

# Steroids in the gym: *Real* men don't get their muscles out of a bottle!

## CHICAGO IRON

By Bob Gajda and Terry Strand



Almost every week, we read a new story unfolds revealing the epidemic of steroid abuse among professional ball players and Olympic athletes. Decades ago, when anabolic steroids were first developed, only a few world-class weightlifters and wrestlers used these synthetic hormones to build bulk and strength. Later, other athletes, even runners and cyclists, were testing positive for these drugs, which have been controlled pharmaceutical substances in this country since 1990.

More recently, we see an upsurge in the workout rooms of weekend warriors who imbibe these questionable 'chemical muscles'. Suppliers of steroids in some weight rooms specialize in selling the exotic 'supplement' out of their gym bags. The dirty little secret of many dilettante bodybuilders is that they take steroids by tablet or by injection. The 'juice' or 'gear' is readily available over the Internet as well, mostly from overseas sources. At one notorious steroid circus populated by these chemical clowns, the Mr. Olympia Contest, police grabbed two competitors for receiving such shipments.

Most disturbing to coaches and parents is the pressure young athletes feel to use

these drugs in order to excel at even low-level completion. Frequently, even high school second stringers pursue the 'juice' to get an edge. The drugs can cause testicular atrophy, "roid" rage, and acne, among other side effects.

Have a talk with your son if you suspect he might be experimenting with steroid use. Unfortunately, many professional athletes who young men emulate are the poorest examples of clean living when it comes to these illicit and dangerous performance enhancers. Some call them chemical clowns in a steroid circus!

*Q. My twelve-year-old son feels he is rather underdeveloped, and lacks the strength that his friends possess at this age. He is easily winded during gym class, also. Part of his problem, I think, is that he gets very little exercise other than poking the keys on his computer. His pediatrician agrees that he should increase his physical activity. Is it too soon to start working out with weights and machines? - Concerned Mom*

**BOB:** It is common for adolescents to be concerned about their muscular development. That is why there is a

billion dollar industry today marketing bodybuilding magazines, exercise equipment, and high protein supplements. Some young men want to 'bulk up' to play sports and for the strength increase that the extra bodyweight may provide. In my kinesiology practice, we work with many boys whose parents, coaches and doctors send them for strength training.

**TERRY:** And don't forget the girls, Bob.

**BOB:** Absolutely right. Many girls share the same concerns at this age, and often want to get serious about working out...

**TERRY:** No, I meant that boys want to impress girls with their physiques. It's a guy thing; that primordial caveman instinct in us.

**BOB:** You *are* a caveman, Terry. But I think that my friend here is correct in recognizing the strong drive to impress members of the opposite gender that sends a lot of young men to the gym. The trick is making sure your son, or daughter, is working out under an experienced coach or trainer using sound exercise principals. Youngsters should handle their own body mass with fundamental exercises like squats,

crunches, pushups, and pull-ups. There was a concern years back that weight training stunted the growth of children. Bones develop from a cartilage growth plate, called the epiphyseal plate, at the bone ends. Overloading these plates calcifies them and can terminate lengthening. However, with appropriate workouts, quite the reverse is true. Weight exercises combined with good dietary habits contribute to overall robustness.

**TERRY:** Robustness? Get back to the part where big muscles impress the girls. That's why we guys start working out!

**BOB:** Terry, if you don't take your medicine, you won't get better.

**TERRY:** What medicine?

**BOB:** Never mind.

*Some call them chemical clowns in a steroid circus!*

*Bob Gajda is a nationally recognized sports rehabilitation expert and Mr. Universe winner. Terry Strand is the other guy.*