

Health

Rafael Palmeiro and the dubious war on drugs

By Jed Shlackman

Online Journal Contributing Writer

August 9, 2005—Earlier this year, the United States Congress held hearings concerning allegations of steroid use in [Major League Baseball](#). Several popular players testified, including star home run hitters such as Rafael Palmeiro, who has now been suspended by the league after testing positive for steroids. Palmeiro has also been featured in advertisements for the sexual performance enhancing drug [Viagra](#). This situation raises some interesting issues concerning the role of government in regulation of drugs in our society.

The health hazards of anabolic steroids have been publicized for many years, yet there are many people who continue to use these drugs to enhance their physique and gain an edge in competitive athletics. Is it the job of the government to protect people from self-injurious and short-sighted behaviors? Meanwhile, there are growing reports of people experiencing adverse effects from Viagra, yet there is no sudden interest from the government to investigate any aspect of this drug's use, possibly because the pharmaceutical industry is reported to be the biggest source of corporate campaign donations to congresspersons.

Thoughtful Americans may be disturbed by the fact that Congress takes time to meddle in the affairs of a private sports league. This is nothing new, of course. There has been government involvement in past players' strikes and prior scandals associated with substance abuse in athletics.

However, there is no logical justification for such involvement and many more pressing issues of public concern and general welfare for Congress to investigate. Isn't it more of a concern that thousands of American soldiers are sick or dying due to exposure to uranium and other hazards generated by the U.S. military? What about trillions of dollars of public funds that disappear unaccounted for from government agencies? Should Congress be concerned about the stream of demonstrable lies emanating from administration officials?

In our present era, it seems that the supposed integrity of millionaire athletes is more important than the integrity of the institutions of government that concern all citizens. Similarly, news programs routinely give more attention to celebrity scandals and entertainment world phenomena than vital issues that affect numerous individuals' daily lives.

Government officials and office-seekers routinely promote policies of fighting against certain forms of recreational and non-medical drug use. This generates a sizeable prison population who become a [de facto slave labor force](#), while simultaneously maintaining an [underworld of drug trafficking that links into hidden funding for covert and classified government and intelligence operations](#).

Additionally, this criminalization of chemical consumption often makes those who wish to abide by laws turn to medically approved drugs manufactured by major pharmaceutical companies, companies that keep their contributions flowing to the politicians. Statistical data show far more people are [harmed by legitimate medical drug use](#) than by illicit drug use, so government regulation of drugs is clearly selective and motivated by factors that often have nothing to do with benefiting public health.

It is the role of a freedom-respecting government to enforce laws concerning actions that violate agreed upon rights. Thus, if someone snorts cocaine and then mugs people while high on cocaine, then it is the role of law enforcement and the justice system to take action concerning the mugging. The fact that the individual used cocaine could be used to guide any rehabilitation measures considered as a consequence in such a case. However, the use of cocaine has no inherent criminal nature to it—there are many people using all types of mind altering drugs who don't do anything to harm others, while there are some people who appear to become motivated to harm others while taking prescribed medications, as has been noted by [Peter Breggin](#), M.D., a psychiatrist who has often testified in legal cases arising from these circumstances.

In our modern era there is a wealth of information available about drugs and their potential effects, so adult citizens have the power and responsibility to inform themselves and make decisions about what they choose to consume. Government involvement has actually served to interfere in this process, as government agencies are often used as tools to disinform the public about the overall profile of drug effects, exaggerating the potential hazards of some drugs, such as marijuana, while minimizing the potential hazards of many pharmaceutical drugs. There can't be honest, unbiased regulation of drugs when [government officials are supported by money from the pharmaceutical industry](#) and some have even [more direct ties to the industry](#).

Professional sports teams and leagues are responsible for maintaining their own policies about dealing with substance use or abuse. If citizens don't want to see steroid-enhanced athletes then they can stop watching. Professional wrestling is a form of entertainment where people have expected to see abnormally beefed up men engage in competition that is presumed by most persons over the age of 13 to be rigged. I've seen no outrage over that.

Purity of athletics and American sports has always been an illusion. Yet people have continued to enjoy watching sports and idolizing talented athletes. Let's just accept that reality and acknowledge that people are responsible for their own decisions and the consequences thereof.

If Rafael Palmeiro knowingly took steroids and became impotent from them that's his business. If he takes Viagra to overcome impotency and [goes blind](#) that will be his business also. If he gets drafted to serve in the armed forces due to America carrying out military aggression overseas for a hidden agenda covered by lies and fraud that would be something about which all citizens may have a reason to be concerned.

Jed Shlackman is a mental health counselor, hypnotherapist, and holistic healing practitioner in Miami, Florida. Jed also researches a variety of subjects related to our human existence and to ideas concerning spirituality and metaphysics. Jed can be contacted at jshlackman@adelphia.net and through his website at www.phinsights.com.