Major League Baseball “Steroid Era” & The Decline Of Alex Rodriguez On Use Of Performance Enhancing Drugs

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As the gates to the stadium open to let in guest, you can smell the freshly made popcorn, the smell of ball park hotdogs grilling, hearing the crowd of people walking around the stadium and the baseball crack off a bat during batting practice before the game starts…there’s just something about baseball that get generations after generations to come out to the ball park. Most American has grown up with the game, sharing a passion that spans from generations, in malls, in schools and in the playground. To many of us, baseball, especially its history, is represented as a pure and simple world. As Fans, America enjoyed the jump in offensive statistics with Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa’s chase for the great Roger Maris single season home run record. However, the sudden offensive explosion raised questions about how these numbers were being achieved. The rumors of steroid use amongst players finally began to come to light in 1998 when Mark McGwire admitted to taking androstenedione. This started a movement by Congress to Major League Baseball that they had a steroid problem and they needed to fix. In this paper I will investigate the economic motivations for steroid use in baseball and the rise of a young talented star Alex Rodriguez and how he got all caught up in performance-enhancing drugs.

**Performance Enhancing Drugs in Sports**

The use of performance enhancing drugs has tracked the rise and fall in sport entertainment. Going back to the ancient Olympics and Roman times, athletes used to use performance enhancing herbs and mushrooms in order to improve their performance in competition by making them faster, stronger, or braver (Osborne 2005). By 1928, the IAAF, track and field’s international governing body, enacted the first modern anti doping rules in modern sports (Osborn 2005).

**Steroid Testing In Baseball**

Steroids finally made it to baseball’s banned substance list in 1991, however testing for major league players didn’t begin until the 2003 season. The former commissioner of baseball Francis T. Vincent Jr. who served as commissioner in 1989-92 released a groundbreaking [memorandum](http://www.steroidsinbaseball.net/assets/memo.pdf) in 1991 to all MLB clubs regarding the use of steroids, although he really did not consider steroids to be a major problem at the time. Vincent merely wanted to lay the groundwork for an attempt to control the entire drug and potential steroid problem. In his memorandum, Vincent emphasized, "There is no place for illegal drugs in baseball. Their use by players and others in baseball can neither be condoned nor tolerated. Baseball players and personnel cannot be permitted to give even the slightest suggestion that illegal drug use is either acceptable or safe. It is the responsibility of all baseball players and personnel to see to it that the use of illegal drugs does not occur, and if it does, to put a stop to it” (Doherty 2006-2009). Evidence of steroid use was rampant and the offensive numbers were on the rise. In 1996, the Orioles, Mariners, and the Oakland Athletics all broke their single season home run records. In 1998 Mark McGwire and Sammy Sosa had fans excited cheering with anticipation as they both were on track to break Roger Maris single season home run record of 61 that stood for 37 years until that year McGwire shattered it with 71. Just three years later, Barry Bonds broke McGwire’s home run record. With the change in nature and frequency of injuries also pointed to the increase of steroid use. The number of players on the disabled list (DL) increased 31%, from 266 in 1989 to 349 in 1998, and the average stay on the DL increased 13% over the same period of time (Assael 2005). The increasing numbers of injuries resulted due to oversized muscles ripping away from bones that could no longer support them (Assael 2005). The first star player to admit using steroids was Ken Caminiti.

The agreement Major League Baseball had with the Major League Baseball Player’s Association (MLBPA) called for one random test per player per year with no punishment in the first year. If more than 5% of players test positive in 2003, tougher, punitive testing would be implemented with penalties ranging from counseling for first time offenders to a maximum one year suspension for a fifth violation (Assael 2005). If less than 2.5% of players tested positive in two consecutive years, testing would be dropped. Negotiators felt that this would give players who were currently using at the time a chance to clean up. In November 2003, however, MLB announced that more that 5% of players had tested positive and that testing would continue into the following year (Assael 2005).

In January 2005, MLB and the MLBPA announced a new drug testing policy that would be in effect, included year round testing and stricter penalties for steroid use. Penalties for positive test remained the same like other sports, starting with a ten day unpaid suspension for the 1st offenders to a potential life ban, at the commissioner’s discretion, for the fifth violation. A few months later on November 15, 2005 the MLBPA’s leadership and MLB agreed to new, tougher penalties including a 50 game ban for 1st offense, 100 game ban for 2nd offense and lifetime ban, with the possibility for reinstatement, for third positive test (Dahlberg 2005).

Alex Rodriguez, goes by the nickname “A-Rod”. Unfortunately though, he has also been called by other nick names having less favourable meaning like “A-Fraud” and “A-Roid”. His image went into a world wind with his positive testing of performance enhancing drugs and later, after he admitted to his lies, his image suffered