Report: stimulant positive tests up

by Mark Zeigler

It is a single number buried in a 14-page report from the World Anti-Doping Agency, but it is another strong indication that major league baseball players are continuing to pop amphetamines and other banned stimulants despite the introduction of testing last year.

Urine samples in Major League Baseball's anti-doping policy are sent to a Montreal lab for analysis. And because the Montreal lab is accredited by WADA, it is required to submit all positive test results for inclusion in WADA's annual "Adverse Analytical Findings Report," no matter if they are from an Olympic sport or a professional league.

In years past, the Montreal lab reported about 20 annual positives for banned stimulants.

In 2006, the first year MLB began stimulant testing there, the number jumped significantly.

To 104.

"We had a lot of stimulants in 2006, yes, that I can confirm," said Christiane Ayotte, the director of the Montreal lab. "But that's as far as I can go. I cannot confirm what sport they were in. I won't do that."

A spokesman for MLB said it was aware the Montreal lab would include its testing results for WADA's 2006 report, which was obtained by The San Diego Union-Tribune. But he declined comment on what those numbers might mean about the effectiveness of baseball's testing program or the state of energy-boosting stimulants in the game.

In the absence of a fully transparent testing program by baseball, the WADA report may be the closest thing to real numbers of positive tests.

"It's crying out for an explanation for variants from the preceding three years," said Dr. Gary Wadler, who serves on WADA committees and has been a vocal critic of baseball's anti-doping policies. "You go from an average of about 20 per year to over 100? What's the explanation?"

The only one of WADA's 33 accredited labs with more stimulant positives in 2006 was UCLA, with

134. But UCLA, which conducts baseball's minor league testing among numerous other sports, handled more than twice as many urine samples last year as Montreal.

From 2003-2005, 10 percent of positive tests from the Montreal lab were for amphetamines or other banned stimulants. In 2006, 34 percent were.

Or put another way: Using the Montreal lab's prior numbers as a guide, MLB could account for as many as 80 or 90 positive tests for stimulants in 2006 - or potentially one in every 10 players.

The release of the WADA report comes as former Sen. George Mitchell is in the "final phases" of his inquiry into the prevalence of banned performance-enhancing substances in baseball. There also was the news last month that Kirk Radomski, a former New York Mets batboy said to be a steroid dealer to dozens of baseball players, is cooperating with federal authorities. And before the season, a Florida pharmacy was raided that allegedly sold banned human growth hormone to Los Angeles Angels outfielder Gary Matthews Jr.

All the while, Barry Bonds - linked to both steroid and amphetamine use - is closing in on the game's most hallowed record, Hank Aaron's 755 career home runs. Bonds hit No. 745 on Tuesday.

Baseball's players union agreed to steroid testing in the early 2000s but resisted including stimulants - or greenies, as players refer to them - until last year.

Players are tested at least twice a year. A first positive test triggers six additional random tests over the next 12 months but no public admonition. A second positive fetches a 25-game suspension.

To date, no baseball player has been suspended for stimulants.

So how to explain the five-fold increase in positives at the Montreal lab last year, particularly when stimulant positives dropped by nearly 25 percent in 2006 at the rest of WADA's testing facilities?

One explanation is that the statistics include all positive findings, whether or not they resulted in sanctioning by a sport's governing body. Baseball players may have unabashedly used amphetamines hoping they wouldn't get caught and knowing even if they did, they'd get a free pass for the first positive test.

Another variable is TUEs, or therapeutic use exemptions. The most common treatment for attention deficit hyperactivity disorder (ADHD) is amphetamines, and several sources have told the Union-Tribune that numerous baseball players had obtained such medical waivers allowing them to use amphetamines.

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