

Drug Use in Sports in Texas and the Impact on Kids

By: Louis Cunningham, All American Research & Drug Testing

Texas is known throughout the nation as a fertile breeding ground for college football talent. Every Friday night during the fall, high school football stadiums across the state are packed to capacity with upwards of 10-15,000 people, more than some NCAA Division 1-AA programs, cheering their hometown teams to victory.

Now that the University of Texas at Austin, which had 20 out of 22 players in the starting lineup and 108 of its 120 players from the Lone Star State, has won its first national college football championship in more than 30 years, the entire country now knows what Texans have known all along, "football reigns supreme."

According to www.rivals.com, one of the leading high school recruiting services in the country, the University of Texas has had a top ten recruiting class for five consecutive years. Virtually every high school football player in Texas would like to be a Longhorn. However, the University is limited by the National Collegiate Athletic Association (NCAA) to only 85 scholarship athletes per year.

With so few scholarships available and more athletes wanting to participate at the collegiate level, it should be no surprise that young people are willing to do whatever it takes to get bigger, stronger and faster in hopes of catching the eye of a college football scout. Unfortunately, this also means these students may be willing to cheat, or bend the rules, to get to the top by using performance enhancing drugs.

What can school districts, communities and parents do to ensure that students aren't seeking shortcuts to the top? Texas State Representative Phil King has a suggestion.

Last year, Rep. King introduced legislation in the state house that calls for the University Interscholastic League (UIL), the governing body of Texas high school sports, to direct its member schools to develop drug-testing programs.

Texas is one of 41 states that does not have a steroid policy for high school athletes. Clearly, the state that is home to the national football championship trophy should also be a leader among communities concerned about the health and welfare of its high school student athletes.

The NCAA list of banned substances includes 34 stimulants, 27 anabolic agents, 18 diuretics, three street drugs and five growth hormones, with some of these agents found in over-the-counter supplements.

This list represents what should be, at the very least, the cornerstone of a statewide athletic drug policy in Texas. It's well within the realm of possibility that a high school student athlete taking an over-the-counter substance in June could report to college in August and test positive for banned substances.

Substance and illegal drug abuse could be described as at epidemic proportions with youth. A startling fact is that high school athletics is becoming a breeding ground for youth to experiment with performance enhancing drugs. These substances can lead to long-term addictions and health

problems.

Companies are emerging to help schools and youth sports organizations screen and implement programs to reduce the chances of kids becoming addicted to performance enhancement or illegal drugs. This is one way we can help eradicate a growing problem with our state's youth.

Louis Cunningham is president and CEO of All American Research & Drug Testing, a company with a mission to use federal grants to implement drug screening and drug use policies in schools and with youth organizations. Visit www.allamericanresearch.com for more information or call 972.333.4343.