

Performance Enhancing Drug and Steroids in Baseball

And

The Libertarian Press Theory

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Introduction

Since the 1980s, performance enhancing drugs (PEDs), or as most people refer to them, steroids, have been a problem in professional sports, starting in football followed by baseball. In both sports, players were giving themselves an unfair advantage by injecting and/ or ingesting these “supplements” in order to improve their strength and playing ability. This was believed to be the only problem that resulted from these drugs before it was learned of the side effects and consequences of steroids. Within the sport of baseball, the response by the league was slow to attempt to stop the spread of the drug, unlike football whose response was much faster. At the same time, the press that covered the sport of baseball was silent, despite being aware of the situation.

This problem was serious not just because the players were harming themselves but the drugs were degrading the game and its integrity. Although the problem has not been completely eradicated from the game, one of the big reasons that many players have stopped is from the involvement of the press. Once the press and media that followed the sport began to write about steroids and the players using them, the public reacted which pressured the league to created punishments and the players to stop using.

This paper will discuss the history of steroids and PEDs in baseball and how the press and media was involved. This will be explained through using the Libertarian Press Theory, which although developed by observing the government and press interaction can be directly applied to this situation, as there is a similar interaction between the sport of baseball and the press regarding this issue.

Review of Literature

The Libertarian Press Theory is just one of four press theories that have been developed; the others being, Authoritarian, Social Responsibility, and Soviet-Totalitarian or Marxist. The key difference that the Libertarian Theory holds from the others is the use of “checking government and meeting other needs of society,” (Siebert, Peterson, & Schramm, 1956).

The theory is compiled by Siebert, Peterson, and Schramm in “Four the theories of the press,” where they go into great detail about the Libertarian theory as well as the other theories (1956). In a book later written to re-examine the text by Siebert et al. it is concisely stated that the theory is constructed from thinkers spanning at least three centuries. This includes John Milton from the 17th century, Thomas Jefferson from the 18th century, and John Stuart Mill from the 19th century. It’s mentioned that none of these men are considered to be “textbook” libertarians but each is presented as “making an incremental contribution to the eventual construction of libertarianism” (Nerone et al., 1995).

Siebert mentions that this theory developed over several centuries each period time contributing to the construction of theory. The 16th century provided the experiences, the 17th century saw the development of the philosophical principles, and the 18th century put those principles into practice (Siebert et al., 1956).

Siebert states that the 18th century also brought the press from authoritarian principles, or ones with the purpose to support the government and its policies, to libertarian principles. By the end of the century, these libertarian principles were then

preserved in constitutional phrases, which protect the freedoms of speech and of the press (Siebert et al., 1956).

The mass media's transfer from authoritarian to libertarian principles in England and America took several centuries. The main battle to establish the freedom of press or mass media was fought in the 18th century. The authoritarians saw the right of the state or government to protect its self and the libertarians accepted the right of the individual to protect him or herself from defamatory publications. Dealing with seditious libel was one of the biggest struggles in the 18th century to establish libertarian principles. The other main struggle for libertarians to establish their principles dealt with the press having the right to publish government proceedings. During the 18th century, courts observed the concept that published material attacking government policies or workers, managed to undermine the state so it was considered illegal (Siebert et al., 1956).

Under the libertarian theory, the press served various but specific functions. Siebert states that the press was already meant to inform and entertain the public, but through the libertarian concept an additional function was added. This function was to keep the government from over stepping its bounds. Siebert claims that in order for the press to properly perform this function, in a democracy, it needed to be free from control by the state. It was Thomas Jefferson who said the press "was to provide that check on government which no other institution could provide" (Siebert et al., 1956).

In addition to Jefferson, as stated earlier, the libertarian press theory was developed from various thinkers through out history each contributing something to the concept of libertarianism. The first to contribute to this concept was John Milton who campaigned for freedom from government censorship against intelligent well-minded people who had

differing opinions. The next name to come up was Jefferson who held to the conviction that the press should be subject to little interference by federal government, and even said this same idea in an inaugural address. The next to help develop libertarianism is John Stuart Mill who had four basic propositions that contributed to the concept. The first was that silencing an opinion could be silencing the truth. The second was that a wrong opinion could have a bit of truth needed for finding the whole truth. The next proposition was that even if a widely accepted opinion is the whole truth, the public stands behind it irrationally and with prejudice unless it is forced to defend that opinion. The fourth and final proposition that Mill contributed was that unless a common opinion is challenged occasionally, it loses power and its effect on “conduct and character” (Siebert et al., 1956).

