

The Freaky World of a “Steroid Bomb”

by Michael Bateman ©

With the kind permission of John Lovesey, Sports Editor of the “Sunday Times” in London, we present the article by Michael Bateman published in the edition of 10th June 1973.

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The author, Michael Bateman, 41, was staff writer for six years on the “Sunday Times”. He moved to Fleet Street (The “Daily Mail” and the “Daily Herald”) via the provinces where he was icehockey columnist for a Durham paper, and rugby correspondent in South Shields. He also covered county cricket and League football for the London office of a group of papers.

He is author of several books and interviews. More recently he edited his paper's personality column, Atticus, widening its scope to include more interviews with sportsman in the news.

He has also written frequent articles about society's change of attitude towards the users of soft-drugs and discussed the drug laws on television.

He is the father of three boys and a girl and keeps fit racing with them through parks and woodlands. He enjoys swimming cricket and tennis.

Anabolic steroids are producing battery-bred athletes and destroying the Olympic sporting ethos. A report on a worsening situation:

Is there nothing at all in the world to stop the horrific march of Steroidal Man? The number of athletes who use anabolic steroids to build up strength and muscle like so many battery-fed hens is increas-

ing at an alarming rate, and the Medical Commission of the international Olympics Committee, who have been meeting in Moscow, confess they don't know the answer.



Professor Arnold Beckett, Britain's representative on the committee, says there's no hope that they will find a test to spot the use of these hormone wonder drugs before the Montreal Olympics in 1976. "If we can't find a suitable test, then we can't enforce a ban," he says.

So the Olympic committee are left in the absurd position of turning a blind eye to the coaches and athletes and national

executives who encourage the use of a drug which is used completely against the Olympic sporting ethos. "Officially all the sporting bodies are against anabolic steroids," says Beckett. "But what they tend to say is,

Anabolic steroids were used freely at Munich last year by competitors in a wide range of sports: discus, shot, hammer,

weight-lifting, the decathlon and pole-vaulting. One pole-vaulter said he felt so strong, the pole seemed like a pencil in his hands. And there was the wrestler who had grown and grown and grown until he was more than 30 stone.

Apart from making a joke of Olympic records in the field events, the athletes using steroids are courting medical danger and providing a horrible example to youngsters at school. So far, the only practical step the commission can think of, says Professor Beckett, is to prepare a statement when they meet in October in Montreal. It will warn sportsmen of the medical dangers and beg national sporting bodies to condemn it. He thinks it is a faint hope.

The failure to find adequate tests is a particular disappointment to Professor Beckett. He was one of the doping experts at Munich, where they reckon they eliminated all the other drugs which athletes tend to indulge in. Professor Beckett was responsible for the checks which disqualified seven competitors at Munich, including Rick DeMont who forfeited his gold for swimming. He had been using ephedrine, a stimulant, though his doctors claimed it was for asthma.

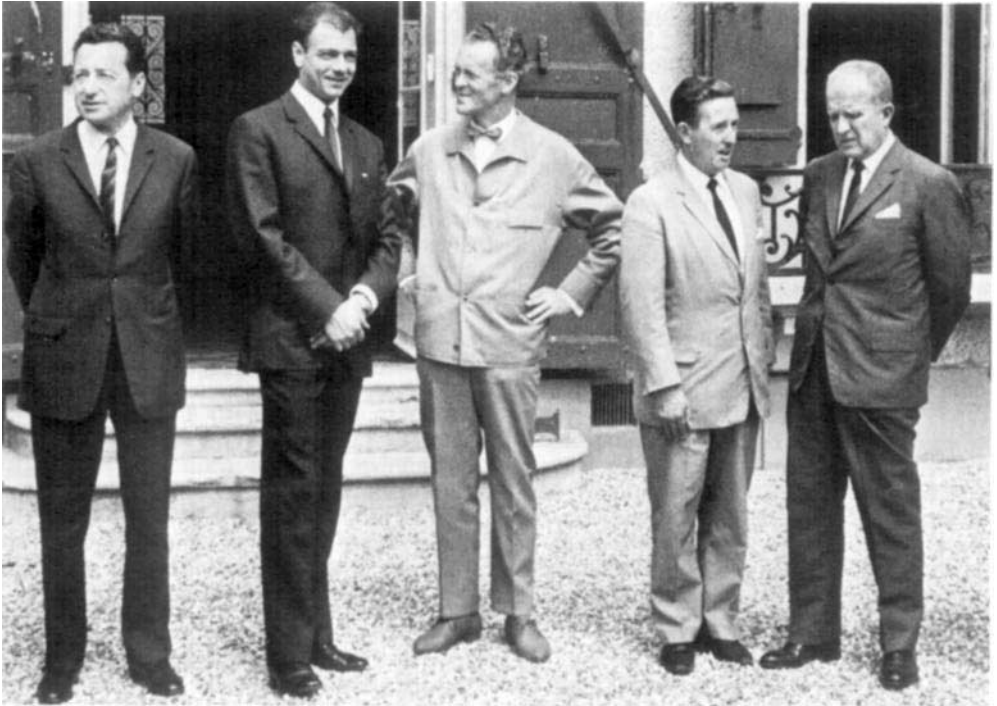
Anabolic steroids were first used to build up concentration camp victims after the war. It is basically a male hormone which assists the body to absorb huge doses of protein which build up muscle when linked to a strict training regimen.

