

**Testimony of Robert F. Kanaby  
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**Before the House Energy and Commerce  
Subcommittee on  
Commerce, Trade and Consumer Protection  
And  
The Subcommittee on Health**

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***“Steroids and Sports:  
Cheating the System and Gambling Your Health”***

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**The National Federation of State High School Associations  
P.O. Box 690  
Indianapolis, Indiana 46206**

## **Introduction**

Thank you Chairman Stearns, Chairman Deal, Ranking Member Schakowsky, Ranking Member Brown and distinguished Members of the Subcommittees for the opportunity to testify today on the issue of Steroid use among our young athletes. My name is Robert Kanaby and I have served as the Executive Director of the National Federation of State High School Associations (NFHS) for the past 12 years. Prior to that, I served 13 years as the Executive Director of the New Jersey State Interscholastic Athletic Association. I have also been a high school teacher, coach, vice principal and principal.

## **The Problem**

In my role as the Executive Director of the NFHS, I have become keenly aware of the growing problem of steroid and performance enhancing drug distribution and use in high schools and all levels of athletic competition. Last week, as it happens, I attended a conference in Houston, Texas focusing on this very problem.

The average high school student has little sense of mortality, but a huge sense of where he or she stands within a peer group context. That is an explosive combination when products exist that can make a young person stronger, faster and more athletic. The products, anabolic steroids and their ilk, are effective; let's not delude ourselves on that point. Thus, the key questions we face in considering this problem are the following: 1. Are steroids harmful? and 2. If so, how can we discourage their use by teenagers? These questions have long been of interest to the NFHS.

## **Who Are We?**

Let me give you some background on the NFHS and its role in the high school sports and activities community.

The NFHS is the national service and administrative organization for high school athletics and fine arts programs in speech, debate, theater and music. Its purpose is to provide leadership and coordination of these activities to enhance the educational experiences of high school students and reduce the risks incident to their participation. The NFHS promotes inclusiveness and sportsmanship, and its paramount goal is to develop good citizens. Its members, the 50 high school associations in each state and the District of Columbia, conduct championships and enforce eligibility rules in their respective jurisdictions.

The NFHS promulgates voluntary rules of play for the nations 7,000,000 high school student-athletes. (Unlike the NCAA, the NFHS does not perform enforcement functions.) In coordinating a variety of activities incident to high school sports, one of its key functions is to obtain and disseminate health and safety-related information. For example, the NFHS has promulgated a statement on drug and supplement usage and supplement that has been adopted as policy by many of the nation's 18,000 high schools.

## **Are Steroids Harmful?**

With respect to the first question, whether steroids are harmful, the answer is an unequivocal yes. But unfortunately, in a society where a “bigger, faster, stronger” mentality prevails, young people often turn to steroids and performance enhancing drugs to get the “edge,” often unaware or ignoring the potential health risks associated with such products. These health risks range from the mundane to the lethal. According to the

American College of Sports Medicine, “anabolic steroid use has been implicated in early heart disease, including sudden death, the increase of bad cholesterol profiles (increased LDL, lower HDL), an increase in tendon injuries, liver tumors, testicular atrophy, gynecomastia (abnormal enlargement of breast in males), male pattern baldness, severe acne, premature closure of growth plates in adolescents, emotional disturbances and other significant health risks.” The National Institute on Drug Abuse adds to this list many behavioral side effects of anabolic steroid use including, paranoid jealousy, delusions, increased irritability and aggression (often called “roid rage”).

### **Facts/Studies Regarding Anabolic Steroid Use**

Over one million young people in the United States have used steroids at least once in their lifetimes. And more than one-third of high school steroid users do not participate in interscholastic sports. A “Monitoring the Future” survey, funded by the National Institute on Drug Abuse, reported an increase in anabolic steroid use and a decrease in perceived harm among 10<sup>th</sup> graders from 1998 to 1999. This same survey annually measured whether 8<sup>th</sup>, 10<sup>th</sup> and 12<sup>th</sup> graders had ever used anabolic steroids, used anabolic steroids in the past year, and used anabolic steroids in the past month. The 2003 survey indicated 2.5% of 8<sup>th</sup> graders, 3.0% of 10<sup>th</sup> graders, and 3.5% of 12<sup>th</sup> graders had used anabolic steroids at some time.

