

Random Drug Testing of Athletes

In January of 1996, six months after the United States Supreme Court ruled that it was appropriate for Oregon's school district 47J in Vernonia, to require student athletes in middle school and high school to participate in random, suspicionless drug tests, one percent out of the 16,000 schools in the country had brought the random drug testing into their facilities. (Taylor, Robert) Even though the Supreme Court ruled this way, they did not feel that this testing was a good idea. There had to of been some reason for this. (Bailey, William) If only one out 16,000 schools pick up on drug testing as a good idea, then there is more than likely something that the schools don't think is right withit or they are unable to do it for some reason. Research shows that drug testing of public school athletes is not a good idea because it singles out athletes from all of the students in the school and suspects them of using drugs it is also a waste of time and money, and consists of low accuracy tests that so not always give the correct results.

There is evidence that shows that students who are involved in athletics are no more likely to use drugs than any other people in the student body. (Bailey, William) There should be a reason for the schools to single out athletes from the other students for drug testing. The only appropriate reasons for treating athletes differently by giving them drug tests would be if they more likely to use drugs than other students, they were at greater risk of using drugs, the use of drugs being riskier to them, or that the tests will be more likely to come back positive for athletes. It is true in some schools across the United States, that athletes are more likely to consume alcohol at a weekend party, but if a urine sample were taken the following week, it would come back clean. So this testing would only be a waste of time and money. Student athletes more than likely know that there is a way to beat a drug test so they won't hesitate to drink anyways.

On the other hand, research shows drugs that would come up on a drug test, such as Marijuana, cocaine and heroin, are less likely to be used by an athlete as opposed to a non-athlete. Participation in an athletic field actually decreases the likelihood of the student using drugs. Before the tenth grade, students who are involved in athletics are actually in the lowest risk group of students who use drugs, including alcohol and tobacco. (Bailey, William) So should the athletes be the ones being tested even if they have a lower risk of using these drugs. These facts show that schools have no reason to single out athletes, for random drug testing. It wouldn't be right if the athletes had to take drug tests, if the entire student body were not also being tested for the use of drugs and they were the ones that were more likely to be using drugs. (Bailey, William)

The process of drug testing is time consuming to just be testing athletes at random if results come back negative. The student has to provide the school with a doctor's note of any medications he/she may be taking. The process is actually quite uncomfortable for most student athletes. The student first enters an empty locker room, accompanied by a monitor of the same sex and is given an empty sample container. For males, the monitor stands 12 to 15 feet behind the student while he is producing the sample at a urinal and watches. Females on the other hand are sent to a closed stall while the monitor listens for the normal sounds of urination. After the sample has been given to the monitor, he/she then checks the temperature of the sample and checks for signs that show it might have been tampered with and then seals the container. Just the procedure of collecting the sample takes approximately five minutes. If the test comes back negative, this procedure was not only a waste of time for the student and monitor, but it is also unfair that the student athlete has to go through the procedure without a reasonable suspicion of drug usage. (Shutler, Samantha) This is five minutes that the athletes should not have to spend because it is their own time and they should be able to spend it as they chose.

According to some school boards, schools have been having enough problems with funds. For example, at Lebanon High School in Oregon, the teachers are limited to a number of

copies that they can make throughout the year. The last thing that the school districts need to start doing, is wasting more of the money they need for other things, on drug testing. For an example of how much money would be wasted if a drug test comes back negative take into consideration steroids, which are actually more common in athletes. The reason for this is the athlete will feel more efficient if they are bigger and stronger, which is what steroids enhance. It costs about 100 dollars to have one steroids test done. (Ringhofer, Kevin) This is extremely expensive if schools are going to be testing athletes for steroids. Just a few of the schools that are performing random drug tests are testing for steroids due to this high cost. (Bailey, William) The drug that the athletes are actually more likely to be using would probably not even be tested for, so why waste money if they are not even going to test the athletes for the drug that they are most likely to be using. This shows that for some reason the schools are unable or unwilling to perform these tests, possibly money, time, stereotyping, accuracy or maybe even a completely different reason.

