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21

Growth Drugs

As of the moment – the fall of 1970 – the use of drugs is an unexploded bomb lurking just beneath the surface of all forms of physical training; according to currently wide-spread attitudes, it is a crime to drug a race horse in order to increase its ability – but it seems to be perfectly all right to drug athletes in order to improve their performances.

At a recent physique contest in London, one of the leading entrants was asked which of several brands of high-protein diet supplements he used, whereupon he replied, "... protein? With Dianabol, who needs protein?" Dianabol is the trade name of one of the anabolic steroids, the so-called "growth drugs."

While there seems to be no doubt that the use of such drugs is justified in certain types of cases, there is no possible excuse for their use by a healthy person – and great weight of evidence that strongly counter-indicates such use.

Basically, most of the so-called growth drugs are synthetic forms of male hormones – and massive doses of such drugs may temporarily increase the recovery ability of the body in certain areas; but the body responds to such treatment by immediately reducing its own natural production of such hormones – in an attempt to reestablish the formerly existing chemical balance. Thus any resulting increase in recovery ability is extremely short in duration – and additional doses of the drug must be given at ever increasing levels at very frequent intervals.

Eventually, if such treatment is continued for a long enough period – and in many cases this period is quite short – the body may actually lose its ability to produce such hormones naturally, and a man could literally be turned into a eunuch.

But totally apart from the obvious dangers involved, a great diversity of opinion exists within the medical profession as to the actual growth effects – if any – that are caused by such drugs; many doctors are of the firm opinion that any observed effects are directly due to placebo effect.

Yet such drugs are being used by literally thousands of athletes in this country – and probably by hundreds of thousands; within the last year, a high school football coach strongly recommended the use of such drugs to the author – and bitterly defended their utilization when questioned regarding the justification or propriety of such use. Nor does there seem to be any shortage of doctors that are willing to issue prescriptions for such drugs to healthy high school athletes on the recommendations of coaches.

Eventually, such drug usage will emerge in a major scandal – and the sooner, the better; but in the meantime, an unknown amount of potentially very serious damage is being done to large numbers of young athletes.

Viewed as simply another attempt to "win at any cost", such drug utilization moves directly in the face of good sportsmanship; but in the light of the very real dangers involved, it borders on outright madness.

Worse than that, there is no slightest evidence to indicate that the results – if any – produced by the use of such drugs cannot be duplicated without such use; although they have been widely considered as such, the ever mounting records in weightlifting are certainly no proof of the effectiveness of such drugs. In the Olympic lifts, the greatest degree of recent improvement has been in the performance of the standing press – but most of this has been directly due to great relaxation in the rules governing the performance of this lift; as of the moment, most of the leading heavyweight lifters are capable of "jerking" very little if any more than they can "press".

The Arthur Jones Collection

In fact, the performance of the press has degenerated to such a degree that serious consideration was given to the idea of dropping it as one of the three Olympic lifts.

In power lifting, great strides have been apparent primarily because of the fact that this is a very recently introduced sport; but some individuals were fully capable of executing such lifts in good form with very near present world-record poundage's as long as fifteen years ago – long before the use of growth drugs.

The present record in the bench press is 617 1/2 pounds – but Douglas Hepburn lifted almost 600 pounds in good form well over fifteen years ago; and he did so at a bodyweight far below that of most of the presently-active heavyweight power-lifters.

Insofar as muscular size is concerned, very few men have ever even approached the muscular size attained by John Grimek nearly thirty years ago.

When I mentioned the possibility of serious damages resulting from the use of growth drugs, the coach that was defending their use stated that such cases of damage were extremely rare and that, in any case, all such cases were due to "overdoses." But in fact, such cases of serious damage are far from rare – although they have not been greatly publicized, for obvious reasons – and the entire effect, if any, from such drugs is entirely dependent upon "overdoses". In a healthy individual, the system is fully capable of maintaining a very delicate chemical balance – and the use of growth drugs is intended to momentarily disturb this balance, as it must, if results are to be produced.