

Drugs put athletes at risk

By Barbara Ann Homick
Staff writer

PITTSFORD — Many athletes want to be number one in their sport, but that ambition can prove to be deadly, according to Dr. Leslie W. Lange.

The chiropractor believes that an overwhelming number of high school and college athletes are turning to anabolic steroids to build muscle mass and increase performance. The drugs, however, are known to do irreparable harm and lead to serious illness — even death.

Lange, who has spoken about the dangers of steroids to athletes at several Rochester-area high schools, noted that drug use among student-athletes has reached epidemic proportions. Citing a 1988 study printed in the *Journal of the American Medical Association*, Lange said that 15 percent of high school athletes in the country have used or are using anabolic steroids. Of those students, 50 percent began using the drugs by age 16.

The percentage is similar among college-age males, said Lange, with use about equal among Division 1, 2 and 3 schools. The Pittsford Division believes that the statistics on steroid use in schools around Monroe County are close to the national average.

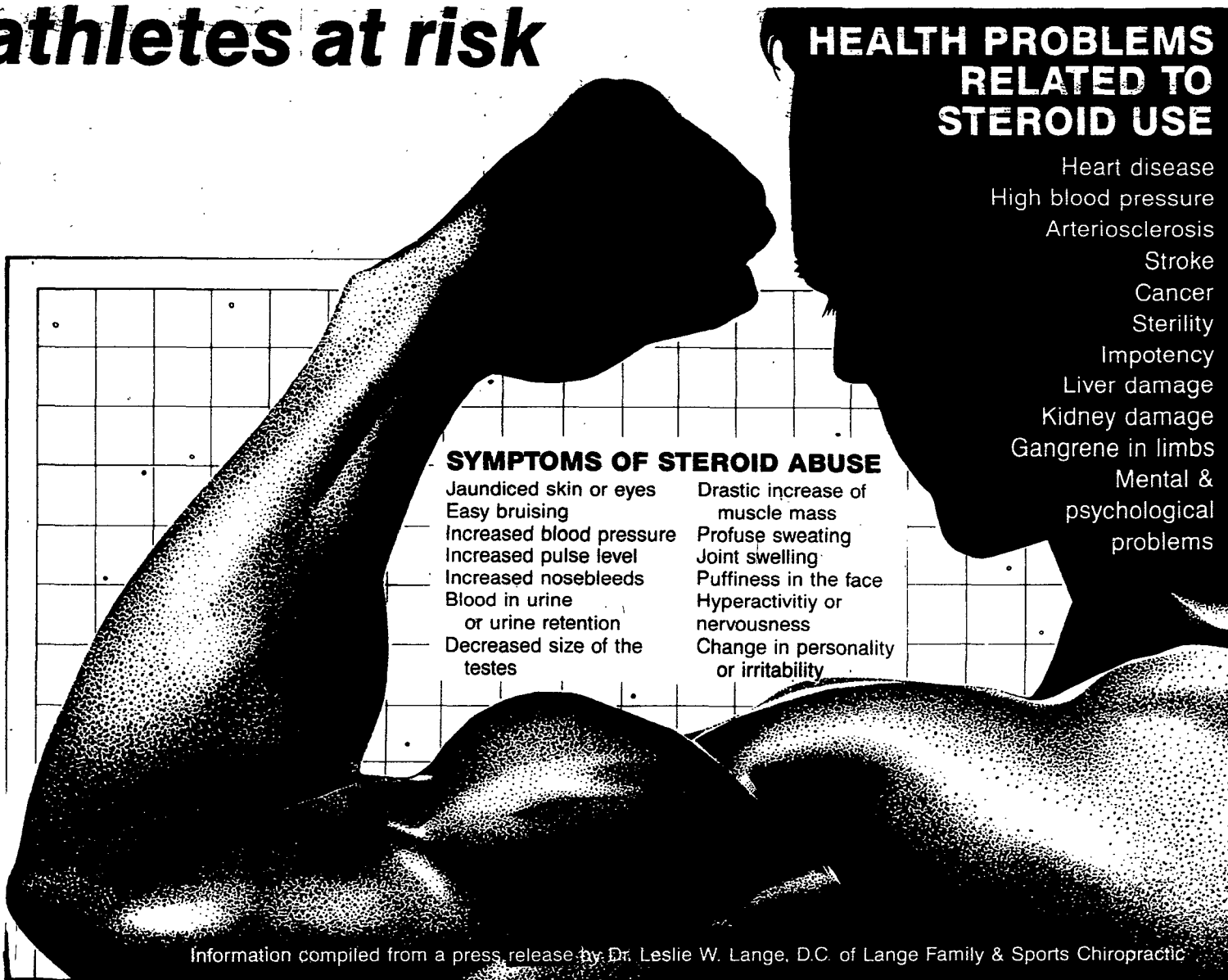
Lange also cited a 1990 study conducted by Michigan State University, stating that steroid abuse was not only confined to sports traditionally associated with the drugs. In addition to football, wrestling, swimming and track, steroid use was also discovered in such sports as gymnastics, skiing, basketball and baseball.