Libertarianism or liberalism also made contributions of its own specifically in the area regarding the press. For one, liberalism insisted on the importance of the individual and the reliance on his or her powers of reasoning and the concept of natural rights, which included freedom of religion, speech and press. Plus Siebert states that most countries, with the exception of those under communist rule, have theoretically based their social and political organizations on the theories of liberalism (1956).

As stated earlier there are an additional three theories of the press but there are certain characteristics or functions that distinguish the libertarian concept from the others. One is the obligation to serve as an extralegal check on government and to keep state employees from abusing or exceeding their power. The concept also has the press serve as a watchdog over the workings of the government or democracy and vigilant to see and expose and arbitrary or dictatorial practices. Siebert claims though, that to properly fulfill these functions the press has to be completely free from control “by those elements which

it was to guard against.” The libertarian theory also provides a more informal version of control, in place of state supervision, “through the self-righting process and through the free competition in the market place of information, opinions, and entertainment” (Siebert et al., 1956).

Since Siebert et al. came out with “Four theories of the press” more than half a century has passed and since has been reexamined by Nerone et al. in “Last rights: revisiting the four theories of the press.” Nerone et al. states that Siebert’s libertarianism is more tangible and attractive than his authoritarianism but it is a simplification of English history and the principle of liberalism. Nerone also states that Libertarianism is one type of liberalism and that liberalism is a broader term and is the “appropriate object of study” (1995).

Nerone et al. suggests that since the release of “Four theories of the press” the press has shifted away from a truly libertarian or liberalism concept. It is stated that the “emerging environment” challenges the traditional, or liberalism, relationship between press and state. An increase in “extra-governmental actors” or corporations has caused the connection between press and government to no longer seem so “integral to the definition of the role of the press relative to civil society” (Nerone et al., 1995).

Nerone et al. states that under the liberalism concept, the press was supposed to represent the government to the people as well as represent the people to the government. But communications from the public to government through the press are now limited and are meaningless except for the “most elite publications.” Nerone et al. also states “the press only partially and largely unidirectionally (sic) fulfills the role of information conduit between government and citizens” (Nerone et al., 1995).

One suggestion as to what Nerone et al. believes the press had arrived at following the liberalism concept was that of communitarianism. Where as communitarian democracy opposes that a liberal politics of rights “rests on unsupportable foundations and should be given up for a politics of the common good.” Nerone also states that for communitarians, liberalism’s call to rights and routine justice is based on a mistaken assumption: “it confuses an aggregate of individual goods with the common good” (Nerone et al., 1995).

Despite this opposition of some as pointed out in Nerone et al.’s text, the concept of libertarianism or liberalism still exists. As mentioned earlier, the basis of libertarian press system was put into practice in the 18th century. Then in the 19th century this system spread through out the world and almost all democratic countries adopted libertarian theories and used them in constitutions or fundamental laws (Siebert et al. 1956).

So although dated in today’s world the libertarian concepts can still be seen in the world especially the United States and England where the idea of libertarianism began.

Analysis Section

Following the use of “greenies,” or amphetamines, in baseball came the era of steroids. Starting in the late 1980s early 1990s, the prevalence of this problem didn’t become apparent until the late 1990s and early 2000s.

The period of time when most of the public was unaware of what was happening in baseball was due in part to teams keeping the use of the drugs by their own players a secret. Today, there is drug testing implemented through out the season and the public will almost immediately know if a player tests positive for steroids.

The use of steroids came from players wanting to improve their careers or even just stay in the majors. Although it is undisputed that baseball, or any sport, requires talent, some players who were of average ability turned to steroids in order to stay just above average and in the big leagues. As for those with above average talent, their use of steroids came from staying above the younger guys and those already using steroids but later evolved into becoming famous.

Until the age Sammy Sosa, the concept of a star player who could stand-alone from the rest of the team, was unheard of. It was not that there were no players of his talent level in the game prior to his day but before Sosa, baseball was truly seen as a team sport, and free agency was a new concept. When the idea of a star player came about, many players wanted to be that guy, some would try at any cost; steroids.

