

## Alternatives to Drug Testing By John Underwood AAI

In the wake of last year's steroid scandals, several states allocated funding for drug testing for high school athletes. Already, however, one of those states has decided to discontinue testing, and another state is considering putting a halt to its program as well.

Some people believe that random drug and alcohol testing does not reliably keep student-athletes from using. In fact, the mere presence of drug testing increases some risk factors for future substance use, Oregon Health & Science University (OHSU) researchers report. Their findings are published in the November issue of the Journal of Adolescent Health, the journal of the Society for Adolescent Medicine. The study, named SATURN (Student Athlete Testing Using Random Notification), is the first-ever prospective, randomized clinical trial to assess the deterrent effects of drug testing among high school athletes.

"Prior to this study, there was little research and no randomized trials to establish whether student-athlete drug testing is an effective deterrent," said Linn Goldberg, M.D., F.A.C.S.M., principal investigator, professor of medicine and head of the Division of Health Promotion and Sports Medicine, OHSU School of Medicine. "As a result of this study, drug testing is better understood. Although drug testing did not appear to reduce school sport participation as some had suggested it would, it did not reduce past 30-day drug or a combination of drug and alcohol use, and only intermittently lowered past-year use. Armed with this information, parents, schools and policy-makers now can make evidence-based, cost-effective decisions about how best to protect the health and well-being of young athletes."

"This was a state-of-the-art collection and testing program that exceeded those of typical school testing programs. If this did not show significant deterrent effects, less-sophisticated programs are not likely to be more successful," said Diane Elliot, M.D., co-investigator and certified doping control officer for the United States Anti-Doping Agency.

Alternatives to drug testing must take into consideration the following:

### **Steroids and Supplements:**

- A strongly written policy banning steroid use and making evident the legal ramifications of possession and/or use, which must be signed by all student-athletes and their parents. Violators would be subject to school or district legal and civil penalties.

- School resource officers used to deliver the legal ramifications educational piece in school-mandated meetings with all parents, athletes and coaches. As an example, New York's Public Health Law classifies anabolic steroids as controlled substances. Selling or giving away anabolic steroids is a Class D felony regardless of the quantity involved and is punishable by up to seven years in prison. Selling or possessing steroids with the intent to sell is also a federal felony.

- All high school athletes are required to have a physical examination by a competent medical professional prior to practice or competition. This is a perfect opportunity to assess any possible reasonable suspicion for steroid use.
- Mandated education and training in steroids and muscle-building dietary supplements should be required for the state's coaches and medical professionals involved in student-athlete physical examinations that would help them spot steroid use as well as to warn players and parents about the health dangers of use. A strong warning should be given that the supplement industry is unregulated and use of any of these substances is dangerous.
- A prohibition on school sponsorships from any muscle-building supplements should be in place, as well as a ban on any school staff members encouraging or distributing muscle-building supplements. Violators would be subject to personnel actions by their schools or districts as well as civil and criminal penalties.
- Establish a reasonable suspicion process to employ drug testing for social drugs, street drugs and steroids. The myriad of signs and indicators associated with steroid/drug use can be enough to warrant this process in lieu of allocating millions of dollars to test high school athletes. (Example: Texas spent \$3 million to confirm two athletes who tested positive this past year. When you consider that there are fewer than 20 NCAA positive tests per year nationwide, this minimal number of positive tests in the high school population indicates few who are using steroids. The reasonable suspicion testing is enough of a deterrent.

### **Reasonable Suspicion Screening**

(for steroids or any drugs and/or alcohol)

A student-athlete may be subject to drug testing at any time when the director of athletics or his/her administrative designee determines there is individualized reasonable suspicion to believe the student-athlete may be using a prohibited substance, or there is suspicion or confirmation within a team that use of prohibited substances has occurred. Such reasonable suspicion may be based on objective information as determined by the director of athletics or by a qualified medical or health-care professional, head coach, assistant coach, head athletic trainer, assistant athletic trainer, or school district physician, academic counselor/social worker or school nurse and deemed reliable by the director of athletics or his/her administrative designee.

Reasonable suspicion may be found, but not limited to 1) observed possession or use of substances appearing to be prohibited drugs, 2) arrest or conviction for a criminal offense related to the possession or transfer of prohibited drugs or substances, or 3) observed abnormal appearance, conduct or behavior reasonably interpretable as being caused by the use of prohibited drugs or substances. Among the indicators that may be used in evaluating a student-athlete's abnormal appearance, conduct or performance are: class attendance, significant GPA changes, athletic practice attendance, increased injury rate or illness, extreme physical appearance changes, academic/athletic motivational level, emotional condition, mood

changes and legal involvement.

### **Upon Verification**

If reasonable suspicion is verified, the director of athletics or his/her designee will notify the student-athlete and the parent/guardian. The student-athlete and parent/guardian must comply with the request to take a drug test upon notification and an adequate specimen must be produced. The student-athlete and a parent /guardian must immediately schedule a drug test with a designated and competent agency that will conduct the test by set procedural process. Failure to comply with a request within the established process or timeframe shall be confirmation of a positive test. Sanctions shall be administered for a positive test.

**Note:** The possession and/or use of illegal substances may be determined by means other than urinalysis (e.g., using on-site saliva testing products/breathalyzer testing to determine alcohol consumption). When an individual is found to be in possession and/or using such substances, he/she may be subject to the same procedures that would be followed in the case of a positive urinalysis.

Last, but not by any means least, pay attention to alcohol and marijuana use. Student-athletes are not just cheating to win a championship. They are being cheated out of their potential, their dreams and most tragically their health and lives with marijuana and alcohol. Athletes clearly use more of these social drugs than non-athletes.

- The lack of concern for social drug use in the student-athlete population is hard to imagine. Alcohol-use rates by 12th -grade student-athletes is at 58.5 percent and marijuana at 20.1 percent, yet this is not a priority.

*John Underwood, who is the founder and president of the American Athletic Institute and the master trainer for the New York State Public High School Athletic Association drug prevention program, has worked with numerous sports governing bodies including the National Collegiate Athletic Association, the National Hockey League, the United States Olympic Committee, the International Olympic Committee and Sport Canada. A former NCAA All-American and international-level distance runner, Underwood has coached or advised more than two dozen Olympians.*