



michigan high school athletic association

# media information

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## **An MHSAA Commentary From Communications Director John Johnson: Steroid Counter Culture**

The sports headlines were filled last week with the results of the Mitchell Report, which told a story of a steroid use culture which existed in Major League Baseball. But perhaps the more important story on steroid use was told a couple of days earlier on a much smaller media scale, one that gives hope for a brighter future for high school athletes – and for that matter, all sports -- playing drug free.

An annual University of Michigan study of high school students -- Monitoring The Future – was released last week and showed a 50 percent decrease in the use of anabolic steroids since 2000. Only 1.4 percent of 12<sup>th</sup> grade-students and not exclusively student-athletes are using such substances. And that while their numbers are also going down, the use of tobacco, alcohol, marijuana and other recreational drugs still involve 20 to 40 times as many seniors in high school as do steroids, represent a far greater threat, and are far more deserving of our attention and resources.

One of the reasons cited for the decreased use was the negative pall cast on professional athletes caught or suspected of using steroids to improve their performances. Such negative role models, coupled with education programs for young people like ATLAS and ATHENA, have developed a counter-culture – an opposition to drug use in our schools. Administrators and athletes know that steroid use is cheating in its worst form. More is also known about the harmful side effects of steroid use in young people than we knew just 10 years ago.

The facts are that educational athletics has taken a huge lead against steroid use, and has done so without going to the grand expense and personal privacy invasion of teenagers that comes with drug testing. Professional sports, where less than one percent of the young people who play youth and school sports eventually land, is a high-stakes business with the resources to become engaged in sophisticated testing -- and yet some substances can still go undetected.

Educational athletics is a higher-stakes business of a different type -- educating tomorrow's community leaders. A business where testing in science, social studies and other course work is more important than testing for steroids. Education efforts in school sports are a more responsible use of the tight dollars our schools have, have proven to be more effective in reducing the use of steroids and other controlled substances, and in producing other short and long-term positive outcomes for young people.

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**NOTE:** This commentary can be heard this week on the radio program MHSAA Perspective, which airs on over 40 radio stations across the state, and can be heard on-demand on the MHSAA Internet Broadcast Network – [www.mhsaanetwork.com](http://www.mhsaanetwork.com).

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