An athletic dilemma: Cost versus accountability

See story on page 8.
Competition’s temptations

The driving inner force that pushes athletes to the brink beyond that of a level playing field and onto a selfish one leaves a clouded bubble above their heads. The junior college athlete’s body and mind is still growing and the pressure to rise above the competition can involve a tangled web of drug experimentation.

While drug testing is the norm for most four-year athletic programs, a national policy instituting the same does not exist for two-year colleges. STLCC currently does not mandate drug testing.

In the fall of 2011, a player was removed from STLCC’s baseball team and expelled from the college. STLCC Archer head baseball coach Tony Dattoli said the player was thought to be using a recreational banned substance and it was found to be true.

“An illegal drug is an illegal drug. It doesn’t matter if you deem it recreational or not. I will not have drugs in this program,” Dattoli said. “We’re all in it to make our guys successful in what they’re trying to do, but they’re going to do it the right way.”

Dattoli said although he does not condone it, he knows some of his athletes will experiment with drugs. But once he finds out, he said, they only have one more chance.

“I’m a firm believer that kids make mistakes,” Dattoli said. “I think we probably need to do a better job at this institution but especially at this level; I think we should have a national push to educate our student-athletes in what is acceptable and what is not.”

Dattoli said it has been left up to him as a coach and the medical staff to educate the players.

“The information has always been plentiful for our staff here at STLCC but it’s one of these things that if I want to talk about it, I can. It’s not mandated and I think we should mandate it. The more kids know the more educated they are, like anything in life, the better off they will be,” Dattoli said.

There have been athletes rumored to be using steroids, according to Dattoli. He said those athletes understood that they would not be returning for the next year. “The only thing I didn’t have was a positive test. It was blatantly obvious that there was something going on with them,” Dattoli said.

According to the National Junior College Athletic Association (NJCAA), athletic participation is a privilege. If athletes who use any drug on the NJCAA’s banned substance list – such as testosterone or marijuana – their participation can be reviewed or revoked.

The NJCAA requires that athletes are educated on drugs and drug policy and have resources like drug counseling available to them, but drug testing
Competition's temptations

Dycus said. “There’s no way financially we can take this on.”

random drug testing for 250 athletes at 10 NJCAA National Championships. The estimate was $69,000

reporting schools tested primarily illegal street drugs with a few targeting steroids.

– these colleges were already testing.

more than 500 member colleges to forward their results to the committee. Forty-nine schools reported

aren’t,” Dycus said. “I hesitate to have us compared to NCAA, which has all of these programs, because

is left to the individual colleges.

“We’re not the NCAA. We’re small time. We’re not a big money organization – most of our schools

Kinney said STLCC does not have the resources to fund mandatory drug tests.

The NJCAA first vice president for women, Norma Dycus, is also the chairperson for the NJCAA

Health and Safety Committee. According to Dycus, mandating drug testing or making the test available

is for the college.

In July 2011, all STLCC sports were consolidated into district teams. Athletics faced cuts as STLCC

was forced to reduce its operating budget by $3.3 million for the 2011-2012 academic year.

Kinney said “We’re not the NCAA. We’re small time. We’re not a big money organization – most of our schools

Kinney said STLCC does not have the resources to fund mandatory drug tests.

In the fall of 2006, the Health and Safety Committee conducted a drug testing survey and asked its

more than 300 member colleges to forward their results to the committee. Forty-nine schools reported

these colleges were already testing.

According to the April 3, 2007 committee report form, the committee found that the majority of the

reporting schools tested primarily illegal street drugs with a few targeting steroids.

“Even though we don’t agree that smoking marijuana is a thing you want your kids doing, that’s not

a performance-enhancing thing,” Dycus said. “That’s really going to detract from your performance.”

The National Center for Drug Free Sport quoted the cost of developing a drug testing procedure and

random drug testing for 250 athletes at 10 NJCAA National Championships. The estimate was $69,000

for a performance-enhancing screen and additional $10,600 for street drugs.

