

Sports

Bodybuilder encouraging athletes to pump up without drugs

By Richard A. Kiley

Although drug problems in professional athletics have been well documented in such cases as New York Mets' pitcher Dwight Gooden and New York Giants' linebacker Lawrence Taylor, the severity of the situation in college and high school sports is still virtually unknown.

Preliminary studies are showing, however, that more and more high school and college athletes are experimenting with drugs to gain a competitive edge. The extent to which drugs help or hinder athletes' agility and strength was the topic of a presentation entitled "Drugs in Sports; For Better, For Worse," which took place at the Rochester Institute of Technology gymnasium Tuesday, Nov. 17.

Sponsored by the Genesee Valley Sports Medicine Council, the Rochester Red Wings, the Rochester Americans and Park Ridge Chemical Dependency, the program focused on some of the difficult issues facing high school, college and professional athletes and coaches today.

"Our message is simple: drugs impede athletic performance," said Ronald J. Freeling, president of the Genesee Valley Sports Medicine Council. "The black market in steroids is pervasive, reaching into every community in western New York."

Bodybuilder Paul D'Accursio, a former math teacher and wrestling coach at Cardinal Mooney High School, knows firsthand the side effects of steroids. Under a doctor's care, D'Accursio — one of five speakers at the forum — used steroids to help speed up his recuperation from some nagging back and knee ailments. The 1986 bantamweight division champion said he stopped using steroids after he noticed he was becoming too aggressive.

Now co-owner of The Gym, Inc., of Fairport, D'Accursio is trying to sway athletes from using anabolic steroids as a quick fix for physical development.

"(Steroids) are there; it all depends where you look," said D'Accursio, a member of the Christian Coaches Association. "Any

kids affiliated with weight lifting and gyms can be found using them."

Through his work with the Genesee Valley Sports Medicine Council, D'Accursio is trying to get today's high school athletes to think in terms of nutrition, training and recuperation rather than banking on drugs whose long-term effects are still being studied by the medical profession.

"I tell kids not to go for that shortcut. What they should be doing is setting short-term and realistic goals," said D'Accursio, who taught at Mooney from 1983-85. "You've got to sit back and ask yourself what you want to do."

Parents also have to stop asking too much of their athletic offspring, according to D'Accursio.

"Parents put too much pressure on kids. Sometimes they think they know better," he said. "Kids want to make dad proud of them, so they go and take steroids."

High school coaches will likewise need to grasp what their players are thinking before drugs become an option, he added.

"I've talked to some coaches, but they just don't want to spend the time on the problem or a lot aren't knowledgeable enough on it," D'Accursio said.

The winner of numerous weightlifting titles wants parents and student-athletes to put more emphasis on nutritional needs in the athlete's quest for the perfect body.

"I've had kids ask me about steroids, but I tell them about various natural supplements instead," D'Accursio said. "Food is so abused with kids ... Anything God makes good, man turns into bad. Man abuses everything."

"I've seen those goofy restricted diets. The risk with those is right up there with taking steroids," he explained. "These kids don't realize that if they train harder and start sleeping (more) at night, they'll be a lot better off than if they took steroids."

By making presentations like the one at RIT, D'Accursio hopes to reach student-

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Paul D'Accursio Bodybuilder



athletes who are still fighting to make the team and fighting the temptation to use drugs.

are bad and detrimental to their goals," D'Accursio said. "Hopefully the message will get through to them. If I can help just one kid with his training, it's worth it."

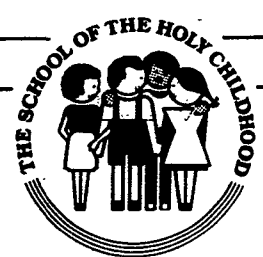
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