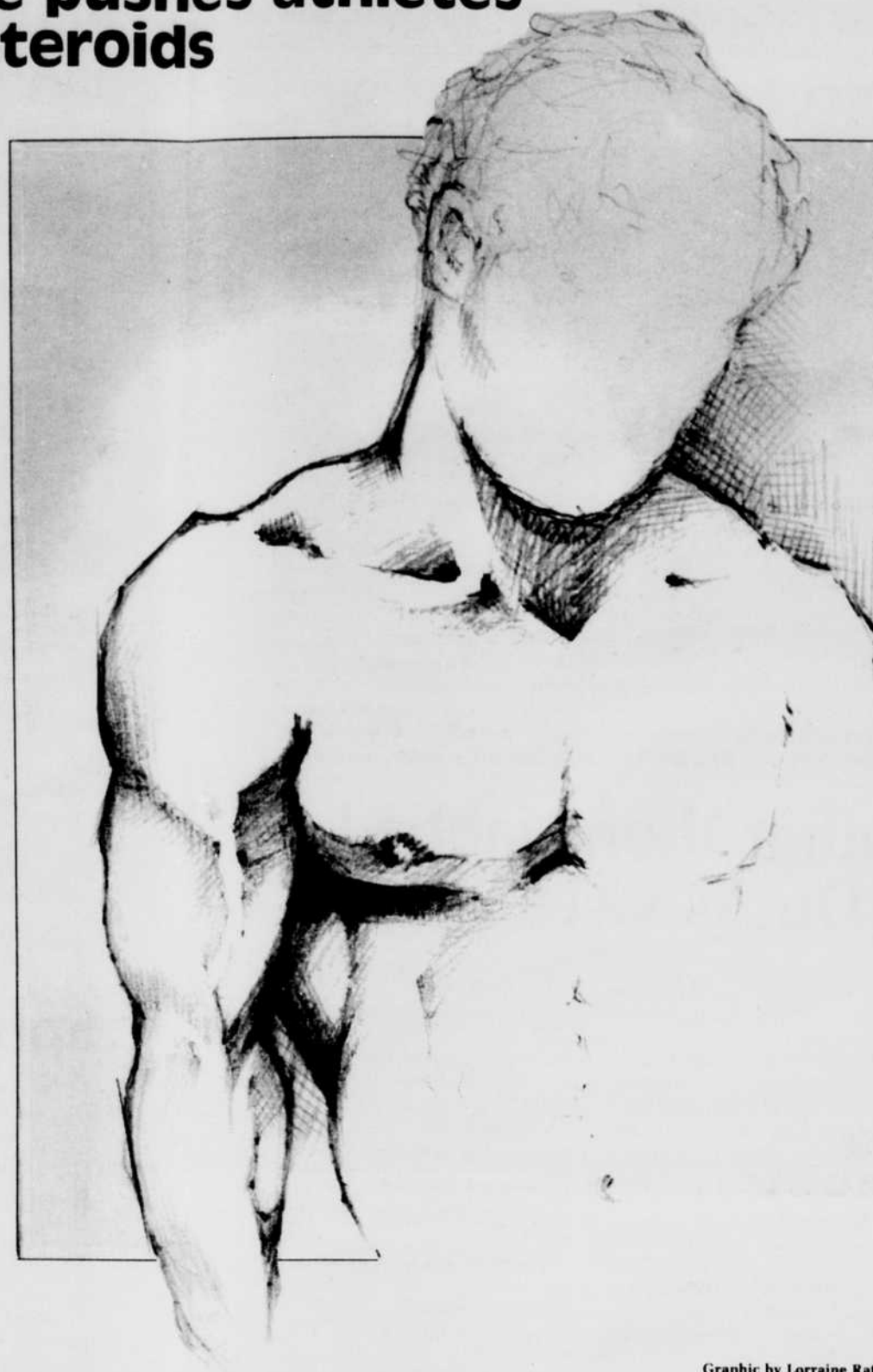
"If the NCAA is really interested in stopping it, I think they need to randomly test throughout the year and not just in football, but in other sports too," Brooks said.

University Athletic Director Bill Byrne said the University tests teams going to an NCAA championship as a screen to the NCAA testing.

"We test them on a random basis prior to national competition. We pick our best players, and then test the others at random," he said.

Byrne declined to say who had been tested or if any of the tests showed positive for steroids.

He wishes the University could test year-round for steroids, but because of the cost of testing, the lack of qualified labs and their availability, it's impossible, he said. There are



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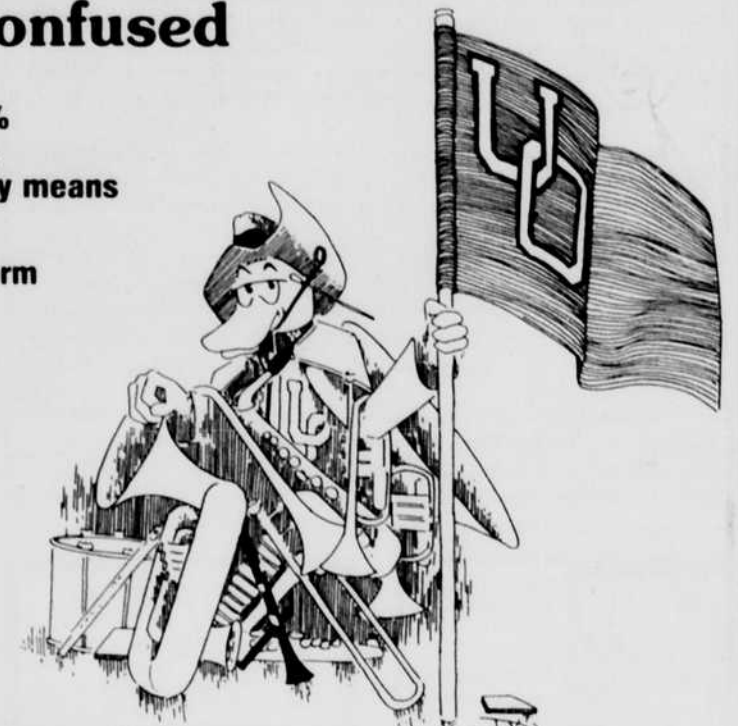
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