



## NEW DESIGNER STEROID DETECTED AMONG TOP ATHLETES

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*A budding steroid scandal may lead to the downfall of some of the world's top athletes and to policy changes among prominent sports organizations.*

A new steroid, designed to go undetected in drug screens, has been found in the urine samples of several prominent U.S. and international athletes.

The United States Anti-Doping Agency, the agency that monitors drug testing for U.S. Olympic athletes, has refused to name the American athletes who have tested positive.

Meanwhile, a grand jury investigating the company accused of manufacturing the drug has heard from stars like sprinter Marion Jones and baseball players Jason Giambi and Barry Bonds, who were subpoenaed to testify as witnesses.

Because steroids, illegal performance-enhancing drugs, are banned by most athletic organizations because they provide athletes who use them an unfair physical advantage, the discovery could put a stain on the careers of some of the sport world's top athletes, including lifetime bans from competition and dismissal from future Olympic Games.

### **How the drug was discovered**

Officials may never have discovered the drug had one coach not blown the whistle.

In June a vial of clear liquid was sent anonymously to the Olympic drug testing laboratory at the University of California at Los Angeles by an athletic coach who suggested testing the liquid for an undetectable steroid.

After months of tests, the lab discovered the steroid tetrahydrogestrinone, or THG, in the liquid. According to UCLA chemists, the drug had been specifically designed to go undetected. The chemists then developed a test for the drug and worked with Anti-Doping officials to begin testing past urine samples of various athletes. According to officials, "several" athletes have tested positive.

"What we have uncovered appears to be intentional doping of the worst sort," USADA head Terry Madden told the BBC.

“This is a conspiracy involving chemists, coaches and certain athletes using what they developed to be undetectable designer steroids,” he said.

Officials believe the steroid was developed and distributed by the Bay Area Laboratory Cooperative, a company also known as BALCO that normally provides nutritional supplements and vitamins to athletes. Though the company’s president has denied creating such a drug, the federal Food and Drug Administration, and the IRS investigating the company for tax evasion, raided the company’s offices in September.

### **The use of steroids among athletes**

The use of steroids has caused trouble for some of the world’s best athletes in the past. In 1998, at the height of his bid for the homerun record, baseball star Mark McGwire admitted to using the muscle-enhancing steroid Androstenedione, a drug banned by the NFL and the Olympics but not by major league baseball. In 1988, Olympic officials stripped Canadian runner Ben Johnson of his gold medal and world record at the games in Seoul, Korea, after he tested positive for steroids. Johnson was banned from competition for life.

Officials at the Olympic lab at UCLA told The New York Times that the probability that athletes are still using other undetectable designer steroids is high.

“This might be the tip of the iceberg,” said Dr. Caroline Hatton, a chemist at the lab. We hope to learn more in a few days, weeks, months. We’re a little afraid of what we don’t know and may never learn.”

Following the discovery of THG, several athletic organizations have taken steps to discourage their athletes from taking the drug. The International Olympic Committee added THG to their list of banned substances and warned that they will test for the drug at the 2004 Athens Games; USA Track & Field officials have proposed a plan that would place a lifetime ban and a fine of up to \$100,000 on any athlete who tests positive for steroids; and International Ski Federation officials and Rugby World Cup officials have said they will test competitors in the coming season, according to the Associated Press.

In Congress Sen. Joseph Biden (D-Del.) and Utah Republican Sen. Orrin Hatch have introduced joint legislation that would make THG and Androstenedione illegal under the federal Controlled Substances Act.

A grand jury meeting in San Francisco will continue to question athletes who may have information and will decide whether to bring charges against BALCO.

*By Kristina Nwazota, Online NewsHour*

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