

By WILLIAM C. KASHATUS

Barry Bonds' very bad example

HERE IS something tragic about Barry Bonds' recent ascension into the ranks of baseball's top three home run hitters, and it's not just the suspicion that he achieved the distinction by using steroids.

What is so tragic is that the controversy will also motivate younger athletes, eager for quick success, to abuse performance-enhancing drugs.

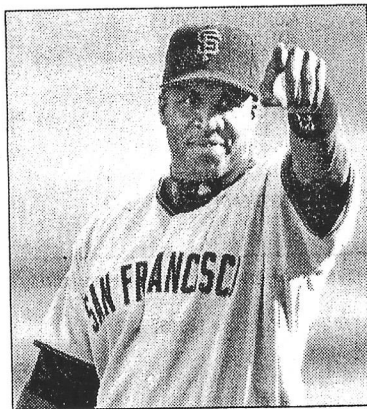
Anyone who's followed Bonds' career knows he's experienced a dramatic weight gain since 2000, the year before he broke Mark McGwire's season home run record with 73 homers. Bonds continues to be a slugging machine, averaging 53 home runs a season over the last three years.

While it may just be a coincidence that his personal trainer, Greg Anderson, is one of four men charged in the case involving San Francisco's Bay Area Laboratory

Co-operative, or Balco, for distributing illegal steroids, the circumstantial evidence is damning.

If federal authorities prove that Bonds did abuse muscle-building anabolic steroids, his newly minted record of 660-plus home runs should be considered "soft" and "unworthy" compared to those of Aaron, Ruth and the man he recently displaced, Willie Mays. Then, commissioner Bud Selig not only has a responsibility to attach an asterisk to any record belonging to a proven steroid user but also to implement a "zero tolerance" drug policy instead of just talking about it. But there's more than the integrity of the game at stake here.

High schools across the U.S. are struggling with rising ste-



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roid use among student-athletes eager to realize success on the field, hoping to attract greater popularity among peers, or to secure Division I scholarships. Not surprisingly, steroid use soared

among high school athletes after McGwire hit his record-breaking 70 home runs in 1998 while using androstenedione, an over-the-counter supplement with many of the same effects as performance-enhancing drugs.

In a recent national survey, 3.5 percent of high school seniors admitted to using steroids at least once. Some states, like Louisiana, reported that steroid use was as high as 11.2 percent among high school males.

It's a trend that must be taken more seriously. Youngsters don't think about the long-term consequences of substance abuse. They live for the present and the immediate gratification that steroid use offers. Sometimes it's too late when they realize that the side-effects

include heart disease, liver damage, stunted growth and rag-

Despite the risky trend, most school districts do not test student-athletes for steroid use because the tests cost \$50 to \$100 each, much more than the \$22 NCAA-approved test for marijuana, cocaine and amphetamines.

Schools must take a more active role in monitoring their student-athletes. They can start by administering tests for steroid use. Positive tests should mean a year-long suspension from all interscholastic sports for a first-time offender, and permanent eligibility for a second offense.

It would also help if Barry Bonds set a better example by coming clean for all the impressionable youth who idolize him.

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