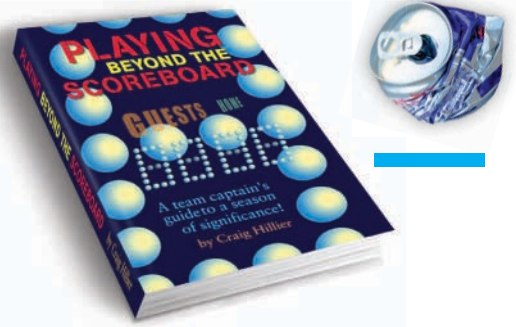


BY CRAIG HILLIER



from Chapter 7 *Playing Beyond the Scoreboard*

# The Delusion of Drugs



Imagine a smooth voice on a television advertisement asking, "Are you looking for a way to destroy your health, lose friends, and slow your team's progress?" Who would say yes to this product?

No one!

Yet every year teen athletes say yes to illegal drugs, alcohol, and performance-enhancing drugs. Before you skip this information because another adult is telling you to "just say no," read the information and think about how drugs affect your team—even if you are not the one taking them.

## What If?

A football team in northern Minnesota won a regional final and were set to play for the state championship at the Metrodome in Minneapolis where the Minnesota Vikings and the Minnesota Twins play. After the regional victory, the team had a party where alcohol was served. On their way home, two all-conference linemen were pulled over by the police and cited for minor consumption.

Because of their infraction,

they became ineligible for the state championship.

The team lost in the finals. If the two linemen participated, would the team have won the state championship? No one can answer that question for sure, but everyone will remember that question for a long time. Imagine their ten-year reunion when everyone gathers to share old memories. The conversation among the football team will surely discuss what could have been.

Imagine the two former linemen showing up for the reunion and having teammates introduce their wives by saying, "These are the two guys that cost us the state championship."

Do you want to be in that position? It's tempting to "yeah, but" this question. "Yeah, but everyone's doing it." "Yeah, but it's tradition." "Yeah, but there's nothing else to do." "Yeah, but I'm not the one taking the drugs—it's them." Those excuses don't cut it.

In my work with two million students since 1990, I've heard hundreds of





stories of how drugs and alcohol have negatively impacted individuals and teams. I could write an entire book on the stories students have shared with me.

## The Effects Are Bigger than You Think

Often the most popular drug used in schools today is alcohol. Some people tend to think alcohol isn't a drug because there's a legal drinking age whereas marijuana, cocaine, LSD, heroin, and other drugs are illegal—no matter how old you are. Whether you—or someone on your team—is using alcohol, marijuana, or steroids, they're all illegal. The detrimental effects of alcohol on performance are well documented and include impairment of the following:

- Balance and steadiness
- Reaction time
- Fine and complex motor skills
- Information processing
- Speech
- Decision making

These are the immediate results of alcohol.

There are also these long-term results:

- Legal problems
- Addiction
- Involvement in a traffic accident
- Engaging in risky sexual behavior that may spread disease
- Decline in general health

## How Drugs Affect Your Team

What are the potential side effects of drugs and alcohol on the team? If people are using drugs or alcohol it could affect:

