

A-Rod misled young fans

When Alex Rodriguez announced his retirement from Major League Baseball on Sunday, I could not escape the irony that he did so on the same day the New York Yankees were hosting an annual benefit for the Taylor Hooton Foundation, a nonprofit organization that educates youngsters, families, teachers and coaches about the dangers of appearance and performance-enhancing drugs, or APEDs.

Rodriguez's attempt to exploit the Hooton Foundation by serving as a spokesman while he continued to use steroids was unconscionable because it misled the people who idolized him the most – kids.

Taylor Hooton was one of those impressionable youngsters. Growing up in the Dallas-Fort Worth area, Taylor fell in love with the Texas Rangers and their power-hitting shortstop. Rodriguez's offensive prowess and chiseled physique inspired the youngster to emulate him.

In January 2003, when his coaches at Plano West High School told Taylor, a 6-foot-3-inch, 175-pound sophomore, that he needed "to get bigger" if he hoped to make the varsity baseball

team's starting lineup, he began using APEDs.

By that time, juicing had become an open secret among professional and amateur baseball players. Rumors of doping on the Texas Rangers seemed to validate the youngster's own steroid use. Taylor spent hours in the weight room, lifting at a feverish pace. In less than three months he increased his weight by 30 pounds. He also exhibited severe mood swings, often flying into a sudden rage only to express remorse for the outburst.

Unable to wean off the drugs, the teen fell into a chronic state of depression. On July 15, 2003, he fashioned a noose out of leather belts and hanged himself from his bedroom door. An autopsy revealed the presence of metabolized steroids in Taylor's system.

Don Hooton attributed his son's death to the psychological effects of steroid use. Since then, he founded the Taylor Hooton Foundation and has dedicated his life to helping other families avoid the same nightmare. Hooton also reached out to Rodriguez in Febru-



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ary 2009 – after the Yankees third baseman publicly admitted to using steroids while playing for Texas – and expressed the hope that he could "use the incident in a constructive way by discouraging kids from using anabolic steroids."

What better way to spread the word about APEDs than having Taylor's boyhood idol serve as a spokesman for the foundation that bore his name?

During the next four years, A-Rod spoke to school groups, encouraging youngsters to "use their God-given abilities to achieve their dreams" instead of "resorting to shortcuts like doing drugs." He appeared to be genuinely concerned about kids.

Don was ecstatic. He was steadfast in his loyalty to Rodriguez, despite the fact that the New York Times, on Feb. 28, 2010, reported that the Yankee third baseman was using steroids again. Nor did he abandon A-Rod when the Miami Times, on Jan. 22, 2013, obtained documents linking the player to Biogenesis, an anti-aging clinic in Coral Gables, Fla., that distributed HGH

and other PEDs to major league ballplayers.

Not until Aug. 5, 2013, when Major League Baseball suspended Rodriguez for the remainder of that season and all of the next season, did Don cut ties, fearing that the foundation would lose credibility among the very people it was trying to serve – the kids.

To be sure, Alex Rodriguez was not responsible for Taylor Hooton's decision to use APEDs. That was Taylor's choice, though A-Rod certainly didn't set a good example.

What is truly reprehensible, however, was Rodriguez's enlistment of the the Taylor Hooton Foundation as an unwitting accomplice in covering up his violations of Major League Baseball's drug policy. In the process, A-Rod betrayed the youngsters who admired him, exploited the Hooton family and Taylor's memory, and called into question his commitment to anybody and anything but himself. Shame on him.

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