

Link of sports and drugs runs deep

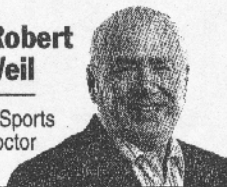
Drugs and sports have been connected for about as long as sports have been played. Not necessarily "performance-enhancing drugs," but there is a fine line between performance enhancement and what I call "performance survival."

One of the concerns I've always had is that especially at the elite and professional levels, the physical and mental demands of sports are way beyond normal. Today even adolescent athletes have troubling access to over-the-counter pain and anti-inflammatory drugs such as aspirin, ibuprofen (Advil, Motrin) or naprosyn (Aleve). These drugs are way overused to keep kids "in the game."

Are the schedules for professional sports too long, with not enough time for the body to recover? For the last 30 years or so I've watched as pros, Olympians and Division I college athletes have faced those challenges. Not much is different for adolescent standouts in club sports, either.

Dr. Robert Weil

The Sports Doctor



Use of prescription painkillers, painkilling injections and all sorts of anti-inflammatory medicines, cortisone injections and the like are the norm, not the exception. If you've got a painful injury that's responding slowly and these drug methods are used, is that performance enhancement or performance survival?

When it became apparent to athletes that drugs such as some steroids and human growth hormone made great differences in injury recovery and the ability to train harder and longer, who can blame them for using them?

Of course there followed is lots of abuse for the performance-enhancement effects, and that's where the lines become blurred.

Some suggestions as to how to address these issues:

■ Pro sports need to

adopt the Olympic program of drug test criteria independent of each sport's politics.

■ If it is shown that some drugs including so-called performance enhancing drugs are helpful and therapeutic for injury recovery and healing, then allow them – provided they are used under medical supervision.

■ At the very least, increased awareness and education are needed about drug use. We should try to slow reliance on pain medicine, especially in youth sports – a little "intelligent rest" is often missing.

■ We've got to better understand the physical demands of some of these sports schedules.

On another note, I'd like to wish good luck to Naperville native Evan Lysacek as he defends his U.S. figure skating national championship in Minnesota. I spoke with him, and he's ready!

Dr. Robert A. Weil is a sports podiatrist with an office in Aurora. Contact him with at drweilsportsdoctor@yahoo.com.