

FEATURE

Big muscles, little penises and maybe even breasts

BY LYNN DECKER

In October 1997 four Canadian University football players were suspended from school athletics for steroid use. Martin Arsenault and Constantin Shousha from the University of Ottawa, Shawn Dyson from the University of Waterloo and Matthew Demers from Saint Mary's University here in Halifax were all suspended from competition for four years.

It is general knowledge that steroid use is dangerous. But why then are athletes and body builders — the people who we assume would be most in tune with their bodies — so vulnerable to the lure of steroids?

"They don't realize it's gonna

happen [to them] until they step into the shower one day and they look at their tiny, little, blue nuts and they say 'what's going on?'" said John, a 24-year-old Dalhousie student.

He claims steroid abusers don't realize that negative side effects may happen to them. He knows what he's talking about. Not because he learned it in a classroom or because it is simply his opinion, but because John was an anabolic steroids abuser himself.

"A guy beat the shit out of me when I was 18. I wasn't strong enough to hold him off. I didn't want to fight him at all. I just wanted to get away and I couldn't. I decided that not being

strong enough would never be an excuse in my life again," he said.

When John started weight training, some of his friends told him he could speed up his progress by using steroids.

John's friends offered to supply him and he decided to "play the game".

The current theory among health educators is that people are just not informed about the negative side effects of taking anabolic steroids. What are these negative side effects?

"Men may find that their testicles get smaller, the sperm count may go down, they may actually get breast development," says Dr. Ron Olson, MD, the Sports Medicine doctor at Dalhousie University Health Services.

To most guys this probably sounds bad enough, but the list goes on. "There is a change in the cholesterol levels... your lipids can get worse... the liver can get irritated and you can actually end up with some liver disease," Olson said.

There are some psychological side effects that accompany anabolic steroid use, including depression.

"The body mass makes [steroid users] feel better about themselves. Then when they lose [body mass] they become paranoid or they want to get back on it. They become depressed," says Dr. Carolyn Savoy, a PhD in Sports Psychology, and the Dalhousie Women's Basketball coach.

Along with depression, major steroid use can also bring on aggression.

"[Roid rage] is anger and aggression that manifests itself in somebody... they just lash out and they're out of control emotionally and their anger gets the best of them. They hammer their heads against walls, or lockers" says Savoy.

John concurs.

"If you felt really good in the gym, [then] the aggressiveness in the gym carried over to the bar.

Let's say you're out that night, sometimes it's hard to come down. Sometimes...it is a good drug, but

rage', embarrassment and depression.

Education is believed to be the key to reducing steroid use. Dr. Savoy believes most people are doing steroids because "they're not educated well enough". The catch is those who are well educated.

All Dalhousie athletes, as well as other Canadian Interuniversity Athletic Union (CIAU) athletes, are required to attend drug education seminars prior to the start of the competitive season. Otherwise they are ineligible to compete. Most bodybuilders are at least somewhat informed on the negative side effects of steroids as well.

So if they know the side effects and the consequences of being caught, why do some athletes and body builders continue to do anabolic steroids?

Dr. Olson thinks the issue goes beyond education. He feels the main concern should be why people feel the need to use steroids in the first place.

"I think people have been reasonably informed about the risks, but I think the big problem is the perception that you need to have this big bulky body to be a worthy person."

Dr. Savoy believes many young people willingly take the risk.

"Most people of the university age think they can walk on water," she said. "They think they're invincible and nothing's going to happen to them."

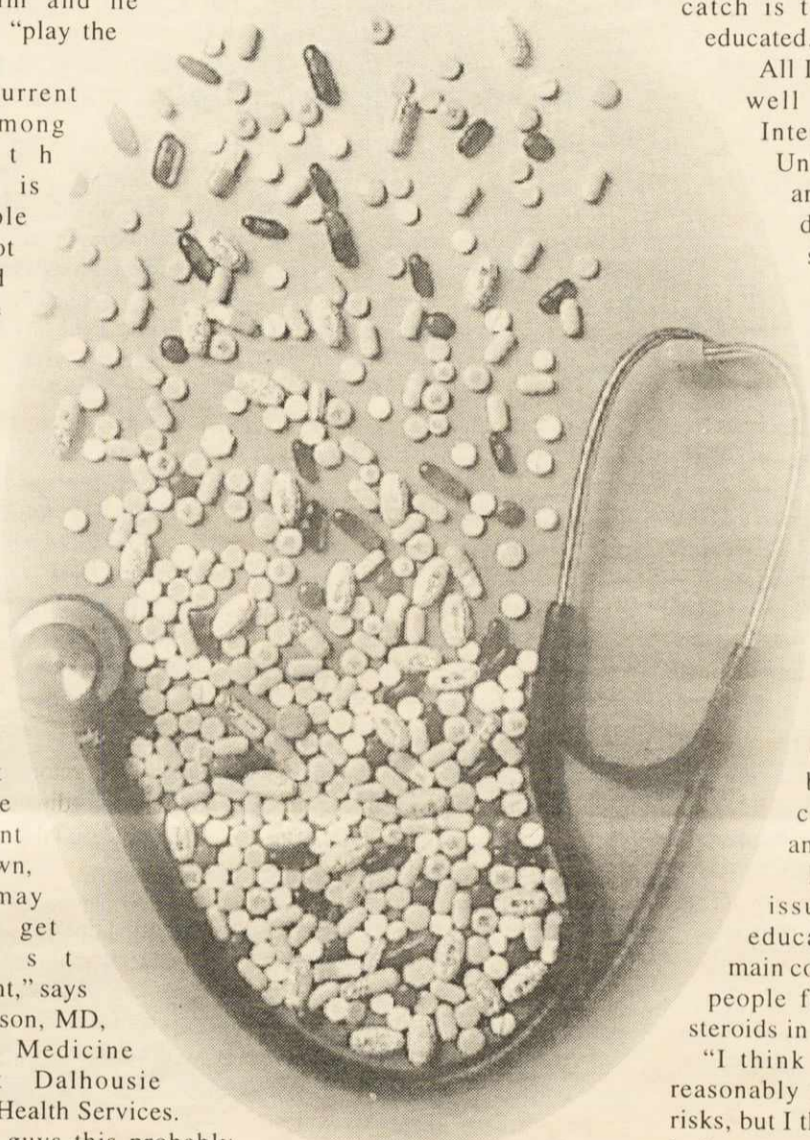
John saw first-hand how vulnerable a young steroid users can be. He says he witnessed a 19-year-old user have a heart attack.

"He was walking through the mall and he collapsed... It was something else, it was just something else."

Based on his own experiences and what he has seen, John was finally able to quit using steroids after four months of use. Asked if he'd ever do them again he was certain he would not.

"I swear on my best friend's grave, I wouldn't. No way. Not when I know the benefits are only temporary. What I do for myself now is forever."

John suggests explaining the downside of steroid use to young men in terms they can understand; let them know that women aren't necessarily interested in big guys, and definitely not steroid users.



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