

Editorial: Small steroid test numbers indicate program is working as a deterrent

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The fact only a small number of high school athletes are testing positive for steroid use doesn't mean the program should be discontinued. To the contrary, it indicates the program is working and shouldn't be dropped after only two years.

The second round of steroid testing young athletes found seven positive results in nearly 19,000 tests, about the same outcome as the program's debut last year. The initial round of testing found four cases of steroid use in 10,000 athletes.

Some state lawmakers immediately pounced on the results and began advocating to eliminate the program and "save" \$6 million in Texas' \$40 billion budget. This is short-sighted thinking. Fortunately, state leadership disagrees.

"The lieutenant governor believes the program is working as intended to keep young people from destroying their bodies and their lives by using steroids," said a spokesman for Texas Lt. Gov. David Dewhurst, who pushed the plan through the Legislature in 2007. Gov. Rick Perry has suggested the program may need to be scaled down, but not eliminated.

Along with the seven confirmed cases of steroid use in the most recent round, 10 more students require more testing because their tests showed elevated testosterone levels, said the report of testing conducted by the National Center for Drug Free Sport, which also tests athletes for the NCAA. Athletes from all sports are eligible, but testing last fall was tilted heavily toward football.

The latest results, released by the University Interscholastic League, came from random tests on male and female athletes from September through December.

Texas, New Jersey and Illinois are the only states testing high school athletes for steroids, and the Texas program is by far the largest, aiming to test up to 50,000 by the end of the school year, reported Jim Vertuno of the Associated Press.

Florida recently decided to scrap its smaller program with one steroid user caught in 600 tests because its state officials said they couldn't justify the \$100,000 cost in a tough economy.

Testing is designed to prevent drug use, not to measure how many kids are doing it, according to Don Hooton of Plano, a prominent testing advocate whose 17-year-old son

Taylor committed suicide while battling depression doctors think was brought on by steroid use.

The small number of athletes caught should not discourage more testing, said Mr. Hooton, who has testified before Congress on the dangers of steroid use. He said it could be geared more toward sports that are known to draw users such as football, baseball and softball.

"They don't stop testing Olympic athletes just because most of them don't test positive," said Mr. Hooton.

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