“At that time, [it would have] cost us well over $70,000 for spot checking – and we don’t have that,”

Dycus said. “There’s no way financially we can take this on.”

Dycus said the programs on campuses the National Center for Drug Free Sport was interested in

were different from what the NJCAA would like to do. According to the committee report form, the committee concluded that, at the time, it was unclear if a performance-enhancing drug screen was necessary but it would continue to monitor for potential problems.

There has not been discussion of drug policy at national meetings, according to Kinney.

Dycus said there has not been policy change regarding drug use and abuse in the four years she has

been in charge of the committee.

At Sinclair Community College in Dayton, Ohio, Dycus was athletic director and coached volleyball

for 26 years. She said there was no drug testing program there either. Dycus said if she was suspicious of drug use among her athletes, she would remove her player from competition and put them into a counseling situation.

The effects of banned substances on junior college athletes are not altogether different from the impact they have on an athlete at any level – from the professional tier to high school sports.

Women’s basketball guard Lauren Fiehler said she thinks drugs can take away from an athlete’s abilities or skill level – especially depending on how often they are used.

“I think it would not be worth taking [performance-enhancing drugs] because of the risk of what can happen to you off the court,” Fiehler said.

Student-athletes at the junior college level can feel pressured in the classroom, at home, or in the gym. While professional athletes are being hunted for drug use, who do younger athletes have to view as a role model?

“Stakes have risen,” Dattoli said. “If you look at the salaries of pro ballplayers – everybody wants to be a pro ballplayer because look at the money they’re making. Unfortunately, kids are doing stupid things... If you’re consuming something on the banned list, you’re breaking the rules.”

When 61 STLCC athletes were surveyed and asked whether they had ever seen another STLCC

athlete use performance-enhancing drugs, four responded “Yes”.

“I think as coaches or even administrators, [we] would be naive to think that it hasn’t somewhat infiltrated [here]. The fact that we have any is upsetting, but I think for some major places, four is low, unfortunately,” assistant women’s basketball coach Melanie Marcy said. “My hopes would be that those people would tell their friends or teammates or other athletes the side effects and hopefully they can stop them from that use so that it doesn’t spread.”

INDEPTH

TOP

Drugs. Drugs. Drugs.

Sixty one STLCC athletes, including women’s basketball, softball, baseball and men’s basketball, were surveyed.

71% of the surveyed athletes are attending STLCC on an athletic scholarship.

22% of the athletes on scholarship said they have used soft drugs (marijuana, mescaline, LSD, etc) while an athlete at STLCC.

20% of all the athletes surveyed have used soft drugs as an STLCC athlete.

NONE

of the surveyed athletes said they have ever used performance-enhancing drugs (PEDs) as an STLCC athlete.

4 athletes said they have witnessed another athlete in their program use PEDs and 2 said they prefer not to answer.

Hard Drugs

None of the surveyed athletes said they have used hard drugs as an STLCC athlete, but 2 admit to having used hard drugs ever.

22% of the female athletes surveyed and 18% of the male athletes surveyed said they have used soft drugs while an STLCC athlete.

Sedatives and Tranquilizers

Side Effects: depressed heartbeat and breathing

Disturbing Statistics

Top 5 Drugs Abused by College Students

Table:

<table>
<thead>
<tr>
<th>Drug</th>
<th>Side Effects</th>
</tr>
</thead>
<tbody>
<tr>
<td>Marijuana</td>
<td>Hinders, performance, slows reaction</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Vincaine</td>
<td>Highly addictive, blurred vision, dizziness</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Amphetamine</td>
<td>Restlessness, headache, stomach pain</td>
</tr>
<tr>
<td>Cough Medicine</td>
<td>Extreme drowsiness, lack of focus</td>
</tr>
</tbody>
</table>

*a according to drugs.com