The study revealed that 50 percent of steroid users were trying to enhance their athletic performance, while 27 percent were non-athletes using the drugs to simply build-up their bodies.

"Let's put it this way — they might have been going to a gym but they weren't involved in a competitive sport," said Lange. "They just wanted to look good and get the babes."

But men aren't the only ones using steroids, according to Lange. Women trying to enhance their athletic performance or just look good in bikinis have also started to abuse the drugs, which may be taken orally or through an injection.

Although anabolic steroids — classified as Class 2 substances just like cocaine — are illegal without a prescription in the United States, they are easy to obtain on the black market, Lange said.



HEALTH PROBLEMS RELATED TO STEROID USE

- Heart disease
- High blood pressure
- Arteriosclerosis
- Stroke
- Cancer
- Sterility
- Impotency
- Liver damage
- Kidney damage
- Gangrene in limbs
- Mental & psychological problems

SYMPTOMS OF STEROID ABUSE

- | | |
|-----------------------------------|---------------------------------------|
| Jaundiced skin or eyes | Drastic increase of muscle mass |
| Easy bruising | Profuse sweating |
| Increased blood pressure | Joint swelling |
| Increased pulse level | Puffiness in the face |
| Increased nosebleeds | Hyperactivity or nervousness |
| Blood in urine or urine retention | Change in personality or irritability |
| Decreased size of the testes | |

Information compiled from a press release by Dr. Leslie W. Lange, D.C. of Lange Family & Sports Chiropractic

"You just go to any gym in the Rochester area and you ask about steroids to people confidentially, you will find somebody who can point you to where you can get them," said Lange.

"I'm not saying you go to any gym and you can buy them, I'm just saying people know," explained the chiropractor, who addressed the McQuaid Jesuit basketball team last fall.

In light of recent cases involving professional athletes, the dangers of steroid abuse have been brought to the forefront by the national media. Three years ago, when Ben Johnson was stripped of his gold medal during the Olympics in Seoul, South Korea, people began to realize how use of the drugs could devastate an athlete's career.

Johnson, who admitted to using steroids over eight years, was banned from international competition for two years.

More recently, former National Football League standout Lyle Alzado was diagnosed last March with brain cancer. Alzado believes the cancer stems from his 22 years of steroid abuse.

In the July 8, 1991, issue of *Sports Illustrated*, Alzado said he began using steroids in 1969 and never stopped — even after he retired from the NFL in 1985. Now he's fighting for his life.

"I went through all those wars on the football field. I was so muscular. I was a giant. Now I'm sick. And I'm scared," said Alzado in the *Sports Illustrated* article.

Although anabolic steroids are sometimes prescribed for patients with breast cancer or muscle diseases, Lange said that performance enhancement is not a practical use of the drugs. Even with proper nutrition and training, steroids are harmful.

Although cancers, heart attacks and strokes have been associated with steroid abuse, Lange said mental disturbances can also result from use of steroids. Some of the drug's users have experienced paranoia, sleep disturbances, personality changes and aggressive behavior, Lange said.

For those athletes who wish to excel in their sport, Lange suggests a proper diet, plenty of rest, and a consistent training schedule. He also stresses keeping competition in perspective.

"These are kids who are the best, the brightest and the most talented who want to do better," explained the 38-year-old doctor. "It may mean the difference between a starting job or the bench, it may mean the difference between All-County or not, it may mean the difference between a scholarship or not."

Lange also warned parents not to put too much pressure on young athletes. "The cost of college nowadays is somewhere between \$10,000-20,000 a year for college, and if a kid could get a scholarship ... so I think there are some parents out there who are either turning their head the other way or putting the pressure on the kids to do it, and there are instances where the parents are actually involved in supplying the drugs," said Lange.

In terms of education, Lange urged coaches, teachers and parents to help young athletes realize that winning is not everything. He said they must take a positive approach to educating their children about proper ways to achieve peak performance.

"We have a society that is 'sports crazy,' pushing children and youth beyond their physical limits, and certainly beyond the limits of wisdom," he noted.

EDITORS' NOTE: Schools or organizations seeking information on steroids should call Lange speak, should call 716/292-0310.

Screening tests available at St. Joseph's Hospital

ELMIRA — Women can now order their own screening for breast cancer through the Self-Referral Mammography Program at St. Joseph's Hospital, 555 E. Market St.

According to the American Cancer Society, one out of nine women will experience breast cancer in her lifetime. The American Cancer Society recommends annual or biannual mammograms for all women over the age of 35.

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