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Mitchell Report: America Loves Cheaters

Posted December 12, 2007 | 01:32 PM (EST)

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George Mitchell's big report has come out naming names -- like Roger Clemens and Andy Pettitte -- of current and former players who broke federal law, risked their health, cheated their teammates, cheated their fans, cheated their opponents and cheated baseball in general, thus pushing kids in high school and the minor leagues to damage their bodies and break the law by doing the same. Big whoop. (Go here for [Roger I. Abrams' post on what's more American than a home run hitter on steroids](#) and go here for [Gary R. Gaffney's post on a paradigm shift in MLB culture](#) and go here for [Paul Finkleman's post on baseball, steroids, Bonds and BALCO](#).)

You wanna know what the fallout will be? Zip. MLB doesn't care about cheating. Commissioner Bud Selig doesn't care. Certainly the players who cheat don't care. Rather bizarrely, even the players who don't cheat don't care. And the fans don't care either. Everyone has made it perfectly clear in the past few years they couldn't care less about performance enhancing drugs (PEDs), about breaking the law, about cleaning up the game and making sure teams compete on an even playing field where no player feels they have to risk their health, their life and break the law just to keep up with the Jason Giambis of the world. (I'm a Yankee fan, by the way.)

The names will be named. The fuss will be huge. Maybe some of them will get some days of suspension. The rules will get tweaked a little. And then it will be over.

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But look at Barry Bonds, right? He paid a price. But Barry Bonds isn't facing jail because he cheated and took PEDs. He was offered full immunity just like the cheater Jason Giambi. But Bonds lied about what he did under oath. If he hadn't, he'd probably be welcomed by now as having been a "man" and come

clean, just like Giambi has been. (All Giambi really did was get caught and not be dumb enough to lie on the stand about it.)

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Even now, some team might sign Bonds for '08, as absurd as that should be. Oakland A's pitcher Dan Haren is typical when he says that he and his teammates have talked about the possibility of Bonds joining their team for years and that Bonds would be welcomed with open arms.

Certainly the A's fans would do the same. And fans matter more than anyone else. If they were disgusted by the rampant cheating, baseball would change its ways. But fans of baseball don't care about the cheating any more than the fans of football, basketball and other sports. One thing is crystal clear: if another team's player is caught breaking the law and using PEDs to get an unfair advantage, opposing fans have a new taunt they can throw out. If it's their player who cheated? They could care less. Bonds was cheered by his hometown fans. So were Jason Giambi and Gary Sheffield by Yankee fans. So is virtually every active player tainted by the scandal.

Jay Gibbons and Jose Guillen have been suspected of cheating since February. What happened? Did their teams shun them? Did their fans boo them? Did little kids look up to them and say, "Say it ain't so, Jay/Jose?" Of course not. Their parents don't care. Why should the kids? Jay is a proud member of the Orioles. Last week, despite the cloud of shame that should hover over him, Guillen signed a three year, \$36 million deal with the Kansas City Royals. Now they've both been given 15 day suspensions beginning next season. Are the Orioles or the Royals abashed at signing cheaters? Are they demanding to be let out of the deals? Are fans outraged? Nope. Cheaters prosper. Will the Yankees dump Andy Pettitte now that they know he's a cheat? Of course not.

Oddest to me is that the players don't care. Derek Jeter of the Yankees -- who I couldn't like and respect more and, thank God, has not even the whiff of scandal about him -- doesn't care; he simply ignores the questions and wishes pushy reporters would stop asking them. Again and again, pros of every sport pile on the people asking questions, not the cheats. Charles Barkley and John McEnroe were interviewed by Bob Costas on HBO about this. They said virtually nothing about the simple obvious fact that cheaters are losers. If they were playing a casual game of basketball or tennis in their backyard and caught someone cheating them, they'd be furious. If they saw kids cheating, they'd surely say that was wrong. But performance enhancing drugs? Oh, was it against the rules, asks Barkley? It was against the law, says Costas. Why do you pick on Barry Bonds, says McEnroe? I don't, says Costas. All they did was complain about the reporters and the media. Not one word about cheating.

A recent New York Times article pointed out **what a joke testing in the NFL is**, with loopholes so wide you drive a linebacker through them. For starters, no one is ever tested on game day. The NFL's response? Mind your own business. Baseball's testers call up a day in advance to say they're coming by to do a "surprise" test. Clearly no one wants to catch anyone. As Charles E. Yesalis of Penn State said to the Times, "Testing is there to provide the fan, who is already disinterested in drug use, with plausible deniability because the leagues tell the fans the athletes are clean because they have drug testing."

