

Pill-popping athletes:

accepted or exception

Drug use and abuse is generally associated with the "bad" kid and the trouble maker. More recently, professional and amateur athletes have come under fire for pill-popping as part of their ritual preparation for competition.

"There is a great deal of drug use by athletes in college. A lot of guys take pills before games to get up and then party afterwards to relax," said former Clackamas Community College football player Tony McBride. McBride is now a student at Oregon College of Education in Monmouth.

McBride's comments were prompted by an article in the December issue of "SPORT" magazine which stated drug use by college athletes was on the decline.

"SPORT" quoted Dr. Robert Kerlan, a well-known sports physician-surgeon as saying, "It's my gut feeling that the problem isn't nearly as bad as it used to be."

Kerlan was obviously not aware of the situation at CCC as "pill popping" is at a

Football is not the only sport in which drugs are used. One basketball player stated that at least 30 per cent of the basketball players take amphetamines or "speed" before games and most of them are starters or regular players.

Baseball seems to be exempt from extensive drug use. Only a few players took drugs before games last year, said one athlete involved in the baseball program.

Baseball coach Gene Peterson said he felt the reason it was less prevalent in baseball than other sports was because there is less fear of being hit by some huge player on the other team.

"If a guy got up to bat with the ball coming in at 95 m.p.h. and he was high on drugs, he would have to be crazy. If a player can really wheel and deal, he doesn't need drugs," Peterson said.

Another sport in which little drug use is practiced at Clackamas is wrestling. "I don't know of anyone on the team that would take "speed" before a match or practice, and I know all the guys on the team pretty well," said Clackamas wrestler Tom Ziegle.

"We are doing really well this year and I guess no one on the team needs to take anything."

"I sure hope none take drugs; I try to discourage it," said wrestling coach Norm Berney. "I try to encourage them to run the weight off or go on a planned diet. I would never have a guy take pills, but I have known of a wrestler or two taking a diuretic. I would much rather they wouldn't and I try to discourage their uses," Berney said.

Although drugs seem to be accepted as an everyday occurrence by athletes, the controversy on whether it helps performance still is being debated.

A number of players from Clackamas said "speed" definitely helps. One football player said he didn't get as physically tired when he took the drug before the game. He knew one athlete on the team this year that popped speed before a game and turned in a fantastic performance.

"Oh yea, I took pills before practice and games," the football player said. "I even ate beans in high school. Guys in less aggressive positions take less (punishment) than defensive guys because they (the drugs) make you more aggressive and hyped up, but you probably lose some fundamentals along the way."

Hudson feels speed is a definite detriment to an athlete.

"One of the biggest problems with its use is lack of nutrition. A kid will forego food and he has a lack of vitamins and minerals," he said.

Another detriment is that drugs can keep an athlete from feeling pain and thus an injury suffered during the course of a game can go undetected and complications can easily set in, said Hudson.

"Because all drugs are depressants, danger is involved in taking them. Speed gives you a lift for a longer period of time but eventually you come down and when a guy drinks liquor to calm himself down, there is a definite danger," Hudson said.

Clackamas' school doctor, Dan Risser, agreed that amphetamines can cause serious problems when athletes use them for stimulation before games.

"The most serious problem is that they make the people feel mentally like they are able to do and be more than they really are," Risser said.

Risser also said that possibly extended use over a period of years can cause serious problems.

Eileen Parent, women's trainer, said the women have not used "speed" as far as she knows but she feels that somewhere some women probably use it.

"I think a lot of the drug use has to do with the coaches and their attitudes to the players," Parent said.

"I definitely think taking pills can cause problems," Parent said. "It causes athletes to be more susceptible to injuries because they don't know when they are tired and this is when injuries happen."

The frightening thing about pill-popping is that it is being practiced at younger ages.

The important question to ask is simple. Why?

No one could come up with a definite reason. Coaches said it was a crutch and an ego trip while athletes declared curiosity and pressure as reasons for popping pills.

"I don't really know why I took pills," said one CCC football player. "I guess I took them to be emotionally up. It was more psychological than physical."

"I also think pressure does have a definite affect on drug use," he said. "Guys that are so pressured to win they take pills so they can have an advantage. The more winning a program, the less drug use there is. There is pressure on coaches which gets pushed on to players in a losing program. And we have a losing program."

"The pills are easy to get. You always know someone who is selling, so why not take speed and have an advantage," said a Clackamas basketball player.

Another basketball player stated that he had never taken drugs. "If you can't use your own ability that God gave you to play basketball, you shouldn't be out there," he said.

He said guys on the team take speed because they want to perform better and be on top because if they don't they sit on the bench and are failures.

Pressure to win seemed to sift through everyone's responses as the underlying reason for drug as an expected advantage for athletes.

Football coach Dale McGriff feels there is too much pressure on achieving success.

"The question I often ask is what is a winner? What is success? I feel it is someone doing the best he can and if he does that, he is a winner," McGriff said.

It is unfortunate that pressure to win is put on kids at such an early age that they feel like a failure if they are not all stars," said McGriff. He feels pressure to have a winning program, and it does get expressed to players, he said.

In the article in "SPORT", an unidentified pro football player said that athletes do irrational things, but they do it for a reason - to maintain their position, to maintain money, glory and fame.



Staff Writer Brad Boyer talked with many athletes this week in an investigation into the use of drugs in competitive athletics at CCC.