Free agency also brought about another reason for the use of steroids. For the first time, the fate of where you play was no longer in the hands of a team's front office, but in your own. If you weren't at the level of other players available, there was a chance you could go unsigned. To get noticed by teams you had to perform and players realized that the quickest way to improve their game was steroids.

While steroids brought down the integrity of the game it also saved the game from its poor image. In 1994, when the players went on strike, the game began to lose fans. For the first time the World Series was canceled and fans became disappointed in both the owners and the players. When baseball returned in 1995, the game saw a large drop in attendance at games. While the revolution of building ballparks versus stadiums, sparked by the Baltimore Orioles' Oriole Park at Camden Yards, helped increase the attendance, the

excitement that came in the late 1990s from the home run is what really saw the fans coming back to the ballpark.

Sammy Sosa, Mark McGuire, Barry Bonds, Jason Giambi, and other big sluggers of that time have almost all been linked to steroids by now but at the time of these home run races they were seen as heroes. Before this era of baseball the home run was cherished and seen as something that only the greats can pull off regularly so when it was becoming more common the excitement level of the game increased.

While all this occurred, the press stood on the sidelines. In the beginning, the press was just like the teams and kept relatively silent. But they increasingly became a watchdog for the game and today the press can be given partial credit for the decrease in steroid use in baseball. This is related to the idea of the Libertarian Press Theory.

In the 2012 season, two players had tested positive for performance enhancing drugs, Bartolo Colon and Melky Cabrera, and the information about their positive tests were almost immediately in the public's minds and the players, in addition to being suspended by the league, were scorned by the public. Although the league no longer conceals this information, the main reason that people knew about the demise of these players was the press.

In sports, press includes more than traditional news sources. In addition to newspaper and television news, sports, baseball specifically, has other channels geared to only sports. On the television there are channels such as ESPN and MLB Network that deal exclusively in sport or baseball news, and then there is online sources ranging from official team news sites to independent bloggers.

With the public having instant 24/7 access to baseball news, the players are a little more cautious on what choices they make. When the steroid era began in the early 1990s, the technology we have today was a long way away and the only sources of news were television and newspaper, and although ESPN and SportsCenter existed the press didn't talk about steroids in baseball as it was a new problem and steroids, at the time, were under researched and the consequences were unknown.

As the opposition towards steroids and performance enhancing drugs grew so did the coverage in the media. The peak of the steroid era, which was the early 2000s, was the start of serious press coverage on steroid usage. As congress became involved with the issue, the press was there the entire time with most of the hearings being televised. For the first time the majority of the public was becoming aware and being educated on the problem. Upon the release of the Mitchell Report, the press took on the performance enhancing drugs in all sports, not just baseball, as a serious project and issue.

Not long after the congressional hearings and the Mitchell Report, in the mid 2000s the use of performance enhancing drugs dramatically decreased, and although still a serious issue, it was no longer prevalent in the game. The press can be given this credit, prior to the teams taking issue with the use of these drugs in the game, the media began to inform the public, which in turn influenced many of the players into stop using the PEDs.

The Libertarian Press theory, although written in terms of government, can be directly applied to the steroid problem in baseball. It wasn't really until the media began to investigate and report on the problem, that it started to be resolved. Although it is not 100% removed from the game, which can be seen from the fact that players are still testing

positive, the press has not let up on informing the public, and in the process keeping the game and the players in check.

Conclusion

The model of the Libertarian Press Theory discusses how the press serves as a watchdog for the government and through rationalization the same relationship can be applied to the media and baseball. It was not until the public became aware of the problem that the league made any attempts to stop the spread of performance enhancing drugs in baseball, all do to the press finally informing the fans of the situation.

As stated earlier, the problem has not been completely eradicated from the game but the number of players known to be using steroids has drastically decreased and new players are being deterred from even trying steroids or PEDs. But as players still are testing positive, despite knowing the consequences, both physical and financial, the drugs are still a problem in America's pastime.

I do not believe that there is anything more that the press can do to help the problem but it still deserves attention. Players are not only degrading themselves physically but the game, and if the 2013 National Baseball Hall of Fame election was any indication, the press writers are not very forgiving. Roger Clemens, Barry Bonds, Sammy Sosa, and others known to have used PEDs, were denied entry on their first ballot opportunity. Although they received enough votes to remain on the ballot for 2014, many writers have voiced their opinion that these players will not gain entry into the hall, which will also be true of those eligible for the hall in the future that are known to have used PEDs.

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