Compare this to overseas. Outside the Olympics, the one sport that has the most stringent testing is cycling. And the constant barrage of cheats that are uncovered has the sport -- one of the most popular in Europe and the world -- literally on the verge of collapse. The sport is arranged so that sponsors actually back certain teams, which means in fact backing certain superstars. Those corporate sponsors don't like being DIRECTLY associated with cheating so they're withdrawing funding. That's spawned a crisis, which might just be a quirk in how the sport is arranged. But it also seems fans genuinely care about the cheating in cycling and are sick of it. That's one reason to look forward to the Olympics: it's the one sport arena where fans know every possible effort is made to punish cheaters and to allow the greatest athletes in the world to compete with pride using their natural abilities. Europeans seem to care about cheating. Not us. Not the US. Not by a long shot.

I think cheaters are losers. I think sports like baseball are a lot less fun when some players have an unfair advantage. I hate to think of my team winning with the help of cheaters. I hate even more to think of kids in high school and the minor leagues risking their health and dignity by breaking the law to cheat because they believe if they don't they'll never make it to the majors. I don't boo my own team, but I don't applaud when Jason Giambi's name is in the lineup and I wish he were traded, however nice a guy he may be on a personal level. I just don't like cheaters. And people using PEDs don't make a one-time mistake or suffer a slip of the tongue, the sort of thing anyone might make and be forgiven for. They choose actively and aggressively to cheat for months and years at a time and they sometimes reap millions by doing so. I hate cheaters. And I seem to be alone in all this. Sure, Clemens and Bonds and Mark McGwire will have more trouble getting into

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the Hall of Fame. But I predict not one single current player that is valuable to their team will be dumped. Some team might dump a marginal player they wanted to get rid of and use the report as an excuse. But that's it. If your player helps the team, there's no way they'll get fired.

Is cheating All-American? I'm starting to think so.

Read more news and blog posts on the Mitchell report on steroids in baseball here.

Comments for this post are now closed

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I haven't cared much for MLB or the NFL. Personally, they are too infused with advertising, at their heart they are corporate sports. That's not to say that events such as the Tour de France or sports like soccer don't have their fair share, I just don't feel it with them.

Speaking of Le Tour, look to it to see what can happen to a sport affected by steroid use. Many are saying that it may be dead (I doubt it).

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For me, if there's one athlete doing steroids, the whole game is tainted. I have ZERO interest in following and event/sport where an undetermined number of players have a huge advantage. But it sounds like I am in the minority.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 06:33 PM on 12/13/2007

ShawnMichel See Profile I'm a Fan of ShawnMichel permalink

We can take this disdain and apathy further. It explains our total indifference to our natural world and the pigs who are gutting it--which includes the suburbanites who feel they gotta keep up with the Joneses. There is no difference here. Just a change of venue.

SMdM

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 12:35 AM on 12/13/2007

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And how it has crept into elections, local and national...

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There seemed to be a generation of players who had no problem making a deal with the Devil. More money and prestige for some of their integrity and health. Even those that weren't cheating made the choice to play dumb and go along. Eventually you'll see a lot of these guys die young from heart attacks like the "freakazoids" in wrestling who died before 50. It's sad that winning trumps all other values.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 07:23 PM on 12/12/2007

mbafromharvard See Profile I'm a Fan of mbafromharvard permalink

Baseball made the right choice when faced with its own extinction. With modern sports fans requiring action, and lots of it, baseball continued to move at a snail's pace. Kudos to Selig for not only making baseball exciting again, but saving the sport from the trash heap altogether.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 03:36 PM on 12/12/2007

Michael Giltz See Profile I'm a Fan of Michael Giltz permalink

Great point. The only unforgivable sin is in fact being a loser. Thanks for reading.

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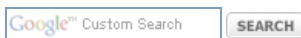
hopeless277 See Profile I'm a Fan of hopeless277 permalink

You are correct, sir. Cheating is probably last on list of unacceptable behavior in sports and in life. The number one item on the list of unacceptable behavior? Losing. America loves winners no matter how they win. It's a disease and it's spreading.

♥ Favorite ⚙ Flag as abusive Posted 02:27 PM on 12/12/2007

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