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Donald Hooton

Statement before Congress on Illicit Steroid Use in Baseball



Delivered 17 March 2005, Washington, D.C.

AUTHENTICITY CERTIFIED: Text version below transcribed directly from audio and edited for continuity

Mr. Davis, Mr. Waxman, Congressmen:

Twenty short months ago our youngest son, Taylor, took his own life. He was two weeks away from beginning his senior year in high school. He was carrying a 3.8 average, made excellent scores on his SAT tests, and he and I were preparing to make college visits.

Taylor was well liked by all who knew him. Adults tell us he was one of the nicest young men they ever knew -- extremely well-mannered. His [teachers] thought he was one of the nicest kids on campus, a real ladies' man, quite a charmer.

This past spring, Taylor would have been a starting pitcher on his varsity baseball team. But during the fall of his junior year, his JV coach told this 6'3, 175 pound young man that he needed to get bigger in order to improve his chances of making the varsity team.

Taylor resorted to using anabolic steroids to help him achieve his objective. And like the Garibaldis, I am absolutely convinced that Taylor's secret use of anabolic steroids played a significant role in causing the depression -- the severe depression -- that resulted in his suicide. And I've also learned that the events leading up to and including Taylor's suicide are right out of the medical textbook on steroids.



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Experts put the usage of steroids amongst our high school kids at about 5 to 6% of the overall population. Some of the experts I talk to use numbers more like a million kids doing steroids - - not 500,000 -- and I'm of a personal belief that those numbers are the bottom end of the range, that that number's higher. In some parts of the country studies show that the usage amongst high school junior and senior males is as high as 11 to 12%. Let me put that in context The kids in my part of the country tell me that as many as 1/3 of the boys that show up to play football under the lights on Friday night are "juicing."

A number of factors are contributing to the increasing usage amongst our kids. You've asked me to talk about one of them, and I'm happy to do that. I believe that the poor example being set by professional athletes is a major catalyst fueling the high usage of steroids amongst our kids. Our kids look up to these guys. They want to do the things the pros do to be successful. And with this in mind I have several messages for the professional athletes.

First, I am sick and tired of having you tell us that you don't want to be considered role models. If you haven't figured it out yet, let me break the news to you that whether you like it or not -- you are role models. And parents across America should hold you accountable for behavior that inspires our kids to do things that put their health at risk, and that teaches them that the ethics we try to teach them around our kitchen table somehow don't apply to them.

Second, our kids know that the use of anabolic steroids is high amongst professional athletes. They don't need to read Mr. Canseco's new book to know that something other than natural physical ability is providing many of you with the ability to break so many performance records, that provide you with the opportunity to make those millions of dollars. Our youngsters hear the message loud and clear -- and it's wrong: If you would want to achieve your goal, it's okay to use steroids to get you there because the pros are doing it. It's a real challenge for parents to overpower the strong message that's been sent -- that's being sent to our children by your behavior.

Third, players that [sic] are guilty of taking steroids are not only cheaters -- you are cowards! You're afraid to step on the field to compete for your positions and play the game without the aid of substances that are a felony to possess without a legitimate prescription -- substances that have been banned from competition at all levels of athletics. Not only that: You are cowards when it comes to facing your fans and our children. Why don't you behave like we try to teach our kids to behave? Show our kids that you're man enough to face authority, tell the truth, and face the consequences. Instead, you hide behind the skirts of your union. And with the help of management and your lawyers, you've made every effort to resist facing the public today.

What message are you sending our sons and daughters? That your above the law? That you can continue to deny your behavior and get away with it? That somehow you're not a cheater unless you get caught?



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Your attorneys say they're worried about how your public testimony might play in a court of law. But how do you think your refusals to talk are playing in the court of public opinion? Let me tell you that *the national jury of young people* have already judged your actions and concluded that many of you are guilty of using illegal performance enhancing drugs. But instead of convicting you, they have decided to follow your lead. And in tens of thousands of homes across America, our 16 and 17-year-old children are injecting themselves with anabolic steroids -- just like you big-leaguers do.

Your union leaders want us to be sensitive to your right of privacy. Right to privacy? What about our rights as parents -- our rights to expect that the adults that our kids all look up to will be held to a standard that does not include behavior that is dangerous, felonious, and is cheating?

How about a short message for management? We can't leave them out. Major league baseball and other sports need to take serious steps to stop the use of -- of steroids. Slapping a player on the wrist with a 10-day suspension -- I didn't even know about the 10,000 dollar [fine] until this morning -- but a 10-day suspension is just one more signal to our children that you're not serious about ridding the game of this junk. Forcing a pro, at worst to miss 10 games, is asking him to miss 6% of a season. Let's put that through the prism of the glasses of a high school student. Forcing a high school student to miss 6% of his season is asking him to sit the bench for less than one game.

And we shouldn't be talking about whether or not to put asterisks next to these guys' records. They ought to be thrown out of baseball, and we ought to be turning them over to the authorities to have them arrested and put in jail for the behavior that they've done.

Why don't you implement a program that we've heard about today, that's a lot closer to the Olympic standard, where cheaters are not able to compete for two years after their first offense, and banned for life following the second. Just maybe, our kids will get the message that you're finally serious about solving this problem.

Let me add to the whole discussion that this is not about a collective bargaining agreement. Guys, we are way past that. Steroid usage has become a major health issue and -- that is affecting the lives and health of our kids, and I encourage the members of congress to please deal with it in such a manner.

A critical weapon that we have in this...battle is education.

Our students need to know that these drugs can seriously harm them. But I'm convinced that trying to warn 16-year-olds about the danger of liver cancer or having a heart attack -- probably going to fall on deaf ears, which is why I believe our first targets for education have to be our parents and our coaches.



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Our parents need to know the dangers of this drug, how to recognize the warning sign, and understand the importance of supervising this with our kids.

Our coaches have to be more responsible and accountable for dealing with this situation with their teams. Coaches across the country need to be certified and credentialed -- to have to pass a test to prove that they are competent to supervise our children. As part of the certification, they need to be trained about steroids and other performance-enhancing drugs, and trained to know what to do about it when they find it. And finally, they need to be held accountable for ensuring that their teams are steroid-free.

To help fill the education void, we have formed the Taylor Hooton Foundation for fighting steroid abuse, the nation's first private organization in this area. Working in conjunction with doctor-experts, like Dr. Gary Wadler here on my left, we would like to explore ways to work with you and others in the government to make our foundation part of your work going forward.

On behalf of my son Taylor Hooton, Rob Garibaldi, and Efrain Marrero, whose parents are with us today, let me implore you to take steps to clean up this mess. Please help us to see that our children's lives were not lost in vain. You have the power to do something about it and we're counting on you to do so.

Thank you.