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## CIF Tosses Penalty Flag at Steroids

**California is the first state in which student athletes must sign a pledge not to use the compounds. Violators risk expulsion.**

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As high school athletes in California suit up this fall, they are facing an unprecedented crackdown on the growing use of steroids.

This school year, a California Interscholastic Federation policy requiring student athletes to pledge not to use steroids makes the state the first in the nation with such a requirement. Penalties for violating the contract include suspension or expulsion.

Some school districts are going further. In Anaheim, for instance, school officials recently enacted a policy banning not only steroids, but also over-the-counter performance-enhancing supplements. A Contra Costa County district is hanging posters in locker rooms depicting girls with hairy faces and boys with acne-ravaged backs — some possible side effects of steroid use. And San Clemente High School plans to expand its voluntary drug-testing program to include costly tests that randomly screen athletes for steroids.

Officials believe 20,000 to 30,000 student athletes in California use steroids, and believe even more may use supplements, such as protein shakes or herbal stimulants, in attempts to gain an edge on opponents.

The consequences can be steep. Abuse of steroids and even some nonprescription supplements can lead to liver, kidney and heart damage — and even death.

Experts say the use of steroids by high school athletes has risen as impressionable teens are bombarded by reports of star athletes building lucrative careers on them. In 2003, an estimated 20,315 CIF athletes used steroids, according to the federation.

"If professional athletes get away with it and get a slap on the wrist and still earn millions of dollars, what kind of message is that sending to the children — do it and don't get caught?" said Dr. Todd Schlifstein, a steroid expert and clinical instructor at New York University's School of Medicine.

"It definitely has a trickle-down effect."

To combat this lure, the CIF in May ordered school districts in the association, which includes private schools, to adopt policies forbidding steroid use. At the same time, the governing body of high school athletics ordered the state's 700,000 student athletes to sign pledges not to take steroids and ordered coaches to be trained on abuse of steroids.



The CIF also banned supplement companies from sponsoring competitions, as one did this year at a regional wrestling meet near Sacramento.

"With everything going on at the professional level, steroids have really just shot to the forefront" of high school athletics, said Emmy Zack, a CIF spokeswoman. "We cannot not address it anymore."

Meanwhile, the Legislature this month approved a bill that would forbid students from taking any substance banned by the United States Anti-Doping Agency, which tests Olympic athletes, and from taking a popular herbal stimulant known as "bitter orange." The bill also writes the new CIF regulations into state law. Gov. Arnold Schwarzenegger has not decided whether to sign it, a spokeswoman said.

"The problem with dietary supplements is they have gotten a free ride," said state Sen. Jackie Speier (D-Hillsborough), the bill's sponsor. Companies "have been able to promote and market products without testing to see if [they are] safe and effective first.... Some of them are dangerous and have a molecular structure that's very similar to speed."

Several school districts have taken matters into their own hands. The Anaheim Union School District adopted a policy Sept. 8 banning not only steroids but performance-enhancing supplements available at health food stores.

"We want to provide more for our student athletes than just the bare minimum," said Assistant Supt. Dave Cowan. "They can get stuff over the counter and at nutritional stores — all kinds of stuff. We don't want to be promoting that stuff. We're just trying to be proactive."

Football players at Savanna High School in Anaheim said they supported the new policy.

"It's an unfair advantage," said senior Marc Grismer, 17, who plays quarterback and safety, referring to steroid and supplement use.

Junior Aaron Strazicich, 17, said school officials should consider expanding their policy to include testing. "It's basically cheating," he said.

But testing is controversial. Though the U.S. Supreme Court has twice ruled that schools may give drug tests to students who participate in extracurricular activities, civil libertarians argue the tests violate students' privacy.

"Policies like random drug testing for students to prove their innocence strip youth of their 4th Amendment rights to be free from unreasonable search and seizure, deter participation in extracurricular activities, create incentives for kids to switch to more dangerous drugs that don't show up in their urine, and foster greater mistrust between school administrators and students," said Elizabeth Schroeder, associate director of the American Civil Liberties Union of Southern California.

It is also expensive. A full panel of steroid tests can cost hundreds of dollars per athlete. The CIF, for instance, considered adding testing to its new anti-steroid policy, but backed off when officials said it would cost schools a total of at least \$70 million.

Those who fear for the health of students say that without testing, regulations banning steroids and other voluntary measures are meaningless.



"Education alone is not enough," said Charles Yesalis, a steroid expert and epidemiologist who teaches health and human development at Penn State University. "If you tell me you don't have money [to test], then get used to your kids using these drugs."

San Clemente High School football coach Eric Patton said that although he didn't think steroid use was a problem among his players, "in all honesty, if someone is going to use it, I don't think a pledge is going to stop them."

Less than 4% of high schools nationwide randomly test for steroids, according to the National Federation of State High School Assns. But the number is growing. New Mexico, for example, is conducting a \$50,000 pilot testing program at four school districts.

At San Clemente High, more than half the students have signed up for a voluntary program that randomly tests them for recreational drugs. The school plans to expand the program next year to include random screenings of athletes for anabolic steroids.

It is a policy that members of the school's football team say they endorse.

"When people use [steroids], they're not doing training the right way," said James Teran, 17, a senior defensive lineman. "The best way is natural."