

# Steroids taking sheen from the diamond

BARRY BONDS, MARK McGwire, Sammy Sosa, Jason Giambi, Gary Sheffield, Jose Canseco, and the late Ken Caminiti. The names are among the greatest stars in baseball's recent history. They're Most Valuable Players, all-stars, home run and RBI champions. They've also been linked to anabolic steroid use.

Their decision reflects the fact that they don't respect their bodies. That's sad, but it's their problem. The fact that they don't respect the game is baseball's problem. Just how big that problem is may be revealed on March 17th when seven players will testify before the House Government Reform Committee

During the last fifteen years, major leaguers in search of size, strength, and a competitive edge have used steroids risking chronic debilitating diseases and death. But they are willing, even anxious, to take those risks for the historic records, fame and millions of dollars they can earn.

Baseball knew about excessive steroid use among players for the last decade. But the revenue generated by the abusers was too tempting to address the issue. McGwire and Sosa, for example, brought baseball back from a public relations nightmare in 1998 when they waged their mutual quest to break Roger Maris' single-season home record of 61. The owners weren't about to blow the whistle on America's two biggest heroes then. Not when they were generating record attendance rates in Chicago and St. Louis, or at any ball park the two power hitters visited that summer.

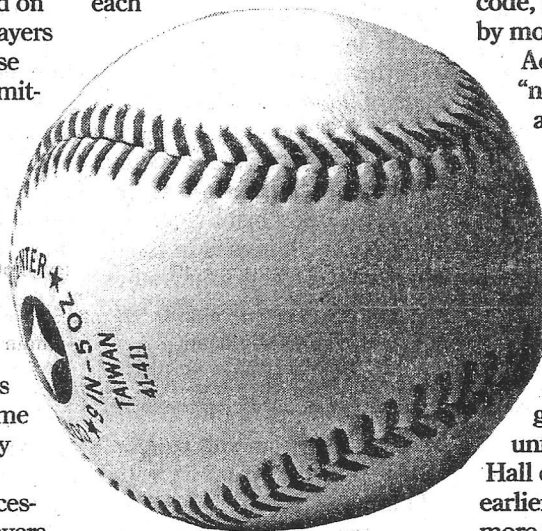
Other offenders played or still play for perennial contenders like the San Francisco Giants, Oakland A's and New York Yankees. No way were the owners

## COMMENTARY

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of those clubs going to cut into their profits by making their players accountable to a stringent drug-testing policy.

Not until 2003 did baseball institute a testing program. Even then, the testing was easily circumvented. When more than 5 percent of the tests came back positive, "random" testing with penalties began. In 2004, each



player was tested for steroids twice over a single five- to seven-day period during the season with a first positive test resulting in treatment. If a player tested positive a second time, he would be subject to a 15-day suspension. Only with a fifth positive test was a player subject to a one-year ban. It simply wasn't good enough.

Off-season allegations of rampant steroid abuse among major leaguers, Canseco's controversial book "Juiced," and the specter of Congressional hearings forced baseball to raise the bar.

Baseball enters the 2005 season with a new, supposedly "more severe" drug-testing policy. Suspensions on the first offense will carry a maximum

length of 10 games. The penalty will increase to a one-year suspension for a fourth positive test.

Unlike the previous system, testing will be done year-round with every player being tested at least once. Players will not be informed beforehand if a second test is to be conducted.

Although baseball will likely regard the suspensions for first-time offenses as "severe" because steroid users will be publicly identified, the new policy falls far short of the World Anti-Doping Agency's code, which has been adopted by most Olympic sports.

According to the code, the "norm" is two-year bans for a first positive test and a lifetime ban for a second, unless there are mitigating circumstances.

What's at stake here is a matter of baseball's integrity. The home run records that have been set by the offenders are "soft." Steroids have given these players an unfair advantage over those Hall of Famers who set the earlier records with nothing more than their natural, God-given strength.

In so doing, they not only set an honest statistical standard, but also a behavioral one grounded in the principal of fair play. Steroid users, on the other hand, are "cheaters" and deserve to be treated as such.

If commissioner Bud Selig, the owners, and the Players' Union truly care about the game, they will not only adopt the two-year ban for first offenders and the lifetime ban for a second offense, they will strike from the books all previous records set by an admitted steroid user.

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