The weight gain can be stupendous. The Swedish shot-putter, Ricky Bruch who appeared on a British TV programme to

denounce anabolic steroids, said he had put on four stone in five months. Other athletes have claimed even bigger gains. But the debit side of building up extra athletic oomph can be heavy. There are documented cases of heart trouble, liver and kidney damage, and alarmingly, cases of an abrupt cessation to sex life. In the *Lancet* last year there was a suggestion that it was a possible cause of cancer of the liver. And in the current *New Scientist* there is a report that steroid injections used by athletes for pain relief in tendons may make the tendon liable to rupture later on.

In the magazine *Sportsworld*, Neil Allen noted that the Bomb, as they call this steroid pill, has been producing freaks as well as sportsmen: a 14-year-old boy body-builder in Connecticut who had lost all his hair; an Arkansas shot-putter dying of a kidney disease; a Texas discus-thrower left stranded between sexes.

For women, anabolic steroids are the answer to Rex Harrison's prayer in *My Fair Lady*: "Oh, why can't a woman be more like a man". Using anabolic steroids, she can. She can lose unwanted curves, her voice will become lower and gruffer, and she will sprout hair where she shouldn't. Why do they take these crazy risks? Cliff Temple, *The Sunday Times* athletics correspondent, has talked to our top sportsmen. "Most world leaders are using them, and when our boys go abroad they get beaten by whopping margins. They come back from throwing the hammer or discus beaten by 10 to 20 feet and their friends say: 'Hey, you're not much good, are you.' So they get fed up. They've done all that work and they've got apparently nowhere."



Several members of the IOC Medical Commission: from the left, Dr. Albert Dirix (Belgium), Prince Alexandre de Merode (Belgium), Professors Ludwig Prokop (Austria) and Arnold Beckett (Great Britain), and Dr. Eduardo Hay (Mexico).

Temple says that much of the motivation for athletics is the chance to go on foreign trips. But because Steroidal Man has pushed up the qualifying standards, British athletes cannot get abroad unless they go on to steroids too. "There's no glamour in training hard and being a loser," says Temple.

Athletes think that controlled use of anabolic steroids may be safe. But there is

always the temptation, when one competitor sees the progress of a rival, and he starts shovelling the pills in like sweets. "They reckon they know it's time to stop when they find themselves getting a bit short-tempered," says Temple. Or when their hair starts falling out?

According to Temple, the spread of the use of anabolic steroids may be bigger than the Olympic commission realises. It

is not only in throwing events, but in the explosive events, like long jump, high jump and sprints. "The whole outlook for the Olympics is rather sad. I get very depressed looking back over the 80 years of the Olympics, seeing how, it grew up in an amateurish way. It's falling apart medically, financially, politically.

Whatever spirit of amateurishness there ever was in the Olympics seems to have vanished years ago. Prof. Beckett's pamphlet, *Doping*; which he produced for the Munich Olympics, lists an amazing range of drug abuses in sport. He gives four main sub-headings. *Psychomotor stimulants*, like cocaine and the amphetamines. *Sympathomimetic amines*, like the ephedrine which Rick DeMont used. *Miscellaneous central nervous stimulants*, like strychnine, said to have been used by Japanese rowers. And *narcotic analgesics* which are the pain-killers like heroin and morphine.

Morphine used to be gruesomely ideal for the professional cyclist: he'd take a shot an hour before the end of a day's racing to help him to finish. Euphoria would set in during the evening and then he would sleep off the depressive phase; awaking fresh for another damaging dose of amphetamines in the morning. This is one abuse Prof. Beckett has happily, managed to end: the British cyclist Tommy Simpson was one great athlete who killed himself with an overdose of amphetamines during the 1967 Tour of France.

"What happens? The drugged cyclist pushes his body to a performance it can't meet. And Pain, like Death, is Nature's way of saying Slow Down."

Prof. Beckett is disturbed about the sports which have not put their houses in order and names rally-driving (where there is serious danger from competitors whose judgment is clouded by stimulants) and English rugby and American football. "American football is legalised organised warfare, isn't it?" He believes they don't want to do anything about it and thinks American spectators revel in the display of aggression which amphetamines help to create.

Professor Beckett's own view of sport is happily amateurish (he once ran a mile at school in 4 min 40 sec) and he has never taken drugs except in his work as a chemical analyst. "Quite often it's illegal to administer drugs to other people, so you have to take them yourself. I don't want to know what the drugs do to the body so much as what the body does to drugs in my work. That's how we evolve our tests."

And until these tests produce something to test anabolic steroids, there will be no stop to battery-bred athletes and no meaning to Olympic records."

Professor Beckett says it's an absurd situation: "We want the Olympics to continue to be a competition between athletes, not pharmacologists."

M. B.