

## **Testimony from Greg Schwab of Vancouver, Washington**

Good Morning, my name is Greg Schwab.

Dietary supplements and performance-enhancing drug use among high school athletes is increasing at an alarming rate. Recent studies have shown as much a 60% increase in steroid use among high school athletes. To better understand what has caused this increase; I would like to share with you some of the things I have observed in my 14 years as a teacher, coach, and school administrator. I will also draw on my insights as someone who has experienced steroid use firsthand for two and a half years as a college football player and an aspiring player in National Football League.

For whatever reason, the focus of high school athletics has shifted. No longer do we preach the values taught by participation in a team or individual sport, the values of competition, teamwork, dedication, and cooperation. These have been replaced by a new focus or value, simply to excel at the highest possible level. While you may be asking yourself, "what is so bad about wanting to excel at the highest level?" consider what many of these high school athletes are willing to do in order to excel. High school athletes use all sports supplements like protein powders, sports drinks, ephedrine, creatine, and androstenedione routinely today as part of their training regimen. Any high school athlete can walk into a store or health club and purchase these dietary supplements no questions asked. On several occasions I have had conversations with athletes I coached about these issues. Many times they have come to me to ask my advice about taking supplements to help them perform at their highest levels. I have always stressed healthier alternatives to these supplements, but for many the supplements are simply too easy to get. While I am no expert on this, I have always believed that dietary supplements can lead athletes to using performance-enhancing drugs like anabolic steroids

The three-sport athlete no longer exists in most high schools today. They have been replaced by athletes who train year-round, honing their skills in one sport. Basketball teams play 60 games during the summer, plus a 25-game regular season. Baseball plays 50 games in fall leagues, in addition to the 25-game regular season schedule and the 50-game summer season schedule. As a coach, I expected my football players to commit countless hours in the weight room lifting, running, and working on fundamental skills. Add to this the proliferation of summer sports camps athletes and coaches can choose from, and it is no wonder that high school athletes have no time for any other activities they might be interested in. any athletes feel they have to turn to supplements to have the strength to compete through the long schedules.

For many male high school athletes, pro athletes are major influences. They are the role models. They choose the jersey numbers of their favorite professional players. They emulate their training regimens. They emulate their style of play. And they are influenced by their drug use. When a professional athlete admits to using steroids, the message young athletes hear is not always the one that is intended. Young athletes often believe that steroid use by their role models gives them permission to use. That it is simply part of what one must do to become an

elite athlete.

Coaches, whether they intend to or not, put a great deal of pressure on their athletes. The demands and expectations of most high school programs rival many college programs. In a sport like football, where the emphasis is on getting bigger and stronger, coaches are constantly pressuring their athletes to gain more weight or to be able to lift more weight than they could a month ago. As a coach, I caught myself saying to my athletes the very things that made me feel the pressure to grow in size and strength beyond what my body was capable of naturally. Athletes grow to feel like no matter what they do, it is not going to be enough for their coaches. Couple this with the fact that athletes are by their very nature, highly competitive, and it is easy to understand how and why they might turn to performance enhancing drugs like anabolic steroids.

One of the biggest challenges I faced as a coach was trying to effectively dissuade my athletes from using supplements and performance enhancing drugs. I have always been very open and honest with anyone who asks me about my use of steroids. I regularly shared with my athletes the effects that steroids had on me while I used them for two-and-a-half years during my career as a football player. My hope is that if I can relate to them on a personal level, they will be more likely to listen to me. Too often though, what they see is someone who used steroids and turned out fine. Instead of listening to me because I am being honest, they think that if nothing bad happened to me, then they will have the same experience. The problem is that there is too little information out there about the dangers of steroids. All adolescents hear is how much steroids will help them perform. We need to get the word out at every level and in every way that steroids are dangerous.

I cannot stress enough how easy it is to get supplements. I cannot stress enough how widespread use of supplements is among high school athletes. Drug stores, supermarkets, and health food stores all carry these supplements and they can be purchased by anyone. While I can only speak for the athletes I coached, I would say that at least 70% of them are using some kind of dietary supplement. Percentages of steroid use are much harder to predict, partly because steroid users simply do not talk about their use. It is not something that anyone would openly admit to. Based on my personal experience and the number of athletes I have worked with over the years, a conservative estimate would be between 5% and 10% of athletes I have coached used steroids.

I hope you understand that supplement and steroid use among high school athletes is a growing problem that needs to be addressed. I strongly encourage you to take the lead and help to curb this problem. Steroid precursors sold as dietary supplements need to be regulated, they need to be harder to get. I cannot stress enough what kind of impact supplement use has on young athletes. This, to me, seems to be the first step in helping to solve the larger issue of steroid use.

Thank you.