Steroid Usage Causes Controversy in MLB

In modern day Major League Baseball, players are hitting the ball 500 feet, and throwing the ball 105 mph. Along with these impressive numbers comes the suspicion of steroids from fans, newscasters, and fellow players. In a game where the playing field needs to be level, steroids usage can’t be tolerated, because of the unfair advantage players can obtain by taking steroids.

Ever since Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa were linked to steroids in the 1990s, different types of performance enhancing drugs have brought about major controversy in baseball. In 1998 McGwire set the single season homerun record with 70 long balls. Roger Maris had held the previous record for 37 years without anyone getting close to it, and then all of a sudden in a span of three years, three players hit more than 61 home runs, at least two times each. In 2001 Barry Bonds broke the record again with 73 long balls. All three of these sluggers were linked to steroids. When you look in the record book for most home runs in a single season, the top six names were involved with steroids.

Just recently the MLB started to crack down and hand out lengthy suspensions to steroid users. Up until 2013 no player had been suspended for more than 100 games for a steroid related offense. The consistent lies of steroid users are also shifting the attention away from the games, into the press rooms, and even courthouses.

This year for the first time, the MLB is starting to hand out suspensions of varying games, instead of the usual 50 or 100 games. Unfortunately, they are still being too soft on some players who have repeatedly broken the rules. Alex Rodriguez has been suspended twice already for steroids, and his third suspension was a 211 game suspension which would extend to the
end of the 2014 season. If a player breaks the same rule three times, they shouldn’t be allowed to play again. In baseball terms “three strikes and you’re out.”

In the game today a player can’t succeed without people wondering if they are using steroids. This year Orioles first baseman Chris Davis was asked via twitter if he was taking steroids, to which he replied with a simple no. There is no evidence that Davis took steroids, but the large jump in his home run total from last year causes speculation. Players like Davis may not like this speculation, but with the increase in steroid usage these questions will continue to be asked. Just last year Ryan Braun swore on his life that he didn’t take steroids, and 12 months later he is serving a 65 game suspension for steroid use. Braun also won the Most Valuable Player award in 2011. He admitted that he was taking steroids throughout that season, yet unlike the case of Lance Armstrong, Braun was not stripped of his award.

During the 2013 season the MLB suspended 15 players for steroid usage, and 13 of them will be able to play on opening day of 2014. About half of the players play for teams that had no chance of making the playoffs, and their seasons were basically over. These players still made about 75 percent of their 2013 salaries. For players whose teams are playoff bound, their seasons aren’t over. Jhonny Peralta of the Detroit Tigers will finish his suspension with three games remaining in the year. The Tigers will most likely be in the playoffs, guaranteeing Peralta more than those three games.

One of the main reasons players continue to use steroids is because of the minimal financial loss. Last year 39-year-old Bartolo Colon was nearing the end of his career, and had just signed a one-year contract worth $2 million. He was caught for taking steroids with 40 games left and dealt a 50 game suspension without pay. He would have made $500 thousand in those final 40 games of the year. With bonuses for his success during the season he ended up making a total of $2.4 million.
For a player declining in ability the reward is high, and the risk is too low.

When the MLB Joint Drug Committee makes the punishment too harsh for the players to risk, steroids will no longer be part of the game. After a first offense players should be suspended for 162 games, which is a full season, and stripped of their salary for the whole year. Following a second offense the player should be suspended for 324 games, which is two full seasons, and again they should have their salary for that year revoked. If a player commits the offense a third time they should receive a lifetime ban from baseball which excludes them from the hall of fame, and from ever having a coaching job.

In the current system, players are tested once during spring training, and once randomly during the year. With this scarcity of testing, players can easily go long periods without being caught, increasing the chance that a player will decide to take steroids. To make sure that players are staying clean tests should be administered not only in spring training but each team should have at least 10 random drug tests throughout the year. With this amount of testing, players wouldn’t be able to play for almost 75 percent of the season before being caught.

Perhaps the biggest effect of steroids is the toll it takes on the players that are clean, and that put in the work, and are getting beat by players who are breaking the rules.

Junior Sam Conklin said, “I don’t think it’s fair that while some players are working hard, others are cheating to gain an advantage.”

A handful of major league players have spoken out against steroids, and other players have even gone so far as to hit steroid users with pitches during games. It is obvious that the clean players don’t want steroids in the game, and what
they want, is what it best for the game.