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Opening Statement Rep. Elijah E. Cummings, Ranking Member

Hearing on "HGH Testing in the NFL: Is the Science Ready?"

December 12, 2012

Thank you, Mr. Chairman. And thanks to all of our witnesses for being here.

Today's hearing is not only about the NFL, and it is not only about Human Growth Hormone (HGH). This hearing is also about millions of young people throughout this country in high school and college who look up to professional athletes, and the lengths to which these young people go to emulate their role models.

Let me tell you about some of the young people in my district in Baltimore, many of whom come from very challenging backgrounds, and from very difficult home situations. They have dreams about making it as lawyers, engineers, teachers, maybe even as a Congressman like me. I have seen their smiling faces at graduation ceremonies. They are dedicated, they are smart, and they have amazing potential.

Some of these young people dream about becoming ball players, and succeeding beyond their wildest expectations. When I meet these young people, I share the same advice my parents gave me—that there are no short cuts in life. If they want to become a successful entrepreneur, a best-selling author, or a Pro-Bowl linebacker for the Baltimore Ravens, they have to put in the work to reach their goals.

But when they see their role models in pro sports using illegal drugs to try to get an edge, and when they see the professional leagues looking the other way, refusing to test, and going easy on abusers, they start thinking they need to use these substances just to compete. They start thinking they are expected to use these substances. This is what we need to change.

HGH is a dangerous drug with both short-term and long-term risks. Let me read just a few of the negative health effects of HGH: "hypertension ... diabetes ... arthritis ... bone spurs ... spinal stenosis ... disfigurement ... and cardiac dysfunction." These come directly from a scientific journal article published in April of this year. Mr. Chairman, I ask that this study be placed into the hearing record.

There is no serious dispute in the scientific community that the test to detect HGH abuse is effective. This test—which has been in place for the past decade—is actually designed to be conservative in order to avoid false positives. As one of our witnesses will testify today, you are more likely to get struck by lightning than to get a false positive in an HGH test.

There is also no dispute that on August 4, 2011, more than a year ago, the NFL Players Association entered into a contract to begin testing NFL players for HGH “by the first week of the 2011 regular season.” As we all know, that season passed without any HGH testing. And now, the 2012 season will also pass without HGH testing.

Despite their commitment, lawyers for the Players Association now say they do not trust the HGH test. Although it has been used for years on Olympic athletes, Major League Baseball players, and a host of other athletes, they argue that NFL players are somehow different. They claim their bodies are not the same as wrestlers, runners, weightlifters, and thousands of other athletes who are tested regularly. They say they need much more time to study this issue before doing what they agreed to do.

To me, it seems obvious that the Players Association is simply running out the clock. Although they agreed to HGH testing, they are now trying to back out of the contract. Well, today we will have the opportunity to hear directly from medical experts, and we will examine the claims of the Players Association under the bright light of science.

Let me address one point that has been raised, which is why Congress is getting involved in this issue. In my opinion, this dispute should be resolved by the NFL and the Players Association. They have a contract, and they should honor it. But when they refuse to do so, that sends exactly the wrong message to the kids we have sworn to protect. And that is when it becomes our business.

Finally, on a personal level, I have worked on this issue for most of my life in public service. I helped with the formation of a group in Baltimore in 2007 called “Powered by ME!” that has reached more than 30,000 young athletes, coaches, and parents, warning them about the dangers of these substances. The group’s director, Mike Gimbel, has spearheaded efforts to prevent young athletes from being brainwashed by the mantra of “winning at all costs.” I am very thankful he is testifying here today.

Mr. Chairman, thank you again for calling today’s hearing, and I look forward to the testimony of all of our witnesses.

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