### **Inhibiting Usage**

The more problematic issue we face in dealing with anabolic steroids, after determining harm associated with them, is what can be done to discourage their usage and distribution among our young people? Unfortunately there is no one quick fix, anabolic steroids pose as complicated an issue as all of the other drug and social welfare

problems that plague society. While complicated and difficult, it is imperative we address these issues and be committed to making a change.

### **What is Already Being Done?**

Many state high school associations are already taking action. For example, the California Interscholastic Federation provides an excellent example of what can be done in the way of education. The CIF, in cooperation with the United States Drug Enforcement Agency held a “Steroid Summit” last fall, and distributed health bulletins to member high schools. Additionally, this month the CIF will send to almost 1400 member high schools an educational Power-Point presentation which emphasizes the dangers of anabolic steroids. The power-point presentation is attached. Through an aggressive plan of coach-student, coach-parent, school administrator-student meetings and presentations, the full truth about steroids will reach the target audience.

Other member state associations are looking towards their local legislatures for assistance. The Virginia General Assembly recently passed a bill which is currently awaiting the Governor’s signature. The legislation will enable the Virginia High School League to establish rules whereby a student, who has used steroids, unless prescribed by a licensed physician for a medical condition, would be declared ineligible for two years. Additionally the Michigan state legislature is currently conducting hearings on a bill that would require each local board of education to have a policy that includes a prohibition of performance enhancing drugs, but leaves the period of ineligibility determination to the local schools. The prohibited drugs are those banned by the National Collegiate Athletic Association, including steroids.

### **What does the NFHS recommend?**

The Anabolic Steroid Control Act of 2004 is a step in the right direction. The NFHS was one of the early supporters of that legislation and we applaud Congress' efforts thus far, but more needs to be done. We believe that for high schools it is important to continue and enhance the efforts currently underway to educate students on the dangers of using these products.

### **Testing**

Testing works. As the American Academy of Pediatrics notes, "random" drug testing is a deterrent at the Olympic, NCAA, and professional sports levels, but it is probably too costly for widespread use in high school. It is expensive, both from the standpoint of the tests themselves, and because of the litigation that can ensue from positive tests.

Bluntly stated, high schools lack the money to test for steroids. To put the cost issue in perspective, the NCAA spends \$4,000,000 each year on drug testing for its 360,000 student-athletes. There are twenty times that many student-athletes at the high school level. There are also potentially difficult legal issues to consider relating to minority, privacy and informed consent. All that aside, however, we must recognize that in an era of scarce resources, steroid testing is way down on budgetary pecking order for most school districts. This is particularly true if there is another good way to address the problem, and there is.

## **Education**

One of the good things about teenagers, and there are lots of good things about them, is that they are trusting of adults who don't abuse such trust. If we are honest with young people about the positive aspects of steroids (which they already know), they are much more likely to believe us when we tell them the other side of the story. Much as they would like bigger muscles, they already know enough about acne to understand they don't want more of it. They certainly don't want the other short-term problems either.

The long-term problems are even worse.

But we must focus on educating not only coaches and athletes, but school administrators, parents and the community at large. Fortunately, there are some good sources of education about steroids. One of the best on-line services for the student-athlete audience is the Resource Education Center maintained by the National Center for Drug Free Sport [[www.drugfreesport.com](http://www.drugfreesport.com)]. There are also excellent programs for coaches and administrators, and various educational programs have, in fact, been implemented to address the use of steroids and performance enhancing drugs. The NFHS Coaches Education Program is a good example.

From a delivery standpoint, the NFHS and its members are experienced providers. We are very good at putting useful information in the hands of high school coaches and athletic directors. Assuming they have developed the relationships of trust referenced above (and most of them have), the truth about steroids WILL resonate with the target audience.

Steroids are a problem at the high school level, but we are dealing with it. Coaches and other educators have the relationships of trust necessary to deliver difficult information. They are doing it now, and they will keep doing it as time goes on

### **The Role of Congress**

If the Congress wants to help us, we would welcome your support. As an educator, I urge that any such help be focused primarily on education rather than on mandates relating to testing or other punitive measures. An example would be funding the development of deterrence strategies which target not only student-athletes but non-athletes as well.

At our level, education is the right answer. I'd like to thank both Subcommittees for the opportunity to be here today. I look forward to answering your questions.