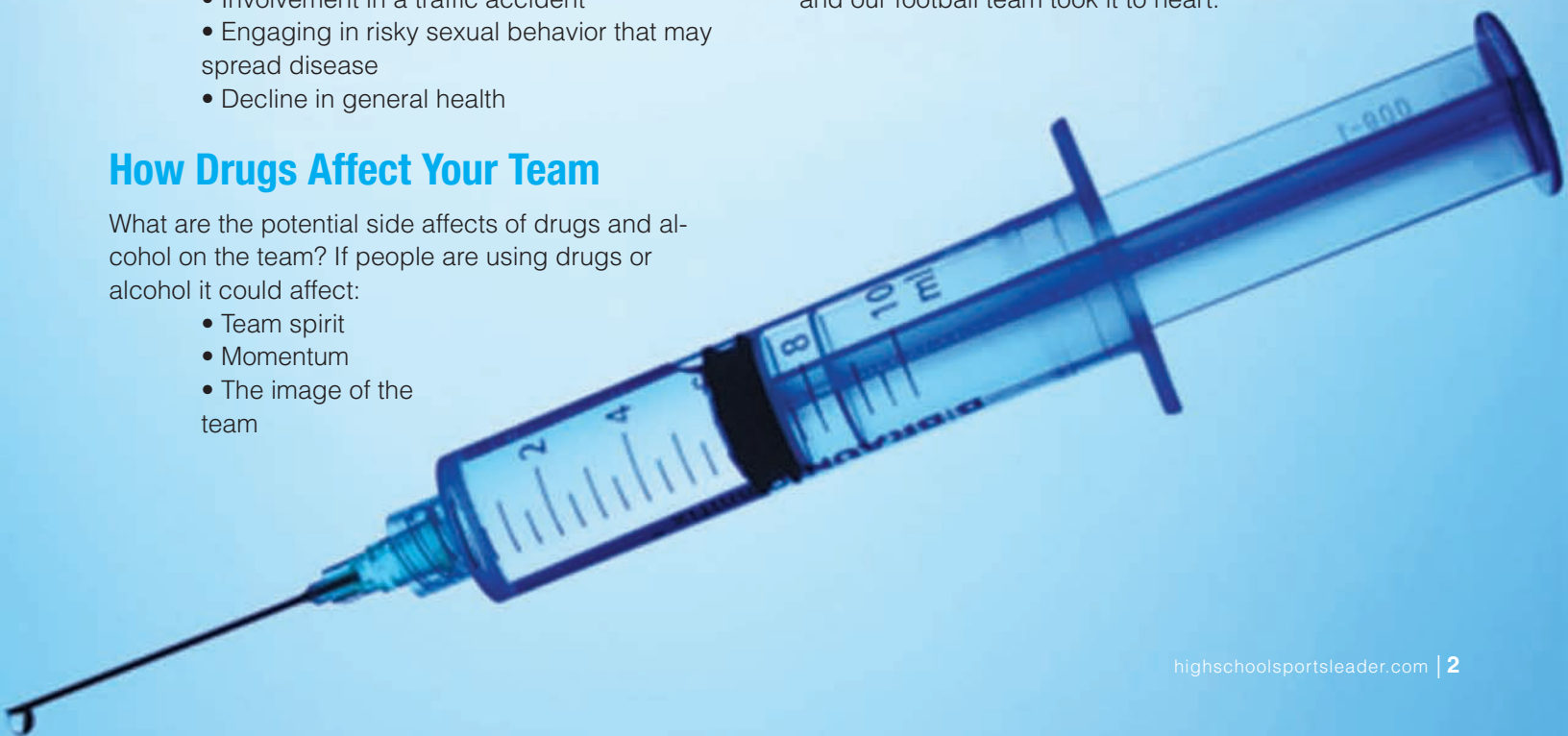
- Team spirit
- Momentum
- The image of the team

That's not all. A division between those using and those not using could occur, which could destroy your team's sense of teamwork. Athletes could get caught and be suspended or removed from the team.

So what do you do if you're a captain, you don't use drugs or alcohol, but you know of team members who do? I think you'd agree, this is a tough question. However, it's a question you need to think about answering. My recommendation is to have a conversation with your coach on how to handle this situation. There is not a simple answer to this problem. The goal is to create a pact with your coach and teammates on what will happen if someone decides to drink alcohol or use illegal drugs. Remember, being a captain is not a popularity contest. Being drug and alcohol free isn't going to be an easy task. However, by committing to abstain from these dangerous decisions, you will certainly have a season to remember instead of one you wish you could forget.

## Choose Wisely

A wise high school coach of mine once said, "You have the rest of your life to drink if you choose. You only have one chance to participate in high school athletics." I'll never forget that statement. It was right on target, and our football team took it to heart.





On the first day of summer football practice, our coach challenged the team to be drug and alcohol free. He said our team had the potential to have an awesome season. A number of the players on the previous season's team drank a lot of alcohol. Our team knew alcohol played a role in the previous year's poor record and dismal performance. Our senior season was going to be different. We were not going to let alcohol wreck our potential. That first day of practice, twenty-two seniors and ten juniors pledged to be drug and alcohol free. I'm proud to say, everyone on that team lived up to their word. We went six and two that season, and we went to the playoffs. It was an incredible season, one I will never forget.

Had our team fallen into the tradition of alcohol, I honestly believe we would have

had only an average season. It certainly would not have been a season of significance.

Even though that was a long time ago, I often reflect on that fall. We were a bunch of young men committing to each other and then playing our hearts out on Friday nights.

"You have the rest of your life to drink. You only have one chance to play high school athletics."

During a pre-season meeting, stand up and present a pledge for teammates not to use drugs and alcohol. If the sport you are a leader of has a tradition of using drugs and alcohol, this is the year to turn it around. By committing to being drug free, you are eliminating one big thing that could keep your team from doing the best that it can.

## Drugs and Drinking

"It seems in our culture that if a person (needs to) drinks by themselves, it's called a problem. If a group (needs to) drink, it's called a party."

—**John Crudele**

"Drugs take you further than you want to go, keep you there longer than you want to stay, and cost you more than you can ever pay."

—**Chester Brewer, Jr.**

"The best thing for me and other athletes is to stay out of trouble."

—**Shaquille O'Neal**