The most common drug test in public schools is called a low-cost immunoassay urine test. This test cost approximately 20 to 40 dollars per test. This is also quite expensive to be sending off if there is a good chance that the test will come back negative. There are actually three major different types of drugs tests used in schools. These tests include, immunoassay tests, thin layer chromatography and gas chromatograph/mass spectrometry (also known as GC/MS.) There are advantages and disadvantages to each of these tests.

Immunoassay drug testing is easy to administer and low cost, but it is often inaccurate. Which could cause a lot of problems and not even solve anything. Another drawback of this testing is it only enables the sample to be tested for on drug at a time. Therefore, multiple tests are often taken, costing the school district even more money for each student athlete tested. These costs begin to add up very quickly. Thin layer chromatography is also inexpensive, but cost a little more than immunoassay testing and easy to administer. This test is also not very accurate, but it at least allows multiple drugs to be tested for at one time. Gas chromatograph/mass

spectrometry one the other hand is very accurate, but extremely expensive and requires a higher trained staff and more expensive laboratory equipment. If a sample is sent off and returned positive, a gas chromatograph/mass spectrometry test is then required because it is more accurate, costing the school even more money. Schools do have the kind of money to be wasting it on things that will have no effect, such that a negative drug test result would have. So why should schools waste money on absolutely nothing.

As shown by the drug tests above, there is a definite pattern of the cost related to the accuracy of the test. With the schools using the least accurate way of testing, how can we be sure they are getting the correct results. If a drug test comes back positive, the test will be administered again with a more precise method, so they will be sure that the student is actually using drugs, which would cost up to hundreds of dollars if the tests were actually being useful. The NCAA uses these more accurate tests and it costs them over 250 dollars per test. In the other case, immunoassay tests often have a tendency to produce what is called a "false negative." A false negative is when a test is sent in that should come back positive, but instead it comes back negative. This is a huge was of money and time because the drug testing is not even accomplishing what it is supposed to be. So the drug testing of athletes wouldn't be a useful tool in fighting drug use among public school athletes. A good example of a false negative is a student who admitted to using marijuana on a regular basis and his coach made him take nine separate drug tests. Each time these drug tests were returned the results were negative. (Bailey, William) This shows how possible it is for the testing to be inaccurate. Just in this exact case, the minimum amount of money that was spent on this student athlete was 200 dollars.

The accuracy of drug tests is mostly dependent upon four major things and these include, the technology used in the test, the nature of the individual drug, the skills and abilities of the organization performing the tests and that the proper procedure is used when collecting the sample. It is not fair if a student athlete has to be tested twice, because of the accuracy of the first test he/she produced. Drug testing of athletes' urine samples is done at 30 different accredited

laboratories, and the costs for all of these drug tests for only one year come to about 42 million dollars. (Birchard, Karen) Drugs that are used on the weekend will not even usually come up on a drug test the following week, unless the athlete being tested is using the drug heavily and frequently. (Bailey, William) There are also many ways to fool a drug test. One common thing that is taken to clean a body of drugs is called niacin. Niacin cleans out the body while the user feels a slight burning all over his/her body. So it is possible for the drug tests to be beat by the athletes.

Athletes could be at greater risks with respect to health issues, but it is their choice if they want to participate in athletics. Also drug testing would not make sports much safer, because the test is not very accurate and there are ways for the athletes to pass the tests even if they do use drugs. Should time and money be wasted on drug testing athletes in public schools, even though drug tests are not very accurate and knowing the fact that the athletes are less likely to produce a positive sample than any other student in the school? Money is an extremely valuable asset to our schools. They should not be throwing away money that they do have, on random, suspicionless drug testing of athletes in public schools. It is stereotyping if just the athletes are selected out of the entire student body to be tested for drugs at any given moment, especially if their participation in athletic lowers their chances of using drugs. It is not a good idea to test students who choose to go above the expectations of public school and participate in sports for the usage of drugs, especially if the tests are not very accurate and cost a lot of money. Drug tests are a direct waste of tax money for this exact reason. Although the Supreme Court ruled that testing athletes in public schools is legal and permissible, they don't feel that the tests are a good idea, because it is not fair to the athletes, the tests are not accurate and all of the public schools can't afford to give these tests.

Works Cited

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