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Statement of Rep. Henry A. Waxman Hearing on the National Football League's Policy on Steroids House Committee on Government Reform

April 27, 2005

This is the second hearing in our Committee on the issue of steroids and professional sports, and this hearing is very different from the first. A little over a month ago, we looked at baseball's steroid policies, and Major League Baseball fought us every step of the way. When we finally got the league's policy, we found that it was surprisingly weak.

The NFL has been different. They've cooperated with the Committee from the start. And they have a very different steroid policy too.

There is no question that the NFL has a steroid program that is superior to the baseball program we examined in our last hearing. The NFL policy covers a broader range of steroids, and its testing is more extensive. And the NFL acted quickly to add substances like andro to its list of banned substances.

This morning the NFL and the players' association will describe additional changes to their steroid policy. These are significant changes that will make a good policy better.

But even the NFL policy – as good as it is – does have holes. I have questions about how the league treats human grown hormone. And the list of stimulants that the NFL tests is much shorter than the Olympic list. I hope we can explore these issues today.

We also need to explore how the NFL steroids policy is working. The percentage of NFL players who test positive for steroids is very low. Is this because the policy is working ... or is this because players have figured out how to avoid detection?

Clearly, there is evidence that some football players are trying to cheat the system. Last month, 60 Minutes reported that three members of the Carolina Panthers filled prescriptions for testosterone before playing in the 2004 Super Bowl. The NFL testing program never caught any of these players. One possible explanation: they may have been carefully calibrating their dosages to stay below the detection threshold.

In 2003, four members of the Oakland Raiders were found to be using a new type of steroid, THG, that was designed to avoid detection.

We need to assess whether these are isolated exceptions or part of a broader pattern.

As our Committee continues its work, I think we should recognize some positive developments. We had a rocky start with Major League Baseball, but I am encouraged by our discussions with the Commissioner's office and players' union since the hearing. Both are now working with us as we sort through the next steps.

One issue that I raised with baseball I will raise again today: whether we should have a single, tough standard for all professional sports leagues. To its credit, baseball has recognized the potential value of such an approach. Today, we will have an opportunity to learn what football and its players' association think about this issue.

I received a letter yesterday from nearly 100 high school baseball players in New York who were writing to tell me about a new organization they had formed called "HATS": High-schoolers Against Taking Steroids. These young athletes signed a pledge not to use steroids because – as they wrote – “we want to uphold the integrity and honor of the sport as representatives of our generation.” I would like to make their letter part of the hearing record today.

These young members of HATS have the right idea, but they need our help. If steroids are condoned in sports, these aspiring athletes and others like them around the country will be put at a crushing competitive disadvantage. We in Congress – and the representatives of professional sports testifying today – have a responsibility to ensure that this doesn't happen.

In closing, let me say that I look forward to the testimony today and commend Chairman Davis for his leadership in holding this hearing.